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Exercice New Horizons

The Flaws of American Neoconservative Foreign and Defense Policy

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Abstract

American neoconservatism refers to the ideology, political movement and public policy goals of the “new” (neo) conservatives. The tenets of its foreign and defense policy were adopted by President Bush shortly following the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. Neoconservatives (or neocons) include amongst their supporters a number of highly placed academics, government bureaucrats and lobbyists who advocate for a hawkish stance in foreign relations. Neoconservatism champions the use of unilateral military force to replace regimes that are hostile to the U.S. with democratic ones. This paper argues that neoconservatism is an ineffective foreign and defense policy for three reasons. First, it underestimates the utility of multilateralism. Second, it is unsustainable at home. Third, neoconservatism is based on erroneous interpretations of history.

Introduction

The remarkable fact is that the Bush Doctrine is, essentially, a synonym for neoconservative foreign policy...

- Charles Krauthammer¹

More than three years after the onset of military operations in Iraq, academics, political analysts, and the media, armed with the advantage of hindsight, now suspect the Bush government to have intentionally and strategically duped the American people. They suggest that the administration exaggerated the implications of September 11, 2001, to effect a “neoconservative” agenda. By manipulating the fear and confusion of the terrorist attacks, a small band of radical intellectuals, well-placed politicians and bureaucrats consorted to finally oust Saddam Hussein from power, seize a strategic foothold in the Middle East, and begin the process to leverage American might across the globe to create a new *Pax Americana*. For proponents of neoconservatism, the war in Iraq was both a blessing and a curse. Iraq was a boon because it brought their political precepts to the fore. However, Iraq has also made the term “neocon” virtually an anathema, because it is intrinsically linked to the violence and bloodshed occurring everyday in that country.

So, what is wrong with neoconservatism? Why is the term becoming increasingly demonized by the media and scorned by its opponents? Is it a practical foreign relations policy? Indeed, a closer examination of neoconservatism reveals it to be a bold, provocative and uncompromising ideology that advocates a profound transformation in America’s traditional

¹ Charles Krauthammer, “The Neoconservative Convergence,” *The Wall Street Journal* (July 2005) [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=11000692>; Internet; accessed 16 March 2006, 4.

global role for today's "unipolar" world.² Unfortunately, however, neoconservatism is premised on faulty assumptions, misinterpreted history and imprudent notions of power. By exploring critical flaws in the doctrine, it will be shown that neoconservatism is an ineffective foreign and defense policy. To this end, the following three key shortfalls of the ideology will be presented: First, neoconservatism underestimates the utility of multilateralism. Next, it is unsustainable at home. Finally, neoconservatism is based on erroneous interpretations of history.

² Neoconservatives first discussed the implications of a unipolar world in the early 1990s. As an example, see Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 70 Issue 1 (Winter 1990/1991): 23-33.

Section 1: Neoconservatism Underestimates the Utility of Multilateralism

Neoconservatives often use distinctive metaphors to advocate for their foreign and defense policy. In asserting that international institutions, treaties and agreements ought not to be applicable to America in a unipolar world, neocon Charles Krauthammer says

...the whole point of the multilateral enterprise [is to] reduce American freedom of action by making it subservient to, dependent on, and constricted by the will and interests of other nations. To tie down Gulliver with a thousand strings.³

In other words, nations are like the diminutive “Lilliputians” of *Gulliver’s Travels*, restricting the U.S. with institutions and rules that ultimately restrain the use of American power. It is a clever metaphor that raises important questions related to neoconservative foreign policy. Has American power become so pre-eminent that it no longer needs to act within a multilateral structure? Why should the U.S. not be exclusively unilateral? In fact, there are two reasons why neoconservatives underestimate the utility of multilateralism, a critical flaw that undermines the effectiveness of the doctrine. The first reason is that multilateralism leverages, rather than hampers, American power. The second reason is that the U.S. needs the assistance of its allies and multilateral organizations in waging the war against terror. Contrary to the neoconservative view, multilateralism is essential to achieving U.S. interests abroad.

