

# Cold War Revival: Neoconservatives and Historical Memory in the War on Terror

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During the Cold War, Americans made choices in places like Berlin and Korea whose implications continued to resonate for decades. Now we face decisions of similar weight and consequences in places like Afghanistan and, most of all, Iraq.

—Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol,  
*The War Over Iraq* (2003)<sup>1</sup>

Among other things, the so-called “global war on terrorism” will be remembered for returning neoconservatism—even if temporarily—to American political discourse. As of this writing, dozens of books, several documentary films, websites galore, and hundreds of articles in the American press alone have explored, bemoaned, celebrated or critiqued the contemporary influence of defense policy intellectuals like Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, or Richard Perle, think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), or working groups like the Project for a New American Century (PNAC).<sup>2</sup> From the onset of the war against terrorism in 2001, neoconservative contributions to foreign policy discourse were highly visible and controversial. Properly or not, the war on Iraq will likely be remembered as a neoconservative campaign, in much the same way the Spanish-American war is popularly, if erroneously, recalled as the ideological gift of the yellow press.

As with most intellectual movements, neoconservatism eludes narrow definition. Not long before her death, Jeane Kirkpatrick, one of the most prominent first-generation neoconservatives to emerge from the Reagan administration, diagnosed “an almost epidemic use of the term” in contemporary arguments about United States foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> In everyday usage, the term has acquired an incoherent array of meanings, many of which are ahistorical and contradictory—as, for example, when “neoconservative” is used as a synonym for the Christian right, or when neoconservatives are described as merely a domestic analog to Israel’s Likud Party.<sup>4</sup> As one of the primary ideological artifacts of the cold war, neoconservatism emerged from arguments over domestic and foreign policies that came to crisis during and after the American war in Vietnam. Yet neoconservatives were also preoccupied with questions of history and national identity. For prominent neoconservatives like Perle and David Frum, Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol, Michael Ledeen and others, the onset of the war on terrorism drew on a reservoir of collective character that extended back to the nation’s founding. Indeed, Ledeen called it a “very old kind of war . . . right out of the eighteenth century, the very kind of war that gave us our national identity.”<sup>5</sup> Challenging the idea that war serves merely to defend American interests and assure its security, neoconservatives asserted that war actually fleshes out national identity and that any successful war would broadcast the United States’ political values and cultural norms.

These beliefs are certainly not without precedent in American history. The presumed link between war and national identity, for example, would have been familiar to Progressive Era imperialists like Josiah Strong and Theodore Roosevelt, and aggressive varieties of American expansionism have been a consistent feature of American culture since the nation’s founding.<sup>6</sup> Yet neoconservatism, I argue, is unique in its obsession with the past as a model for the reconstruction of national virtue and for the assertion of American power on a global scale. While President George W. Bush himself preferred to invoke images of the “greatest generation” when describing the nation’s character and mission during wartime, neoconservatives turned instead to the cold war as resource for their historical lessons.<sup>7</sup> Unlike World War II, which typically summons to mind images of national unity, popular memories of the cold war evoke a fractious domestic order, one in which Americans contended with anti-communist hysteria, countercultural revolution, traumatic political realignments and perilous foreign policy choices in Vietnam and elsewhere. Reflecting on that past, neoconservatives have emphasized a national history marked by clear choices, squandered opportunities, and national redemption; they have drawn sharp lines between “freedom” and “tyranny” abroad and between patriots and appeasers at home.

Here, the crucial question is not whether the cold war actually supplies a usable past that might aid the American war against terrorism, nor am I asking whether neoconservative versions of cold war history are empirically valid. When neoconservatives write or speak of the cold war, they focus almost ex-

clusively on the contours of American leadership—particularly its rhetorical intonations—giving little sense of the social, cultural and political nuances of the broader cold war era. Moreover, their approach to the history of the cold war is reductive and dramatic. They emphasize presumably self-evident beginnings and conclusions, celebrate individual leaders of near-mythic status, and seek to portray a moral universe cleaved between the forces of light and dark. In doing so, neoconservatives impose historical clarity where others might find ambiguity and contingency. Their nostalgia for the cold war is messianic rather than despairing.

