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The Past, Present, and Future of Neoconservatism

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HAVE AMERICA'S troubles in Iraq sounded the death knell of neoconservatism, the political ideology that is said to be behind our presence there? Over the past year, there has been no shortage of voices saying so, many with undisguised glee. Abroad, the *Times* of London heralded "the end of an ideological era in Washington," while the *Toronto Globe and Mail* reported with satisfaction that neoconservatism has been "decisively wiped out." Observers here at home have agreed. To the historian Douglas Brinkley, Democratic electoral victories in November 2006 spelled "the death of the neoconservative movement," while at *National Review Online* John Derbyshire wrote that "all the buzz is that neoconservatism is as dead as mutton."

Prognoses from within neoconservatism's ranks have been correspondingly grim. Kenneth Adelman, an author and sometime defense official in Republican administrations, has lamented that "most everything we ever stood for now . . . lies in ruins." Francis Fukuyama, in a short book excerpted in the *New York Times Magazine*, took leave of his own sometime affiliation with neoconservatism, protesting that it had "evolved into something that I can no longer support." Jonah Goldberg, a columnist at *National Review*, despaired that the word neoconservatism itself has become "useless, spent."

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But more than a word is at issue. The opprobrium lately faced by neoconservatism flows from a number of entwined propositions: that its ideas shaped President George W. Bush's war against terrorism; that the ensuing policy has failed disastrously; and that this failure demonstrates the illusions and delusions embodied in those ideas. This indictment must either be accepted or answered, and the exercise must begin by identifying the ideas in question. That requires revisiting history that has been told before.

THE TERM "neoconservative" was coined in the 1970's as an anathema. It was intended to stigmatize a group of liberal intellectuals who had lately parted ways with the majority of their fellows.

As a heretical offshoot of liberalism, neoconservatism appealed to the same values and even many of the same goals—like, for example, peace and racial equality. But neoconservatives argued that liberal policies—for example, disarmament in the pursuit of peace, or affirmative action in the pursuit of racial equality—undermined those goals rather than advancing them. In short order, the heretics established themselves as contemporary liberalism's most formidable foes.

Two distinct currents fed the stream of neoconservatism. One focused on domestic issues, specif-

ically by reexamining the Great Society programs of the 1960's and the welfare state as a whole. It was centered in the *Public Interest*, a quarterly founded and edited by Irving Kristol. The other focused on international issues and the cold war; it was centered in Commentary and led by the magazine's editor, Norman Podhoretz.

The former current has little if any relevance to the controversy surrounding neoconservatism today. Much of the domestic-policy critique mounted by neoconservatives eventually became common wisdom, symbolized by President Bill Clinton's welfare-reform program and his declaration that "the era of big government is over." In the meantime, several of the seminal figures of the domestic wing—Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Daniel Bell, and Nathan Glazer—drifted back toward liberalism.

It was the foreign-policy wing that was, all along, more passionately embroiled in ideological disputation.* For one thing, the stakes were higher. If a domestic policy fails, you can try another. If a foreign policy fails, you may find yourself at war. Also, the battles that rived the Democratic party in the 1970's, at a time when virtually all neoconservatives were still Democrats, principally concerned foreign affairs. These battles sharpened ideological talons on all sides.

The divisions stemmed from the Vietnam war. Not that all neoconservatives were hawks on this particular issue; some, including Podhoretz, were (qualified) doves. But when opponents of the war went from arguing that it was a failed instance of an essentially correct policy—namely, resisting Communist expansionism—to contending that it was a symptom of a deep American sickness, neoconservatives answered back. Whatever problems we may have made for ourselves in Vietnam, they said, the origins of the conflict were to be found neither in American imperialism nor in what President Jimmy Carter would call our "inordinate fear of Communism," but in Communism's lust to dominate.

Contrary to Carter and the antiwar Left, neoconservatives believed that Communism was very much to be feared, to be detested, and to be opposed. They saw the Soviet Union as, in the words of Ronald Reagan, an "evil empire," unspeakably cruel to its own subjects and relentlessly predatory toward those not yet in its grasp. They took the point of George Orwell's *1984*—a book that (as the Irish scholars James McNamara and Dennis J. O'Keeffe have written) resurrected the idea of evil "as a political category." And they absorbed the cautionary warning of the Russian novelist and dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn against yielding ground to the Communists in the vain hope "that perhaps at some point the wolf will have eaten enough."

Many in our history, both statesmen and scholars, had drawn a distinction between Americans' sentiments and America's self-interest. Where Communism was concerned, the neoconservatives saw the two as intertwined. Communism needed to be fought both because it was morally appalling and because it was a threat to our country.

For their passion against Communism, neoconservatives were accused of being "zealots" and "Manicheans." To this, one neoconservative rejoined: "we face a Manichean reality." That is to say, the struggle between the Communist world and the West involved, on the one hand, some of the most malign, murderous regimes ever created and, on the other hand, some of the most humane. The moral consequences were enormous.