Multilateralism Leverages American Power

At first glance, it seems doubtful why America would need to leverage its power in any multilateral context. After all, the American military dwarfs any other nation in capabilities and spending. In 2005, U.S. defense expenditures were \$421 billion or about 43% of the world’s

³ Charles Krauthammer. “Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World,” *American Enterprise Institute* (February 2004) [journal on-line]; available from http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.19912_filter.all/pub_detail.asp; Internet; accessed 2 March 2006, 6.

total.⁴ It is an enormous figure that enables America to project power unilaterally to almost any part of the world. The entire UN budget for the same year was comparatively much lower at \$10 billion, or about 2.4% of the Pentagon's coffers.⁵ Given this massive disparity as just one example, it could lead one to agree with the neocon perspective that,

[C]ollective security is a mirage...[T]he international community is fiction...[A]llies [are] a smaller version of the international community and equally fictional...[T]he United Nations is a guarantor of nothing. Except in a formal sense, it can hardly be said to exist...[W]hen serious threats arise to American national interests...unilateralism is the only alternative to retreat.⁶

This neoconservative assessment misses one critical point. Even though the U.S. is by far the strongest nation in the world, particularly in terms of military capability, it is by no means “omnipotent,”⁷ still needing the cooperation of its allies. In simple terms, it cannot do everything, everywhere without the assistance of the global community. As European Union diplomat Javier Solana says,

No single country - not even the United States - has the wisdom, resources, or patience to tackle today's challenges alone. Because the most urgent contemporary challenges are transnational in character, they can only be tackled as a cooperative venture.⁸

⁴ Global Issues that Affect Everyone, “High Military Expenditures in Some Places,” <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/ArmsTrade/Spending.asp#InContextUSMilitarySpendingVersusRestoftheWorld>; Internet; accessed 12 February 2006, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ Charles Krauthammer, as quoted by Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 84.

⁷ Alex Callinicos, *The New Mandarins of American Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 126.

⁸ Preparing for Peace Institute, “Effective Multilateralism,” <http://www.preparingforpeace.org/solana.htm>; Internet; accessed 21 January 2006.

Neoconservatism underestimates the importance of cooperative ventures as a viable means to leverage, rather than hamper, American power. In defending multilateralism, political scientists G. John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan argue that since 1945, the U.S. has maintained a favourable international environment for the advancement of its own interests through the formation of institutions such as NATO and the UN. These rules-based institutions empowered rather than inhibited America by structuring, “bargains,”⁹ which benefited both strong and weak nations. By having states operate within multilateral institutions, the U.S. reduced its need to continuously pressure or coerce them to follow its lead. In return, weaker nations were “enticed by mutually acceptable rules of the game”¹⁰ and willingly worked with, rather than opposing, American interests abroad. Ultimately, costs incurred for reaching consensus via multilateral institutions and rules are more than made up for in the gains of added support.

NATO is an institutional bargain where the price of consensus is worth the gains achieved by working collectively.¹¹ As an example of this dynamic, retired General Wesley Clark asserts that in fighting the Kosovo war through NATO, any losses in American freedom of action were offset by the gains in international support and legitimacy:

NATO wasn't an obstacle to victory in Kosovo; it was the reason for our victory. [Getting consensus and agreement from allies was not always simple.] But in the end, this was the decisive process for success; because whatever we lost in theoretical military effectiveness we gained many-fold in actual strategic impact by having every nation on board.¹²

⁹ G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, “Liberal Realism: The Foundations of a Democratic Foreign Policy,” *The National Interest* (Fall 2004): 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹¹ G. John Ikenberry, “The End of the Neoconservative Moment,” *Survival* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 16.

¹² Wesley Clark, “An Army of One: In the War on Terrorism, Alliances are Not an Obstacle to Victory,” *The Washington Monthly*, September 2002, 48.

Even with its inherent defects and shortfalls, the UN has a vital role in leveraging American power. By working through this multilateral institution, countries more willingly participate in peace support operations, share in the costs of reconstruction, and provide non-governmental organizations that can “win the peace” in postwar efforts.¹³ Moreover, in a world that had become increasingly globalized and interdependent, the UN is essential in managing such issues as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, poverty, the spread of disease, disaster response, global warming and international crime.¹⁴ The U.S. leverages its power by cooperatively forming common strategies and sharing burdens with its allies to meet these challenges.