Yet because neoconservative intellectuals insist on the *meaningfulness* of history, I am interested in what the cold war clarifies for them. What lessons do they claim to draw from it, and how do they invoke a cold war past that suits their view of the United States' mission in the contemporary historical moment? While neoconservatism is an intellectually diverse and multigenerational movement in American politics, one of its characteristic features remains a preference for using a particular and self-serving configuration of cold war history to inform its arguments about the "present danger." Neoconservatives sought to reanimate that tone of struggle—and to vindicate their own counsel—in part by invoking the cold war as the most relevant historical guide for comprehending the "present danger." The first section of this essay examines the forms of national identity proposed by neoconservative writers during the cold war, taking note of the ways that neoconservatives distinguished their foreign policy perspectives (and their sense of national-historical mission) from liberal internationalists and realists. The second portion of the essay considers neoconservative perspectives on the "war on terror," which they have often depicted as an opportunity to rededicate a foreign policy disposition articulated during the Truman administration, abandoned by traditional conservatives and liberals and then revived by President Ronald Reagan.

### **Neoconservatism, the Cold War and Imperial Identity**

As Michael Shapiro has described it, the discourses of foreign relations set policy while also embracing "moral geographies"—popularly-held beliefs about one's own nation as well as other regions of the world. Shapiro argues that such beliefs become crucial to the intimate, local processes of identity-formation, endowing categories like race, class, gender, and nation with meaning, materiality, and historical specificity.<sup>8</sup> Foreign policy, Melani McAlister writes, is thus a "semiotic activity" that assists in the imagination and construction—rather than simply the defense or extension—of national identities and interests.<sup>9</sup> Over the past decade, critics like McAlister, Amy Kaplan, and Matthew Frye Jacobson among others have argued for a more sophisticated account of empire and American culture, drawing greater attention to the interaction of material, ideological and imaginative registers in the formation of what William Appleman Williams once called "empire as a way of life."<sup>10</sup> The culture of American empire—of

which neoconservatism is a part—enlivens its subjects by depicting the United States as an indispensable beacon for the world's future progress.

Neoconservative discourse sprung from various traditions of American exceptionalism, including nineteenth-century progressivism and Social Gospel theology, as well as the rhetorical traditions of "covenant renewal," which urges followers to adhere faithfully to the national mission or risk the loss of divine favor.<sup>11</sup> To cite Louis Hartz' classic formulation, neoconservatives promote an "absolute national morality" that obliges its bearers to either flee from or transform an alien world.<sup>12</sup> In Walter MacDougall's more contemporary phrasing, neoconservatives are "global meliorists" who believe that the U.S. "can, should, and must" bring the world into alignment with its own ideals. This ambition is derived from their conviction that "the American model is universally valid, that morality enjoins the United States to help others emulate it, and that the success of the American experiment itself ultimately depends on other nations escaping dearth and oppression."<sup>13</sup> To the degree that neoconservative ideas helped reshape the views of many Americans on domestic issues like affirmative action and welfare, they also promoted a set of foreign policy beliefs that cast the United States as an exceptional yet universal nation, one that led not merely by passive example but through virtuous performance. At the core of the neoconservative historical vision stand the United States—enduring and perpetually imperiled—and its citizens, who face the choice of remaining faithful to their national mission or suffering the wrath that bears down upon all apostates. To neoconservative writers, the latest war therefore cannot be seen as a deviation from national traditions but rather as a reaffirmation of the nation's foundational, evangelical, and embattled identity.

In one sense, neoconservatives emerged in the late twentieth century as the most articulate proponents for a new culture of American empire, the latest advocates for manifest destiny. Tracing the course of such ideas as have been rededicated from one generation to the next, one is struck by Edward Said's observation that a "kind of monotony" sustains the "schemes, phrases, or theories produced . . . to justify the serious responsibilities" of the United States as a global power.<sup>14</sup> Yet not all of these schemes, phrases and theories have been uttered in a belligerent tone of voice. In the United States especially, expressions of empire have traditionally adopted the soothing tones of liberal universalism, which treats foreign policy as the means of extending order and civilization—usually defined in terms of economic freedom, republican institutions, and Christianity—to benighted peoples. (The recipients of these gifts cannot be imagined as undeserving, though they may prove momentarily ungrateful or unappreciative. In due time, however, they will—as the saying goes—welcome us as liberators.)