This attitude was one of the things that set neoconservatives apart from traditional conservatives. To be sure, there were a few intellectuals of the Right, like William F. Buckley, Jr. and Whittaker Chambers, who shared the neoconservatives' loathing for Communism. But mainstream conservatives were better represented by the approach of Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford and their foreign-policy mentor, Henry Kissinger, according to which the Soviet Union was to be seen more as another great power than as the vessel of a lethal ideology; the policy of détente was devised accordingly. This approach was embraced by such conservative icons as the Reverend Billy Graham, who hoped to convert Russians to the Gospel, and the capitalist Donald Kendall, who hoped to sell them Pepsi—without, in either case, troubling with the issue of their enslavement.

Even those traditional conservatives who distrusted the readiness of Nixon and Kissinger to make deals with the Soviet Union tended to share the underlying philosophy of foreign-policy "realism." As opposed to the neoconservative emphasis on the battle of ideas and ideologies, and on the psychological impact of policy choices, realists focused on state interests and the time-honored tools of statecraft. That was one reason why, for the neo-

* Irving Kristol is often referred to as the "godfather" of neoconservatism. Though this may capture his role in shaping the domestic side, it has been a source of confusion when it comes to neoconservative ideas on foreign policy. Although outspoken on this subject, Kristol has more often positioned himself with traditional conservatives than with other neoconservatives. For example, he opposed the Reagan policies of supporting anti-Communist guerrillas and of promoting democracy abroad, on which more below.

conservatives of the 1970's, the great champions in American political life were not conservative or Republican figures but two Democrats of unmistakably liberal pedigree: Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson and George Meany, the president of the AFL-CIO. When President Ford, on Kissinger's counsel, closed the White House door to Solzhenitsyn upon his expulsion from Soviet Russia, these two stalwart anti-Communists formally welcomed him to Washington.

It was only with the accession of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1981 that the neoconservatives made their peace with Republican-style conservatism. Reagan brought several neoconservatives—notably Jeane Kirkpatrick, Richard Perle, Max Kampelman, and Elliott Abrams—into pivotal foreign-policy positions in his administration (and, on the domestic-policy side, William J. Bennett and others). With time, most neoconservatives moved into the Republican fold. As for Reagan's "belligerent" approach to the cold war, it was criticized as loudly by both liberals and conservatives within the foreign-policy establishment as it was cheered by neoconservatives. But there can be no question that it issued in a sublime victory: the mighty juggernaut of the Soviet state, disposing of more kill power than the U.S. or any other state in history, capitulated with scarcely a shot.

By the 1990's, therefore, the neoconservatives' analysis seemed vindicated. But, by the same token, the cause that had drawn them together and defined them—the cold war—was concluded. In the relatively quiet 1990's, most of the nation's attention was concentrated on taxes and budgets and other domestic concerns. By 1996, Podhoretz himself proclaimed that neoconservatism was "dead," and that "what killed it was not defeat but victory; it died not of failure but of success." As a consequence, he wrote, "in foreign policy it has become impossible to define a neoconservative position."

This, in my judgment, underestimated the signs that a distinctive neoconservative approach to post-cold-war foreign policy had already been taking form. In 1990-91, cold-war neoconservatives lined up with traditional conservatives serving in the first Bush administration in support of military action to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. At the time, most liberals opposed the use of force, and so did some so-called paleoconservatives like Patrick J. Buchanan and Robert Novak, as well as various libertarians.

No less revealing than the debates between the war's opponents and supporters was a division that opened within the ranks of the supporters themselves once the fighting ended. In an act of quintessential "realism," President Bush declined to order American forces to capture Baghdad and oust Saddam Hussein or even to obstruct Saddam's campaign to suppress Iraqis who had risen in rebellion against him. Most neoconservatives disagreed with at least the latter of these decisions.

In 1992, the Bush administration's realism got the better of it once again when war broke out in Bosnia. The President dismissed the violence there as a "hiccup," and James Baker, his Secretary of State, famously declared that "we have no dog in that fight." When the new Clinton administration proved equally inert, and with the death toll mounting, a lobby developed for some form of American intervention.

Most active members of that lobby were neoconservatives, and other neoconservatives, with notable exceptions like Charles Krauthammer, embraced its position. By contrast, most traditional conservatives believed that America's own interests were not sufficiently engaged to justify intervention. Many liberals, for their part, while sharing a sense of urgency about Bosnia, were characteristically chary of using force or acting outside the aegis of the United Nations (whose actions, as it happened, had been constraining the victims of aggression more than the aggressors).

After Bosnia, the top foreign-policy issue in the latter half of the 1990's was the enlargement of NATO. Liberals and conservatives were arrayed on all sides. But most of those associated with the neoconservative camp, with the prominent exception of the historian Richard Pipes, were united in favor of it. I worked with Jeane Kirkpatrick and Paul Wolfowitz (and two moderate Democrats, Anthony Lake and Richard Holbrooke) to organize a statement, signed by most of America's former top foreign-affairs officials, that helped to seal the debate.

This series of events suggests that some kind of common neoconservative mentality endured beyond the cold war. What were its elements?