Neoconservatism is critically flawed because it underestimates how multilateralism can leverage American power. Since their creation, NATO and the UN have played essential roles in complementing and multiplying America’s influence in foreign relations. The bargain from these organizations is threefold: America reduces its unilateral burden, it increases its perception of legitimacy in the eyes of the world, and it multiplies its capacity for nation-building exercises.

Multilateral Assistance in the War on Terror

The global war on terror is an excellent example of a transnational threat that demonstrates the importance of multilateralism. Increasingly, successes are being achieved against militant factions and terrorist groups as a result of multilateral initiatives. Bruce Jentleson, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Democratic Party, has noted that it is through the

¹³ Bruce W. Jentleson, “Tough Love Multilateralism,” *The Washington Quarterly* Vol. 27, No.1 (Winter 2003-04): 12.

¹⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press), 162.

cooperation and assistance of allies in such areas as intelligence sharing, border security, economic sanctions and law enforcement that the U.S. has achieved essential but “lower-profile” victories against terrorists.¹⁵ Multilateral efforts that cut off financial flows, break-up cells, interdict supplies and intercept conspirators are in his words, “essential to mounting the reach needed to counter the global scope of Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks.”¹⁶ As just one example, the *Jemah Islamiya* terrorist cell responsible for the Bali bombings was captured due to a multilateral cooperative operation between the governments of Indonesia, the U.S., Australia, Japan and other allies.¹⁷

Traditional multilateral institutions such as NATO are assisting in the global war on terror as well. In doing so, nations are essentially burden-sharing with financial and manpower contributions that can reduce American commitments abroad, sustain operations over time, and improve the perception of legitimacy for nation-building and counter-terrorism activities.¹⁸ With 18,000 soldiers being offered to the NATO International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan by July 2006, the U.S. will be able to reduce its overall troop strength in the country and allow reconstruction and security operations to be continued over time, much like the situation in Bosnia and Kosovo.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷ E Journal USA, “Response to Bali: An International Success Story,” <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/ites/0904/ijee/stapleton.htm#note>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2006.

¹⁸ Jentleson, “Tough Love Multilateralism”..., 9.

¹⁹ Jeff Schogol, “U.S. to Reduce Troop Level in Afghanistan.” *Stars and Stripes*, 22 December 2005, 21.

In summary, even though the U.S. is the most militarily capable nation in the world, it does not have the capacity to address transnational threats such as terrorism alone and unilaterally. By rejecting the potential assistance that can be gleaned from its allies in a multilateral context, neoconservatives abandon important and perhaps essential resources required to successfully meet the challenges of today's globalized world. Underestimating the utility of multilateralism is a critical flaw in neocon doctrine and demonstrates that it is an ineffective foreign and defense policy.

Section 2: Neoconservatism is Unsustainable at Home

Neoconservative theory, with its mix of idealism and emphasis on military power, has been described as “Wilsonianism with teeth.”²⁰ It is premised on the belief that American ideals of freedom and liberty are inalienable, God-given, and are universally applicable to all people. Like modern-day crusaders, neocons assert that the U.S. “must be willing to support the arsenals of democracy”²¹ and use American power to spread freedom, by force if necessary, against hostile regimes and brutal dictators. If open and free society can be established in these nations, they would no longer pose any threat because “democracies rarely, if ever, wage war against one another.”²² Neocons assert that only in a world where freedom and liberty prevails will American security be assured; thus, democracy begets security.²³

In translating this theory into action, neoconservatives fuse the fomenting of democracy by force with aspirations of American imperial control over strategically valuable failed states. Neocon Thomas Donnelly describes the effort as creating an “Empire of Liberty.”²⁴ Max Boot goes even further and argues that the U.S. needs a “colonial office” that can effectively manage

²⁰ John Mearsheimer, “Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism versus Neoconservatism,” http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-americanpower/morgenthau_2522.jsp#; Internet; accessed 26 February 2006.