If imperialism, as one historian writes, "lies at the heart of US foreign relations," the cultures of United States imperialism have asserted the nation's military, economic, or political supremacy while eagerly disavowing those same "selfish forces" with which imperialism is traditionally associated.<sup>15</sup> As Frank Ninkovich has persuasively argued, the traditional markers of individual and

collective identity were transformed by modernity, which prioritized the role of culture in the creation of an interdependent world. As a consequence, beliefs about national identity worked their way toward the center of international relations; no longer governed primarily by traditional calculations of national interest, material gain, or national prestige, the discourses of U.S. foreign relations in the twentieth century became preoccupied with narratives about the “civilizing mission” of the United States in other parts of the world. Foreign policy, therefore, acquired a kind of identity politics of its own, as concerns about national security came to be framed by the discourses of culture, by anxieties about the survival of an “American way of life” (rather than the survival of America as such) and by the conviction that American values, if they are to endure, must be promoted and extended globally.<sup>16</sup>

Walter Russell Mead has identified the roots of this broadly “Wilsonian” perspective in the work of nineteenth-century American missionaries, whose liberal theology emphasized the global expansion of democracy, racial equality and human rights.<sup>17</sup> While the traditions of Wilsonianism are usually associated with the development and expansion of international institutions like the League of Nations and the United Nations, Mead reminds us that the core of “Wilsonian” thinking has always emphasized the evangelizing purposes of American civilization. Thus Max Boot, who regards himself as a “hard Wilsonian” rather than a neoconservative, has argued that Wilsonians promote a balance of morality and self-interest in their foreign policy. On his account, Wilson was “one of our most interventionist presidents,” deploying force on behalf of liberal democracy throughout the world.<sup>18</sup> Shades of this belief could be found everywhere in the speeches of George W. Bush, especially in his oft-repeated claim that the principles of freedom are not owned by a single nation but are instead the destiny of all, “the birthright of every person—in every civilization.”<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, the measure of one’s affection for “American civilization” may be found in one’s willingness to promote the extension of its values and principles. Such supposedly neoconservative ideas, as Gideon Rose pointed out a year before George W. Bush acquired the presidency, have always enjoyed a certain measure of popular charm, offering Americans a sense of providence and purpose. These ideas also, Rose warned, have a history of promoting dangerous oversimplifications.<sup>20</sup>

However much it may resonate with these disparate cultural and intellectual traditions, neoconservatism is inseparable from the history of the cold war. Unlike traditional American conservatives, the first generation of neoconservatives were secular modernists who traced their origins to the left wing of the New Deal, to post-World War II social science, to the cold war liberalism of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Nitze, to the political writings of Sidney Hook and James Burnham, and to the politics of “muscular liberals” like Truman and Henry “Scoop” Jackson. This generation of cold war intellectuals actually began their public lives as anti-Stalinist liberals—even Trotskyites in some early cases—who were affiliated with the Democratic Party during the 1940s and 1950s. Neoconservatives, however, recoiled from the new left during the Vietnam era, frustrated with the

rise of black nationalism, Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, and the policies of détente pursued by Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Jimmy Carter toward the Soviet Union, China and the so-called "Third World." Committed to the proposition of American exceptionalism, neoconservatives were united by their skepticism toward moral relativism and its alleged denial of the superiority of American ideals and values.

Presenting their ideas in the pages of eclectic journals such as *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* during the 1960s and 1970s and through advocacy groups like the Committee on the Present Danger, the Committee for the Free World, and the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, neoconservative influence broadened during the 1980s, ascending to dominance at think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the Heritage Foundation, and the Hoover Institute. Additionally, neoconservatives helped create non-governmental organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy, and they established important alliances with more traditional conservative institutions such as the John M. Olin and Richard Mellon Scaife Foundations. The political migration of neoconservatism parallels this institutional transformation. By President Reagan's first term in office, neoconservatives had completed their migration from the Democratic Party to the GOP, where they continue, almost without exception, to reside. Since the end of the Reagan era, neoconservatism has found its strongest expression in journals like the *Weekly Standard*, in policy organizations like AEI and the Hudson Institute, and in a small but notable clearinghouse known as the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), which has become the dominant symbol of the neoconservative ascension following September 11, 2001.