First, following Orwell, neoconservatives were moralists. Just as they despised Communism, they felt similarly toward Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic and toward the acts of aggression committed by those dictators in, respectively, Kuwait and Bosnia. And just as they did not hesitate to enter negative moral judgments, neither did they hesitate to enter positive ones. In particular, they were strong admirers of the American experi-

ence—an admiration that arose not out of an unexamined patriotism (they had all started out as reformers or even as radical critics of American society) but out of the recognition that America had gone farther in the realization of liberal values than any other society in history. A corollary was the belief that America was a force for good in the world at large.

Second, in common with many liberals, neoconservatives were internationalists, and not only for moral reasons. Following Churchill, they believed that depredations tolerated in one place were likely to be repeated elsewhere—and, conversely, that beneficent political or economic policies exercised their own "domino effect" for the good. Since America's security could be affected by events far from home, it was wiser to confront troubles early even if afar than to wait for them to ripen and grow nearer.

Third, neoconservatives, like (in this case) most conservatives, trusted in the efficacy of military force. They doubted that economic sanctions or UN intervention or diplomacy, per se, constituted meaningful alternatives for confronting evil or any determined adversary.

To this list, I would add a fourth tenet: namely, the belief in democracy both at home and abroad. This conviction could not be said to have emerged from the issues of the 1990's, although the neoconservative support for enlarging NATO owed something to the thought that enlargement would cement the democratic transformations taking place in the former Soviet satellites. But as early as 1982, Ronald Reagan, the neoconservative hero, had stamped democratization on America's foreign-policy agenda with a forceful speech to the British Parliament. In contrast to the Carter administration, which held (in the words of Patricia Derian, Carter's Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights) that "human-rights violations do not really have very much to do with the form of government," the Reagan administration saw the struggle for human rights as intimately bound up in the struggle to foster democratic governance. When Reagan's Westminster speech led to the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy, the man chosen to lead it was Carl Gershman, a onetime Social Democrat and a frequent contributor to COMMENTARY. Although not an avowed neoconservative, he was of a similar cast of mind.

This mix of opinions and attitudes still constitutes the neoconservative mindset. The military historian Max Boot has aptly labeled it "hard Wilsonianism." It does not mesh neatly with the familiar dichotomy between "realists" and "idealists." It is indeed idealistic in its internationalism and its faith in democracy and freedom, but it is hardheaded, not to say jaundiced, in its image of our adversaries and its assessment of international organizations. Nor is its idealism to be confused with the idealism of the "peace" camp. Over the course of the past century, various schemes for keeping the peace—the League of Nations, the UN, the treaty to outlaw war, arms-control regimes—have all proved fatuous. In the meantime, what has in fact kept the peace (whenever it has been kept) is something quite different: strength, alliances, and deterrence. Also in the meantime, "idealistic" schemes for promoting not peace but freedom—self-determination for European peoples after World War I, decolonization after World War II, the democratization of Germany, Japan, Italy, and Austria, the global advocacy of human rights—have brought substantial and beneficial results.

WHETHER OR not a distinct neoconservative position could be discerned in the relatively calm 1990's, everything changed, with a vengeance, after September 11, 2001. As the second President Bush unfurled his "war against terror," word spread that he himself had been captured by neoconservatives. What gave plausibility to this idea was that Bush's new approach constituted a radical break with his own earlier predilections. Less than a year before, he had come into office evincing little interest in international affairs and proclaiming that America should be a "humble nation," with fewer global commitments. No more than a handful of identifiable neoconservatives occupied influential positions in his administration, and none at the highest tier.

There was unintended irony in the post-9/11 liberal caricature of Bush and Cheney as politicians who had haplessly allowed their administration's policies to be hijacked by a few spookily effective intellectuals—this, less than a year after having been such master manipulators as to have allegedly stolen away the presidency from Al Gore. But this was not the only grotesque charge leveled at the President. Another was that the "neoconservatives" in question were in reality a group of Jews who were attempting to divert U.S. policy in the interests of Israel. This particular bit of slander ignored, among other things, the fact that the neoconservative position on the Middle East conflict was exactly congruous with the neoconservative position on conflicts everywhere else in the world, including places where neither Jews nor Israeli interests

could be found—not to mention the fact that *non*-Jewish neoconservatives took the same stands on all of the issues as did their Jewish confrères.*

However fantastical the conspiracy theories, and however polluted their origins, what is undeniable is that Bush's declaration of war against terrorism did bear the earmarks of neoconservatism. One can count the ways. It was moralistic, accompanied by descriptions of the enemy as "evil" and strong assertions of America's righteousness. As Norman Podhoretz puts it in his powerful new book,† Bush offered "an entirely unapologetic assertion of the need for and the possibility of moral judgment in the realm of world affairs." In contrast to the suggestion of many, especially many Europeans, that America had somehow provoked the attacks, Bush held that what the terrorists hated was our virtues, and in particular our freedom. His approach was internationalist: it treated the whole globe as the battlefield, and sought to confront the enemy far from our own doorstep. It entailed the prodigious use of force. And, for the non-military side of the strategy, Bush adopted the idea of promoting democracy in the Middle East in the hope that this would drain the fever swamps that bred terrorists.