²¹ Robert Kagan and William Kristol, *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004), 295.

²² Lawrence F. Kaplan and William Kristol, *The War Over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003), 104.

²³ Jeffrey Record, *Dark Victory: America’s Second War Against Iraq* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 25.

²⁴ Thomas Donnelly, “Empire of Liberty: The Historical Underpinnings of the Bush Doctrine,” *American Enterprise Institute* (June 2005), [journal on-line]; available from http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.22756,filter.all/pub_detail.asp; Internet; accessed 2 March 2006.

the long-term challenges of American imperialism and nation-building throughout the Middle East.²⁵ The success of democracy in Iraq and in other countries in the region, he posits, will depend on American imperialism for decades to come.²⁶

From this description, it is clear that neoconservatism is an ambitious, aggressive, and controversial foreign policy. In their defense, neocons are not the only ones who share a belief that it is America's responsibility to spread its version of individual liberty throughout the world. One analyst has indicated that this perception "resonates deeply in American public opinion."²⁷ They are also not the only group that has grand American hegemonic visions to shape and develop international political and economic systems. Such ambitions have been in existence in the U.S. since the 1880s.²⁸ What is unique to neoconservatism is the methodology employed to enable the doctrine: the use of military force to purvey democracy to create and maintain a democratic imperium. As will be shown, this foreign and defense policy is not sustainable over the long-term domestically for two reasons: troop shortfalls and decreasing public support.

²⁵ Max Boot, "The Case for American Empire." *The Weekly Standard*, 15 October 2001, [journal on-line]; available from http://www.weeklystandard.com/Utilities/printer_preview.asp?idArticle=318; Internet; accessed 4 September 2005.

²⁶ Max Boot, "American Imperialism: No Need to Run Away from Label," *USA Today*, 5 May 2003, 3.

²⁷ Zachery Selden, "Neoconservatives and the American Mainstream" *Policy Review* (July 2003) [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.policyreview.org/apr04/selden.html>; Internet; accessed 3 February 2006.

²⁸ Tom Barry, "Hegemony to Imperium," *Foreign Policy in Focus* (September 2002) [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.fpif.org>; Internet; accessed 4 September 2005.

Troop Shortfalls

Before the invasion of Iraq, neoconservatives Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol estimated that approximately 75,000 U.S. troops would be required to secure the country in the aftermath of war.²⁹ They also predicted that the levels could be reduced “to several thousand soldiers after a year or two” as other country’s forces arrived and Iraq rebuilt its economy and political system.³⁰ Neoconservatives based these figures on two assumptions. The first assumption was that other countries would “bandwagon” behind the U.S. and join their efforts in Iraq once victory had been attained.³¹ The second assumption was that American military technology would enable a quick conquest in Iraq, freeing up a small but highly mobile army to engage the next hostile regime such as Iran or Syria.³² Heavy reliance on a big army would reduce the flexibility required to make the strategy work. This explains why Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld dismissed Army General Eric Shinseki’s statement that the U.S. needed “several hundred thousand troops” to occupy the country.³³ A large-scale military force occupying Iraq would undermine the neoconservative plan to win a succession of quick and decisive victories throughout the region.

Given the current situation and troop levels in Iraq today, neoconservatives appear to have severely miscalculated postwar force requirements to foment a democracy. Other than those who formed the “coalition of the willing,” nations did not bandwagon behind the U.S. to

²⁹ Kaplan and Kristol, *The War Over Iraq...*, 98.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

³¹ Mearsheimer, “Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War”..., 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

support the war or the subsequent occupation of the country. Hopes for an early withdrawal of forces from Iraq have all but disappeared. A large American military presence in country is required to quell insurgency and provide security. Moreover, there is growing evidence that suggests the troop levels needed to support the neoconservative vision of creating a democratic empire in the Middle East may be in excess of American capacity to support the objective.