Broadly speaking, neoconservatism represented one of several competing arenas of foreign policy thought within the wider conservative movement from the 1970s through the 1990s. It was always reviewed with considerable skepticism by realists, libertarians or populists who may have regarded neoconservatives as interlopers, "right wing liberals," or—in the caustic words of Patrick Buchanan—"boat-people from the McGovern revolution who rafted over to the GOP at the end of conservatism's long march to power."<sup>21</sup> Henry Kissinger, recalling the emergence of neoconservatism with some degree of disfavor, wrote in 1999 that "tactics bored them; they discerned no worthy goals for American foreign policy short of total victory."<sup>22</sup> More recently, Richard Lowry, editor of the *National Review*, claimed that neoconservatives cannot properly be called "conservative" at all, as they display "impatience at any reminder that the world is not infinitely plastic and that not all problems will break down under the solvent of American power."<sup>23</sup> Even less impressed with bellicose visions of America's universal dominion, conservative critics Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke describe neoconservatives as Wilsonians with bandoliers, "born of the unlikely mating of humanitarian liberalism and brute force."<sup>24</sup>

The hostility is not surprising. As former radical-turned-neoconservative Norman Podhoretz reflected in 1996, neoconservatives sought to shape a unique perspective that differed from "the older varieties of American conservatism,"

especially what he viewed as its repugnant strains of nativism and isolationism. Unlike traditional conservatives—sometimes dubbed “paleoconservatives”—cold war neoconservatives were not intuitively hostile to the welfare state, but instead wanted to set limits on it; they supported the mainstream labor movement out of gratitude for its anti-communism; they rejected the policy of détente, convinced that the Soviet Union was not a “normal” power that would respond to ordinary forms of engagement; they supported Israel as a regional surrogate in the struggle against Soviet influence in the Middle East; and they were repulsed by the American counterculture and bemoaned the weakening of American cultural institutions, to which they ultimately assigned blame for the disaster in Vietnam.<sup>25</sup> From the start, neoconservatives anchored the identity of the United States in its need for a strong military, its moral commitment to the spread of democracy everywhere, its near-total responsibility for the international order, and its resulting obligation to challenge those who defy American values. As Louis Hartz observed, early cold war liberals viewed the new struggle against the Soviet Union as an “ideological competition for human loyalty” and not merely as a strategic encounter rooted in the traditional calculations of great power politics.<sup>26</sup> Promoting a foreign policy vision of “crisis internationalism,” cold war liberals defended American internationalism as necessary to thwart the demise of the global order itself.<sup>27</sup>

Neoconservatives rejected the two dominant foreign policy perspectives of their era, viewing liberal internationalism and realism as insufficient to the task of defending either national or universal human interests. Unlike liberal internationalists, whom the neoconservatives strung to the mast for their utopian, legalistic commitments to diplomacy and their faith in the pacific results of economic integration, neoconservatives insisted that America’s “hard power” be used freely and without apology or embarrassment. Thus, during the Nixon, Carter and Reagan administrations, they agitated against arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union, arguing that totalitarian regimes could not be trusted to honor such agreements and that the illusion of amity merely allotted the Soviets much-needed time to enhance their already substantial threat to the United States. And unlike traditional foreign policy realists, whose commitments to “order” and “stability” led them to accept the existence of unsavory regimes, neoconservatives insisted that democracy was a revolutionary force that could not coexist with evil but must instead defeat it. Neoconservatives claimed that traditional realists like Hans Morgenthau and Kissinger were too enthralled by questions of “interest” and “the balance of power” and were not driven to articulate national ideals and abstract principles. Contemporary neoconservatives like Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol have argued that *realpolitik* had no authentic American precursors, that it derived more from Europeans like Metternich and Bismarck than from nineteenth-century American statesmen like John Quincy Adams.<sup>28</sup> In their view, United States foreign policy has always promoted values above mere geopolitical power. Believing that the United States represented humankind’s universal interests, cold war neoconservatives concluded that constraints on