It is possible that Bush and Cheney turned to neoconservative sources for guidance on these matters; it is also possible, and more likely, that they reached similar conclusions on their own. In either case, the war against terrorism put neoconservative ideas to the test—and, in the war's early stages, they passed with flying colors. The Taliban regime was ousted from Afghanistan quickly and without a major commitment of American forces. More striking still, a democratic government was established in Afghanistan—one of the least likely places on earth for it. Muammar Qaddafi, the ruler of Libya and one of the world's most erratic and violent dictators, abandoned his pursuit of nuclear weapons, and in effect sued to bring his country in from the cold reaches to which Bush had assigned terrorism-supporting states. Finally, Saddam Hussein was toppled from power in a brief campaign with minimum loss of life.

Even more remarkably, Bush's advocacy of democracy brought an immediate and positive reaction around the region. The Lebanese drove out Syrian forces after a 30-year occupation. In an unprecedented development, elections at various levels of government were held in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and a handful of other Arab states (and the Palestinian Authority), including most dramatically Iraq itself. The collective leadership of the Arab states, meeting at a summit, declared its commitment to "strengthening democracy, expanding political participation, consolidating the values of citizenship and the culture of democracy, the promotion of human rights, the opening of space for civil society, and enabling women to play a prominent role in every field of public life."

Crowning all these events was one crucial non-event: the absence, despite the almost unanimous forecast of experts, of further terror attacks on the United States.

But then, of course, the landscape shifted. Resistance and terror mounted in Iraq to levels that the U.S. and allied forces could not manage, and the entire war against terrorism bogged down. Not only did Iraq itself devolve into a bloody mess, but gains on other fronts also began to fray. The Taliban intensified terror and guerrilla attacks in Afghanistan, Syria launched new depredations in Lebanon, Iran defiantly accelerated its drive for a nuclear bomb, and autocrats around the Middle East reneged on their pledges of democratic reform. The American public, originally supportive, turned against the Iraq war. Bush's popularity plummeted.

Today there are signs that the "surge" of U.S. troop levels and the new counterinsurgency tactics designed by General David Petraeus will succeed in stabilizing Iraq, provided they are not aborted by congressional Democrats who, as the British writer Douglas Murray has put it, "want the neoconservatives to fail more than they want Iraq to succeed"—or, more accurately and more disgracefully, who want Bush to fail more than they want America to succeed. Even so, it cannot be denied that the war has proved far costlier in treasure, lives, and American standing than its proponents imagined, and, at least for the time being, the loftier dream of Iraq as a model for its neighbors has turned to ashes.

But to what is all this to be attributed? According to one highly publicized article in *Vanity Fair*, several leading neoconservatives put the blame on poor execution of their ideas on the part of the administration. This is not a very satisfying analysis. Complaints about government incompetence dog every administration, almost always with justice, and there is no convincing evidence that the functioning of the present administration has been worse than that of its predecessors.

* For a fuller account, see my "The Neoconservative Cabal," in Commentary, September 2003. Although Jews often dominate liberal political causes, one never hears them attacked by their opponents on the Right in the anti-Semitic terms used freely by the Left.

† *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism.* Doubleday, 230 pp., $24.95.

More specific and more convincing targets for blame are a few key decisions made by Paul Bremer, the chief of the allied occupation from May 2003 to June 2004, and by former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Bremer's decisions—to disband the Iraqi army and to undertake a purge of Baath party members so sweeping as to dismantle the Iraqi government—have been widely criticized. Whether it would otherwise have been easier to cope with the insurgency is hard to say, though the idea seems plausible. Rumsfeld's insistence, backed by the President, on deploying to Iraq only a fraction of the troops requested by General Eric Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, seems more clearly to have courted trouble—a conclusion brought home all the more sharply by the apparent success of today's "surge" in manpower.

In any event, the decisions about troop levels and about abolishing Iraq's existing administrative structure had nothing to do with neoconservative ideas. The most that can fairly be said is that Rumsfeld was an ally of neoconservatives and that some among them, enamored of military technology or influenced by the Iraqi dissident Ahmad Chalabi, endorsed his choices. Besides, whatever measure of responsibility may be placed on neoconservatives in this one matter, it pales in comparison to the errors of the realists in the George H.W. Bush administration who in 1991 chose to leave Saddam in power, and of the liberals in the Clinton administration who allowed Saddam's defiance of his disarmament obligations to swell steadily over eight long years. Together, these failures left the problem of Saddam Hussein festering for George W. Bush to confront in the aftermath of 9/11, when it appeared in a more ominous light.

To point to an insufficiency of troops or to errors by Paul Bremer is of course no answer to more searching questions about the wisdom of the war itself. At the outset, liberal critics—initially there were more of them abroad than at home—argued that UN inspectors should have been given more time to find Saddam's hidden weapons of mass destruction, and that the U.S. should not have gone to war without the approval of the Security Council.