According to the latest analysis from the U.S. Congressional Budget Office (CBO), other than the United Kingdom which is contributing approximately 8,000 soldiers, the U.S. is bearing the brunt of the troop commitments required to support Operation Iraqi Freedom with between 160,000 to 180,000 personnel in the region.³⁴ The report warns that the occupation is having serious strains on America's ground forces, requiring a heavy reliance on National Guard and Reserve personnel.³⁵ The deployment rates of army units are now in excess of what is considered sustainable. Unless the U.S. Army reduces commitments to other missions, or is allowed to increase in size, the military could only sustain approximately 106,000 troops in Iraq for the long-term.³⁶ However, with this large number of personnel still garrisoned in Iraq, the report advises that the Army's ability to react quickly to any other large contingency operation will be seriously limited.³⁷

³⁴ United States, Congressional Budget Office, *An Analysis of the U.S. Military's Ability to Sustain an Occupation in Iraq: An Update* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 5 October 2005), 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7. Recruiting for the US Army is also a sustainment issue. In 2005, the Army National Guard was 10,000 soldiers below its annual recruiting goal.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

In evaluating the CBO report, one may get the sense that America is in the throes of “imperial overstretch,”³⁸ with no easy or immediate solutions in sight. Political scientist Peter Rudolf opines that the document illustrates that the U.S. must consider how it will reduce burdens and limit aims in Iraq.³⁹ He predicts that instead of transforming the country into a liberal democracy, success will increasingly be defined as merely organizing a reasonably stable country that is positively inclined towards America.⁴⁰ In other words, the end state goals in Iraq will need to be scaled back due to the inevitable need for decreases in U.S. troop levels.

The evidence suggests that the occupation of Iraq exposed the limits of U.S. military power to support neoconservative doctrine. Spreading democracy by force and maintaining imperial control over failed states requires a large commitment of troops for extended periods of time. Simply put, the number of soldiers that need to be generated to support the neocon vision of an “Empire of Liberty” can not be sustained by the U.S. over the long-term.

Decreasing Public Support

Another challenge to sustaining neocon ideology and objectives is decreasing public support for the effort, especially as it becomes more costly in terms of blood and treasure. In this regard, historian Jeffery Record says neoconservatives assume enduring public and political resilience for their ambitious foreign and defense policy. They seem to believe that Americans will “pay any price” or “bear any burden” to transform the world into a “peaceful community of

³⁸ For a detailed description of the gravity of economic, political and military impacts of the occupation of Iraq, see Roger Burbach and Jim Tarbell, *Imperial Overstretch: George W. Bush and the Hubris of Empire* (New York: Zed Books, 2004).

³⁹ Peter Rudolf, “Return of the Benevolent Hegemony.” *IP – Transatlantic Issue*, December 2005, 81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

democratic nations.”⁴¹ He predicts that in the case of Iraq, public aversion to neoconservative doctrine will become intolerable if American forces continue to be mired in low-intensity combat that results in increasing numbers of casualties.⁴²

Indeed, the mounting casualty figures in Iraq do seem to be impacting on the sustainability of the neoconservative foreign policy. According to political scientist John Mueller, public support has eroded much more quickly for the war in Iraq compared with the Vietnam War. By early 2005, Mueller indicates that over half of the respondents to polls considered the war in Iraq to be a mistake when the number of combat deaths reached 1,500. In contrast, approximately 20,000 Americans had died in Vietnam before half of the American public came to judge the war a mistake.⁴³ Mueller postulates that the lower tolerance for casualties is due largely because the American public is placing less value on the stakes in Iraq than it did for Vietnam. In the absence of Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction or evidence to show that its former leadership supported international terrorism, the occupation is “left as something of a humanitarian venture” that is no longer politically sustainable at home.⁴⁴

Outspoken neocon opponent Francis Fukayama echoes this sentiment when he says,

If Bush had come to the American people with a request to spend several hundred billion dollars and several thousand American lives in order to bring democracy to Iraq, he would have been laughed out of court.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Record, *Dark Victory...*, 125.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴³ John Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome.” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2005): 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁵ Francis Fukuyama, as quoted by David Isenberg, “The Mother of All Budget Busters,” *Asia Times Online*, 14 January 2006 [journal on-line]; available from http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HA14Ak01.html; Internet; accessed 2 March 2006.