the exercise of American power—actual or recommended—must be rejected.<sup>29</sup> This sense of obligation was pronounced for neoconservatives throughout the final two decades of the cold war, when they decried the alleged influence of post-Vietnam “isolationists” on both the left and the right. “To disengage [from the world] in the service of a narrow nationalism,” Charles Krauthammer wrote in 1985, “is a fine foreign policy for a minor regional power . . . . For America today it is a betrayal of its idea of itself.”<sup>30</sup>

Similar claims are abundant as well in recent neoconservative writing, abetted by George W. Bush administration’s insistence that it is waging a war on behalf of democracy and its global extensions. According to Hoover Institute fellow and *Policy Review* editor Tod Lindberg, the moral vision of neoconservatives was always rooted in the “raw material” of classical liberalism, in the belief that “freedom and equality” are “intrinsically expansionist in character” and thus must be defined as “universal goods” rather than the exclusive property of Americans. “When the United States promotes and defends its liberalism as its own,” Lindberg writes, “it is also promoting and defending the liberalism of others, of which liberalism in America is a part.” Underscoring similar remarks by George W. Bush, Lindberg reiterates the notion that liberty is “not the sole property of Americans, even if the United States has played and continues to play a special role in [its] protection and extension. On the contrary, these things in principle belong to everyone—albeit, in actuality, not yet.”<sup>31</sup> In the United States especially, as Lindberg’s words reaffirm, the “special role” of the United States has often been expressed in the soothing tones of liberal universalism, which regards foreign policy as a tool for enlarging the realm of order and civilization to include benighted peoples. Michael Ledeen carried forward this tradition of benevolent hegemony in 1996, writing that the United States is the

embodiment of an idea: the sovereignty of a free people defined by a commitment to the rights and obligations embodied in the written law rather than by a shared ancestry. Our national interests cannot be defined in purely geopolitical terms because we seek to advance ideals. Therefore, our foreign policy must be ideological—must be designed to advance freedom. Three times in this century we and our friends and allies have been attacked by the enemies of freedom, and three times we have prevailed, because of the incomparable power and creativity that only free people, bound together by a common purpose, can generate. In these days of multicultural relativism, it is unfashionable to state openly what the rest of the world takes for granted: the superiority of American civilization.<sup>32</sup>

Whereas most forms of nationalism seek to preserve the historical particularities of a nation, neoconservatives promote what Claes Ryn describes as an ideological nationalism committed to “ahistorical, supranational principles

that they believe should supplant the traditions of particular societies.”<sup>33</sup> “Our nationalism,” David Brooks and William Kristol wrote in 1997, “is that of an exceptional nation founded on a universal principle, on what Lincoln called ‘an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times.’”<sup>34</sup> And applicable, they might have added, to all wars.

## Restoration

In the months following the catastrophic attacks in New York and Washington, the Bush administration underwent an apparent conversion to neoconservatism. To the surprise of nearly everyone, Bush seemed to morph from the candidate who once promised a “humble” foreign policy to the president who suddenly aimed to rid the world of “evildoers” while committing the United States to the political and cultural transformation of the Middle East. Public addresses such as Bush’s 2002 State of the Union (the setting for his historic “axis of evil” declarations), followed by the June announcement of his doctrine of pre-emption, established the broad foundations for this grand strategy. While these statements were collectively known as the “Bush Doctrine,” it was not Bush himself but Vice President Richard Cheney who was directly responsible for the presence of Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Kenneth Adelman, Paula Dobriansky, David Wurmser, Lewis Libby and other defense policy intellectuals in the Bush administration. Nearly two dozens of these “unipolarists” had received prominent appointments in the departments of state and defense, while Cheney’s office, the Defense Policy Board, and the Project for a New American Century became centers of neoconservative thought. Outside the administration, op-ed columnists like William Kristol (*The Weekly Standard*), Charles Krauthammer (*The Washington Post*), Eliot Cohen (*The Wall Street Journal*), and Max Boot (*The Los Angeles Times*) provided constant and aggressive support for expanding the war in Afghanistan into and beyond Iraq. If the promoters of neoconservative foreign policy in the 1990s had seemed “anachronistic” to some observers, the attacks in 2001 offered the opportunity to reassert their central claims about the nature of American power and its historic mission.<sup>35</sup> As Robert Kagan argued, “America did not change on September 11. It only became more itself.”<sup>36</sup> After September 11, 2001, neoconservative writers intensified their argument that the United States, as in previous epochs, was again embroiled in an existential conflict whose stakes included the very survival of democracy.