But the inspectors had been at their mission for twelve years, and there was no reason to believe they would ever accomplish it. As we later discovered, the Iraqi regime had apparently destroyed its stocks of biological and chemical agents and concealed or destroyed the evidence it had done so, or failed to make a record in the first place. Why Saddam would have deliberately invited the suspicion that he still possessed such materials remains the war's great mystery—probably he did not want his enemies *or* his friends to know the actual state of affairs—but whatever the final truth may be, the inspectors were unlikely to have discovered it.

As for the Security Council, here we do hit on one of the signature issues of neoconservatism. Although neoconservatives are not necessarily unilateralists, they are certainly and pointedly distrustful of the UN (as are traditional conservatives). And they have reason to be.

America's decision to invade Iraq after failing to secure the support of the Security Council cost it dearly in the coin of world public opinion. But should we resort to war only upon the Security Council's approval? Although some Europeans have articulated such a principle, in 1999, when Russia stood in the way of UN-approved military strikes against Serbia over the issue of Kosovo, NATO went ahead and bombed anyway, and all nineteen members took part. Surely, the stakes in Iraq were far higher than in Kosovo, even in purely humanitarian terms, all the more so in strategic.

Although the UN Charter gives the Security Council a near-monopoly on the use of force, that same charter also envisioned a mighty UN army that would protect every member against attack or even threat. In return for this protection, the member states were to sacrifice much of their freedom to defend their own interests. But the army never came into being, so this part of the charter is a dead letter. Surely states cannot have surrendered most of their right to defend themselves once the other half of the bargain became null and void.

But arguments over the UN and the Security Council are only the tip of an iceberg. The larger and more general issue is how readily America should resort to the use of force and whether neoconservatives are too promiscuous or "trigger-happy" in this regard. Liberal critics of the war, who grew more assertive and numerous as our effort in Iraq bogged down, reprised the dovish positions of the past 30 years. Over the course of those decades, the likes of Carl Levin and Edward Kennedy and Nancy Pelosi had opposed virtually every new U.S. weapons system and every stout anti-Communist policy—in other words, the very measures that led to victory in the cold war. They also opposed the 1991 Gulf war to force Saddam out of Kuwait, and military action against Serbia in Bosnia. Never once did they acknowledge error or revisit their own mistaken judgments, although in each case the neoconservative critique of those

judgments was proved right. Are we now to suppose that, whatever may have gone wrong so far in Iraq, we can vanquish the forces of terrorism by restricting ourselves to the liberals' favored instruments—diplomacy, foreign aid, and the UN?

On the other side of the ideological spectrum, some conservative critics of the war have argued that we went to Iraq in pursuit of the wrong mission—that is, democratization. As Charles R. Kesler, the editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*, puts it: "the case for toppling Saddam was much stronger than the one for staying indefinitely to buy time for the Iraqis to democratize." And this, too, touches a signature neoconservative issue.

It is hard to picture what would be better today, either for the Iraqis or for us and our interests, had we just deposed Saddam and left. Numerous scenarios are imaginable, all of them grisly. Saddam might have been succeeded by one of his equally bloody henchmen, like the infamous "Chemical Ali." An ethnically-based civil war might have broken out, or the country might have devolved into anarchy like Somalia, except with infinitely more weapons available. Or Iraq's neighbors might have torn it to pieces, with the largest piece consumed by Iran.

Perhaps Kesler envisions that we could have installed a benign dictator. This thought is not far from that of some neoconservatives themselves, who believe that we would have done better to place Ahmad Chalabi in power. But whether it would have been Chalabi or Ayad Allawi (who served briefly as prime minister) or some other Iraqi to our liking, this would not have reduced our own burdens a whit. No such figure could have remained in power unless we shouldered the job of preserving him by force. To the contrary, the measure of democracy that *has* taken hold in Iraq—along with the degree of legitimacy, however attenuated, that this has given to both the Iraqi authorities and our own continued presence—has made our burdens there so much the lighter.

Indeed, what with high voter participation and a degree of give-and-take among the various factions, democratization can be said to have received a decent start in Iraq. To be sure, the functioning of the Iraqi government has been inadequate, but more mature democracies have also faltered under the pressures of war and terror. In the meantime, government on the local level, at least in areas relatively free of violence, seems to be functioning. What is apparent is that most Iraqis want democracy, but their wishes are hostage to a sizable minority of violent recalcitrants, backed by outside force.

A more profound criticism of the war in Iraq is that it was the wrong war in the wrong *place*. By attacking Iraq, so it has been said, Bush diverted us from completing the vital mission of pacifying Afghanistan and tracking down Osama bin Laden. This critique, which became another staple of Democratic argument, has the advantage of sounding tough even while opposing the war. Barack Obama revealed a new variation of the theme when, in August, he announced that he would support bombing terrorist targets in Pakistan.

But what good would it have done to have had tens of thousands more U.S. troops in Afghanistan? From the perspective of "nation building" and other humanitarian concerns, Afghanistan after the removal of the Taliban was doing well—for Afghanistan. A thousand things were wrong, but that poor and undeveloped country was progressing better than at any other time in memory. From a strategic perspective, perhaps a larger American force could have suppressed Taliban guerrilla activity more completely, but was this a mission for which we should have tied down the lion's share of our deployable forces?