The reality is that there are limits to the American public's attention to foreign affairs and willingness to sustain projects in the Middle East that do not have clear benefits to national interests. Fukayama maintains that although most Americans want to do what is necessary to make the project of rebuilding Iraq succeed, the costs of occupation have “curbed public appetite” for any further military interventions in the region.⁴⁶ Americans are not by nature an imperial people and have little interest in long-term neoconservative plans to create a democratic empire.

This conclusion is supported by Niall Ferguson, renowned for his work on the history of the British imperium. He states that Americans are not prepared to assume the burdens of empire because its “best and brightest insist on staying home” and have little interest in the world beyond the United States.⁴⁷ More importantly, America does not have “the one crucial character trait without which the whole imperial project is doomed: stamina.”⁴⁸ In the U.S., “the young elites have no desire whatsoever to spend their lives running a screwed-up sun-scorched sandpit like Iraq.”⁴⁹

Public support for such a grand strategy as the perpetuation of an American empire and the democratization of the Middle East can not be sustained at home. The U.S. is not willing to bear the costs in casualties to stay the course in Iraq, let alone take on a flawed neoconservative

⁴⁶ Francis Fukuyama, “After Neoconservatism,” *The New York Times*, 19 February 2006, 3.

⁴⁷ Niall Ferguson, “The Empire Slinks Back.” *New York Times Magazine*, 27 April 2003, 57.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

campaign to overturn and rebuild other countries in the world. The doctrine is ineffective because Americans are not interested in costly crusades abroad and they have no aspirations in sustaining a neocon “Empire of Liberty.”

Section 3: Neoconservatism is Based on Erroneous Interpretations of History

Neoconservatives are not the only group who look back at history to interpret the meaning of events and employ them to muster public support. Academics, political leaders and pundits commonly use historical analogies to bolster their arguments either for or against contemporary foreign policy decisions and perspectives. It does not necessarily follow, however, that they will reason correctly as interpretation by analogy is an “inherently risky business.”⁵⁰ The debate can often be skewed because historical analysis is often subjective, no two situations are exactly alike and sometimes, policymaker’s knowledge of history is incomplete.⁵¹

Two historical analogies employed by neoconservatives as a basis of their doctrine will be examined and shown that they are inadequate to defend their foreign and defence policy. The first belief is that the situation in postwar Japan is analogous to the circumstances in Iraq today. The second belief is that the foreign policy of President Ronald Reagan serves as an appropriate model for contemporary neocon doctrine. As neoconservatives draw unsubstantiated and erroneous lessons from these two historical comparisons, it is argued that the basis for their foreign and defense policy is flawed.

Postwar Japan and Iraq

Joshua Muravchik’s essay, “Bringing Democracy to the Arab World,” typifies neocon thinking about the commonality between Japan after World War II and Iraq today. He maintains that those who do not believe it possible to foment democracy in Iraq should look to the example

⁵⁰ Record, *Dark Victory...*, 78.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

of imperial Japan. Muravchik says that in 1945 the State Department's leading Japanese authority warned President Truman that all that could be hoped for in the long run was a constitutional monarchy, because "experience has shown that democracy would never work."⁵² Contrary to the pessimism of the experts, Japan and other members of the Axis alliance are democracies today because of U.S. military occupation. The lesson he draws is that democracy will one day become the norm in Iraq as well, and eventually "extend into the Arab world."⁵³

Historian Jeffery Record asserts that "the analogy is enticing, but it is also highly misleading."⁵⁴ The circumstances surrounding Iraq's occupation are profoundly different than the Japanese circumstances in 1945 for three reasons. First, the U.S. military governance structure, with General MacArthur in command, was accepted by the international community. Japan was a cruel militaristic state which had dominated its regional neighbours during the war. Its victims perceived U.S. occupation as an essential guarantee that Japan would not re-emerge as an aggressor.⁵⁵ In stark contrast, the occupation of Iraq suffers from intense international opposition. Iraq's regional neighbours are far from supportive and actively oppose U.S. occupation. Even allies such as Turkey and Jordan refuse to let the U.S. use its military bases to support Operation Iraqi Freedom.⁵⁶

⁵² John Muravchik, "Bringing Democracy to the Arab World," *American Enterprise Institute* (June 2005) [journal on-line]; available from http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.19717,filter.all/pub_detail.asp; Internet; accessed 2 March 2006, 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁴ Record, *Dark Victory...*, 86.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁶ Roger Burbach and Jim Tarbell, *Imperial Overstretch: George W. Bush and the Hubris of Empire* (New York: Zed Books, 2004), 168.