And what of bin Laden? By all accounts, he is not in Afghanistan but in Pakistan. There is still talk of U.S. forces attacking the tribal areas where he is believed to shelter, but this would be another nettlesome project. It would entail great military risk—Pakistan's own army has done poorly in the region—and would possibly destabilize the world's second largest Muslim country, a country that contains both a nuclear arsenal and large numbers of extremists. Obama's hypothetical bombing attack would more likely result in mayhem than in the death of bin Laden.

A more serious version of the "wrong place" argument came from within the neoconservative camp itself, and specifically from Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute. He argued in 2003 that we should focus not on Iraq but on Iran.

A key goal in the larger war against terrorism has been to put an end to state support for terrorists either by inducing state sponsors to mend their ways or by bringing about their downfall. Among these sponsors and/or perpetrators, the most active have been Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Libya.

All four are brutally repressive of their own citizens and opponents of regional peace. All have attempted to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

All embrace radical anti-Western philosophies, secular or Islamist. And all have been in place for decades. It seemed a sensible strategy to use force against one in the hope that this would precipitate the desired outcome in the others.

The administration did not spell out its rationale for choosing Iraq, but it is possible to imagine the reasons. In Iran, internal dissidents and reformers seemed far stronger at the time than they do today, and there were grounds for hoping they might change the government on their own. Hitting Syria first, the choice of some neoconservatives, might have reinforced the canard that we were acting on Israel's behalf and thus sparked an even stormier backlash in the Arab world than what we have suffered over Iraq. Libya had been quiescent since Reagan bombed the country in 1986 in response to a terrorist outrage.

The choice of Iraq as a target had another comparative advantage, a particularly ironic one in light of the subsequent charge by Kofi Annan (among others) that the war was "illegal." Actually, there was a clear justification in international law for using force against Iraq, and it did not rest primarily on the administration's controversial interpretation of the traditional right of preemptive self-defense. It rested on Saddam's own willful defiance of the terms and conditions ending the 1991 war he had launched by invading Kuwait.

In hindsight, was Ledeen right? After all, Iran is closer to having a nuclear bomb than Iraq seems to have been, and it has always been the greater supporter of terrorism. Moreover, our difficulties in Iraq have left an opening for Iran to bid for regional hegemony. But if it was indeed a mistake to concentrate on Iraq first, the mistake had nothing to do with neoconservatism. Rather, it was the kind of strategic error that abounds in war. In World War I, our side may have concentrated too much on the central front; in World War II, too much on the periphery. In the cold war, we met disaster in Vietnam, where we either should not have fought or should not have allowed ourselves to lose. In each case, however, we won the larger war.

In sum, the most persuasive criticisms of the Iraq war—that we sent too small a force, that we erred in dismantling the Iraqi state, that we would have been wiser to concentrate on Iran—do nothing to impeach neoconservatism. And as for the criticisms that do aim at the distinctly neoconservative tenets of the war—that we should have deferred to the UN, that we should have avoided resorting to force, that we should not have tried to bring democracy to Iraq—none is persuasive.

In the end, the validity of the neoconservative position, or for that matter of the indictment against it, rests on two issues that go beyond Iraq: whether and how the U.S. should try to spread democracy in the Middle East, and whether we should be engaged in a war against terrorism.

On the first count, Francis Fukuyama has explained his disaffection from neoconservatism on the grounds that, in contrast to his own, "Marxist" approach to democratization, his former friends and allies had behaved like "Leninists." By this he means to separate his analysis in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) from the policies to which that analysis seminally contributed. In writing about the "end of history," Fukuyama now says, he was only attempting to discover the historical laws that, sooner or later, would lead all nations to democracy. But just as Lenin took matters into his own hands when he tired of waiting for Marx's predicted revolution, so had the neoconservatives tried, fatally, to force the pace of democratization.

The analogy may be catchy, but it is flawed. The socialism envisioned by Marx was a fantasy, which came true neither by natural evolution nor by Lenin's violence. Democracy, on the other hand, is the method by which governments are chosen today in about two-thirds of the countries of the world, and this is something that has come about via both the "Marxist" and the "Leninist" paths. In the technologically advanced countries of Europe, democracy in the postwar era may arguably have developed organically, as the outgrowth of socioeconomic development. But the majority of today's democracies are not technologically advanced; democracy came to them because people wanted it and worked or fought for it. In other words, it has been a product of individual choice and will. And though most of its proponents have been indigenous, outsiders have often played influential roles.

In fact, even in the advanced countries, postwar democracy did not just unfold naturally. There, too, it came with the help of various kinds of foreign intervention, whether it was the Allied occupations of Germany, Japan, and Austria, or the CIA's interventions in the politics of Italy and France, or the role played by the Marshall Plan across Western Europe. For that matter, America's own democracy was born with outside assistance from the likes of Lafayette and the government of France. It turns out that we are all "Leninists."

The strategy of promoting democracy in the Middle East flowed from Bush's realization that the war against terror could not be won by military means alone. Bush eschewed the old cliché that the

"root cause" of terror was poverty, a theory always contradicted by the available evidence and one that should have received its final blow this past summer from the appearance of a cell of terrorist physicians in the United Kingdom. Instead, Bush hypothesized that the root cause was the political culture of the Muslim Middle East, which is steeped in violence. This political culture has incubated thousands of young men ready to die for the joy of killing and tens of millions of citizens ready to applaud their "martyrdom." Bush's thesis was, and is, that the Middle East can be brought to partake in the global tide of democratization that has touched every other region, and that such democratization will lead to new ways of thinking and make violence less acceptable.

Neither Bush nor anyone else can know if this strategy will work. There are two obvious areas of uncertainty. One has been expressed well by Kesler:

> The conspicuous exception to democracy's spread was the Arab Middle East. That could have meant, as the neoconservatives concluded, that its turn was next. But it could also have meant that there were cultural, religious, and political factors that had made it resistant to the democratic wave—and would continue to do so.

Kesler here makes the neoconservatives sound more assertive and uniform than I think is fair, but he is certainly right that we do not know whether Arabs will in fact embrace democracy any time soon or, for that matter, ever. And we also do not know—we can only suppose and hope—that if they do, democracy will work to pacify Arab political culture. That is the second uncertainty.

Was it irresponsible of Bush to rest such weighty national concerns on an unproved supposition? It *would* have been irresponsible had there been any better-tested or more plausible alternatives available. But none has yet been suggested, unless one counts those who persist in believing that stronger U.S. efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict will solve everything else. (If that were the case, attacks on America should have subsided during the 1990's, the decade of our most vigorous efforts to broker just such a peace; instead, they crescendoed.)

Thus far, Bush's strategy has scored some steps forward and some back. All in all, as Freedom House reported this year, "the Middle East continues to lag behind other regions in the development of free institutions." But, the Freedom House report immediately continues, "the fact that progress has been made since the September 11, 2001 attacks gives some cause for optimism." Although no country in the region (apart from Israel) can be judged "free," the number counted as "partly free" (as opposed to "not free") has risen from 3 to 6 (or 7 if one counts the Palestinian Authority). If appreciable progress is to come, it will require more years, which is why Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice speaks of "a generational commitment."

If Bush's strategy of spreading democracy bears a neoconservative imprimatur, it is not the largest issue on which neoconservatism stands or falls. That issue is the war against terrorism itself. According to the financier George Soros, among many others, terrorism ought to be viewed simply as a form of criminal behavior, to be handled by means of law-enforcement and not by means of war. Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former national-security adviser, argues that, under Bush, the country's fear of terrorism has amounted to a species of "paranoia," resulting from "almost continuous national brainwashing" that has been perpetrated not only by our government but also by "security entrepreneurs, the mass media, and the entertainment industry." This in itself sounds rather paranoid.

The simple fact is that the attacks of 9/11 were the most deadly on the United States proper in its history. What is more, they followed by eleven months the suicide bombing of the *U.S.S. Cole* that killed seventeen U.S. sailors and wounded 39 others. Two years before that, two of our embassies in Africa were bombed, killing more than 300 people, and two years before that a truck bomb in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia struck U.S. military housing, killing nineteen and wounding 550.

One could go on. Perhaps more frightening is a fact I have already mentioned: tens of thousands of young men in the Islamic world have gone for formal training in terrorism. Their highest objective, presumably, is to strike at "the Great Satan" even at the cost of their own lives, or especially at the cost of their own lives. These myriads are backed by a larger network disposing of considerable resources, making use of modern technology, enjoying the support or complicity of several governments, and striving to acquire or develop ever more lethal means.

The 3,000 lives that were obliterated on 9/11 represented a new benchmark in the success of terror operations, but no one then doubted that the killers would turn at once to the challenge of outdoing this toll. So, indeed, they have repeatedly

tried to do. Contrary to Brzezinski, to be frightened by this requires no brainwashing. Nor, contrary to Soros, are those young men likely to be deterred if we issue them restraining orders.

Fukuyama offers a somewhat more judicious argument. "'War' is the wrong metaphor," he writes. "Meeting the jihadist challenge is more of a 'long, twilight struggle' whose core is not a military campaign but a political struggle." The extent of that jihadist challenge, moreover, has been greatly overestimated, and its rootedness in Islam is itself exaggerated. "It is . . . a mistake," Fukuyama asserts, "to identify Islamism as an authentic and somehow inevitable expression of Muslim religiosity."

Interestingly, the very phrase "long, twilight struggle" is borrowed by Fukuyama from John F. Kennedy's characterization of the cold war—which is exactly the model that neoconservatives have repeatedly offered for the war against terrorism. And as for Islamism being an "authentic and inevitable expression of Muslim religiosity," inevitable it surely is not; but who are non-Muslims to say that it is inauthentic? It certainly seems to be authentic to the individuals who espouse it.