Second, the Japanese perceived U.S. occupation as legitimate because Emperor Hirohito had called for acceptance of the termination of hostilities and the allowance of American-led political, social and economic reforms.⁵⁷ The nature of Japan society itself was homogeneous, conformist and free of ethnic, tribal and religious divisions.⁵⁸ For these reasons, MacArthur was able to occupy Japan without the fear of resistance. It is notable that during the entire occupation, there was not one single act of politically motivated violence directed against U.S. forces.⁵⁹ Iraq, on the other hand, has no equivalent of an emperor who could imbue a sense of legitimacy on occupying forces once the Ba'athist regime had been toppled. Internal violence between the multiethnic population continues today and resistance to the occupation manifests itself in road-side bombs and suicide attacks on American forces.

Third, Japan has a geography that is completely surrounded by water. American naval and air forces dominated the approaches to Japan, sealing off external infiltration and potentially seditious groups.⁶⁰ Iraq, in contrast, is an almost landlocked country with porous borders, surrounded by hostile nations such as Iran and Syria. Unlike Japan, insurgents are able to penetrate into Iraq and ultimately affect the U.S. occupation of the country.

There is very little commonality between postwar Japan and Iraq today that would indicate that a positive analogy can be drawn. Factors such as the international acceptance of

⁵⁷ Record, *Dark Victory...*, 88.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Record, "Bounding the Global War on Terrorism," (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College Press, 2003), 26.

⁶⁰ Record, *Dark Victory...*, 88.

U.S. occupation, internal resistance and geographic differences make comparisons between the two unconvincing; any similarities are overwhelmed by the differences. There is simply not enough evidence to support the neoconservative argument that the successful occupation of Japan is a valid precedent to show that there will ultimately be comparable success in Iraq. Ultimately, this faulty historical comparison illustrates a fundamental weakness in the neocon ideology and foreign and defense policy.

Reagan's Foreign and Defense Policy

The second popular historical analogy often invoked by neoconservatives is how their doctrine is tantamount to President Reagan's foreign policy in the 1980s. Since Reagan "won the Cold War," the neoconservative philosophy will be equally as successful against contemporary threats. William Kristol and Robert Kagan's essay, "Towards a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," illustrates the neocon perspective:

...Ronald Reagan mounted a bold challenge to...coexistence with the Soviet Union...proposing a controversial vision of ideological and strategic victory over the forces of international communism...Reagan called for an end to complacency in the face of the Soviet threat, [and made] large increases in defense spending, [encouraged] resistance to communist advances in the Third World, and [gave] greater moral clarity and purpose in U.S. foreign policy. He championed American exceptionalism when it was deeply unfashionable. Perhaps most significant, he refused to accept the limits on American power imposed by the domestic political realities that others assumed were fixed...ultimately, he succeeded at transforming the world.⁶¹

In essence, the neocons have adopted what they perceive to be Reagan's hard line policy of confrontation, intense military build-up and ideological philosophy that ultimately defeated the Soviet Union. There are, however, serious inconsistencies with this understanding of history.

⁶¹ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (July 1996); [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.ceip.org/people/kagfaff.htm>; Internet; accessed 12 March 2006.

In *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order*, authors Stephan Halper and Johnathan Clarke discuss a number of erroneous neocon interpretations of the Reagan foreign policy legacy. Reagan was not as confrontational as neoconservatives remember. Instead, he used “a range of moral, military and economic resources primarily to undermine Moscow with non-violent means.”⁶² His approach was based on restricting Soviet expansionism, but it was not, unlike contemporary neoconservative doctrine, “predicated on the unilateral deployment of U.S. military power to the virtual exclusion of all other foreign policy instruments.”⁶³ They indicate instead that Reagan used a balanced diplomatic style, often working with multilateral institutions. For most of his presidency, Reagan had adopted a very cautious approach to foreign and defence policy, employing Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger’s “six tests” before he used force.⁶⁴ As Halper and Clarke conclude, these tests are “a far cry from the force-friendly *National Security Strategy* published with much neoconservative input and fanfare in September 2002.”⁶⁵

Other historians take the argument further. In *Future Tense: The Coming World Order*, Gwynne Dyer says neoconservatives mistakenly believe that Reagan won the Cold War because he employed massive U.S. defense budgets and ideological power that the “evil empire” could not match, ultimately bringing down the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ Using Reagan’s apparent success

⁶² Jonathan Clarke and Stefan Halper, *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order* (New York: The Cambridge University Press, 2004), 170.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁶⁶ Gwynne Dyer, *Future Tense: The Coming World Order* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 2004), 119.

against communism as its historical precedent, neoconservatives conclude that the U.S. should therefore use a combination of the “irresistible attraction of American political values” and military power to transform other people’s societies into democracies friendly to its interests.⁶⁷

The problem with the neocon thesis is in the faulty premise that Reagan’s administration had toppled the Soviet Union. Instead, Dyer says that the Soviet command economy had ceased to grow since the 1960s. The cumulative impact of lower oil prices in the early 1980s and decades of massive defense spending by the Soviet Union meant that by the time Reagan had assumed office, the collapse was inevitable. “Reagan increased the U.S. defense budget in 1982, but that came so late in the game that it was practically irrelevant: he was flogging a horse that was already dead.”⁶⁸

The evidence suggests that neoconservatives have drawn erroneous lessons from the legacy of President Reagan’s foreign and defense policy. In contrast to contemporary neoconservatives, Reagan appears to have been less confrontational, more cautious, and willing to consider an array of foreign policy instruments in the accomplishment of his goals. Furthermore, it is debatable that the Reagan administration’s foreign policy actually caused the Soviet Union to collapse. Since neoconservatism is based on erroneous interpretations of Reagan’s presidency, it is argued that the foreign and defence policy is flawed.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

Conclusion

Neoconservatism is a bold and provocative foreign and defense policy. Proponents of the ideology advocate a profound transformation in America's traditional global role in today's unipolar world. Neoconservatism, however, is founded on faulty assumptions, misinterpreted history and imprudent notions of power. As has been demonstrated, it is an ineffective foreign and defense policy that is critically flawed in at least three different areas. First, with its almost uncompromising reliance on unilateral actions, neoconservatism underestimates the utility of multilateralism. Institutions such as NATO and the UN continue to be essential in leveraging, rather than restraining American power against transnational threats. As one example, the U.S. gleans important assistance from its allies in ongoing efforts in the war against terror. Second, neoconservatism is domestically unsustainable. The troop requirements to support an agenda of spreading democracy by force and maintaining an empire exceed America's capabilities to sustain the doctrine. Increasing public aversion to casualties in Iraq and the lack of American imperialistic ambitions also challenge the longevity of the ideology. Third, neoconservatism is based on erroneous historical interpretations of history. Two historical analogies evoked by neoconservatives as a foundation for their doctrine are the circumstances surrounding the occupation of postwar Japan and the foreign policy of President Reagan. Neoconservatism doctrine is based on erroneous interpretations of both of these historical precedents.

Given these critical flaws, what is the future of neoconservatism? Is the influence of the doctrine in decline with the Bush Administration? Are the current diplomatic negotiations with Iran through the UN an indication that the U.S. is abandoning neocon methodologies? If so, what will be the legacy of neoconservatism? Will the U.S. need to scale back its worldwide

presence as a result of an overextension of its commitments or will the failure of neoconservatism cause future American decision makers to once again seek multilateral partnerships with international bodies and established allies to achieve their foreign policy objectives? Whatever the answers, one thing remains certain: neoconservatism remains an intriguing foreign and defense policy, worthy of continued study and analysis.

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