Nor are they alone. Despite the insistence of U.S. officials that the supporters of terrorism are a tiny minority of Muslims, the available data tell a different story. Yes, they are a minority, but not an insignificant one. This summer, the Pew Global Attitudes survey heralded a sharp decline in Muslim support for suicide bombings. After this drop, reportedly, "only" 16 percent of Turks support such attacks—as do 21 percent of Kuwaitis, 23 percent of Jordanians, 34 percent of Lebanese Muslims, 42 percent of Nigerian Muslims, and 70 percent of Palestinians. Confidence in Osama bin Laden "to do the right thing in world affairs" tracks these numbers at a slightly lower level.

There are, thank goodness, some countries where Pew's figures are lower, the lowest being Egypt, where only 8 percent approve suicide bombings. But another Pew survey conducted just a couple of months earlier found 15 percent of Egyptians believing that "attacks on civilians . . . to achieve political goals" were justified. Perhaps the discrepancy means that some Egyptians disapprove of suicide—which presents its own theological difficulties—but not the killing of innocents in a worthy cause. In the same poll, a mere 26 percent of Egyptians disapproved both of al Qaeda's attitudes toward the U.S. and of its tactics. When Egypt's Ibn Khaldun Center, run by the political sociologist Saad Edin Ibrahim, asked Egyptians whom they most admired, the three frontrunners were the Hizballah chief Hassan Nasrallah, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Khaled Meshal of Hamas.

Troubling as they are, these data may understate the problem, at least to judge by election results in the region. In Egypt, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories, Islamist parties, some of them non-violent but some very violent indeed, have scored a string of successes. Although Fukuyama rightly assures us that "we are not currently engaged in anything that looks like a 'clash of civilizations,'" if Islamists and jihadists take over additional countries, the consequences may well resemble exactly that.

The terrorists are the shock troops of the jihadist or radical Islamist movement, a movement whose strength is limited but substantial—far greater than, for example, that of the Communists just after Lenin seized power in Russia. Jihadism has many times more supporters, its reach is more global, it has far more resources, and it has a natural constituency that Communism only pretended to have. Lenin and his band succeeded in fastening their grip on a backward country and used it as a springboard from which their heirs could contest seriously for world domination. Who is to say how powerful a threat radical Islam could become if allowed to metastasize further?

This movement has already been at war with us for some time, and has killed us by the thousands. Bush's announcement of a "war against terror" was thus nothing more than a declaration that we had decided to fight back. Soros, Brzezinski, and Fukuyama notwithstanding, this war was not "optional." If we had declined to fight it now, we would only have to fight more desperately later. If we do not fight back, can anyone imagine that the jihadists will stop? Conversely, defeat of their cause will assuredly demoralize that movement and thin its ranks.

As for the neoconservatives, they have taken their lumps over the war in Iraq. Nonetheless, the tenets of neoconservatism continue to offer the most cogent approach to the challenge that faces our country. To recapitulate those tenets one last time: (1) Our struggle is moral, against an evil enemy who revels in the destruction of innocents. Knowing this can help us assess our adversaries correctly and make appropriate strategic choices. Saying it convincingly will strengthen our side and weaken theirs. (2) The conflict is global, and outcomes in one theater will affect those in others. (3) While we should always prefer nonviolent methods, the use of force will continue to be part of the struggle. (4) The spread of democracy offers an im-

portant, peaceful way to weaken our foe and reduce the need for force.

This suggests a few priorities. First, for all our failures in Iraq, we cannot afford to accept defeat there; nor do we have to. True, our more fanciful images of what Iraq would become after Saddam's removal have gone by the boards. But there is still a world of difference between a relatively stable if troubled country and a state of anarchy.

And then there is Iran. Even if we turn a corner in Iraq, our relative success will be negated if we allow Iran to obtain a nuclear bomb. Once it does, not only will we be haunted by the specter of nuclear terrorism, but we may be constrained by nuclear blackmail from actions we would want to take in future chapters of the war against terror.

Next, only by enlarging our military can we base strategic decisions on military need and not on the availability of forces. How is it that a nation of 300 million cannot indefinitely sustain a force level of 150,000 in a given theater, meaning one soldier for every 2,000 Americans?

Finally, our efforts to foster democracy in the Middle East must not be curtailed but prosecuted vigorously and more effectively. True, the "Arab spring" of 2005 did not turn out to be as successful as the famous "Prague spring" of 1968. But then, it took two decades for that Prague spring to yield fruit. The modest liberalization in the Middle East and the democratic ferment that we have stirred there promise further advances if we persevere.

None of this offers a complete guide to waging the war against terror. But it does amount to a coherent approach, essentially similar to the one by means of which we won the cold war. By contrast, liberals and realists have no coherent approach to suggest—or at least they have not suggested one. That, after all, is why George W. Bush, searching urgently for a response to the events of September 11, stumbled into the arms of neoconservatism, unlikely though the match seemed. One can always wish that policies were executed better, but for a strategy in the war that has been imposed upon us, neoconservatism remains the only game in town.