Among other features, neoconservative discourse was immediately notable for its insistence that “Islamofascism” represented a threat equal to those posed by tyrannies in the twentieth century. Neoconservative intellectuals were especially apt to describe the current historical moment as the direct successor to the challenges faced by the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. “Just as the particular events of the 1940s yielded the broad commitment that guided America through the Cold War,” wrote William Kristol and

Lawrence Kaplan, “so have September 11 and the threat from Iraq combined to produce a national security doctrine that responds to the broader dangers of the new century.”<sup>37</sup> As such, there was nothing particularly unique—and certainly nothing discontinuous or revolutionary—about the foreign policy ideas set forth under the banner of “democratic globalism,” “American internationalism,” “hard Wilsonianism” or any of the other synonyms for neoconservative ideas. For writers like Michael Ledeen, therefore, it was not neoconservatism but the United States *itself* that embodied the spirit of revolution; neoconservative ideas were merely the expression of that “eternal” revolutionary essence. “We are the only truly revolutionary country on earth,” Ledeen explained, “which is both the reason for which we were attacked in the first place and the reason we will successfully transform the lives of hundreds of millions of people throughout the Middle East.”<sup>38</sup>

While focusing practical attention on U.S. policies toward individual states like Iraq, Iran or Syria, neoconservatives also participated in the construction of a much more elaborate narrative about the war on terrorism, casting it as an ideological scrum between Western liberal democracy—alleged to be the only viable form of human existence after the cold war—and an insufficiently modernized Islamic world spellbound by a fanatical ideology. Charles Krauthammer, in a typical formulation, wrote that September 11 reminded Americans that the “existential struggles of the past six decades” were alive, that “history had not ended.” Instead, “we found ourselves in a new existential struggle, this time with an enemy even more fanatical, fatalistic, and indeed undeterrable than in the past.”<sup>39</sup> This configuration of national identity and danger represented one of the primary attributes of neoconservative historical discourse, and it bore no small resemblance to the emphasis early cold warriors like John Foster Dulles placed on the allegedly expansive nature of Soviet ideology. Rather than focusing solely on actual Soviet capabilities, Dulles and others claimed that Soviet *beliefs* (and the intentions that flowed from them) should be the root concern of United States policy; thus, any war that sought the mere containment of Soviet capabilities would fail to appreciate the deeper ideological nature of the struggle.<sup>40</sup> As a consequence, cold war was frequently depicted in cultural rather than geopolitical terms, as the United States was seen as threatened not by an actual attack so much as by an ideology wholly distinct from its own cherished principles.<sup>41</sup>

In similar ways, those who wrote in a neoconservative idiom during the first few years after the 9/11 attacks gave extraordinary consideration to the intentions of “Islamists,” doubtless in part because such intentions could be presented as clear and unified across national and organizational lines. As cold war hawks believed that they were mobilizing against a communist monolith, neoconservatives downplayed the significance of divisions within Islamic theology, between one “terror state” and another, or between one terrorist organization and the next. Yet while the cold war with the Soviet Union could be framed both abstractly (as a continuation of a more general war against

totalitarianism that began during the 1940s) as well as concretely (in the materiality of the Kremlin, in the doctrines of the Soviet state), no such clarity defined the campaign against terrorism, which has been characterized from the start by a lack of specificity. In place of concrete national enemies, writers like Ledeen chose instead to portray the war in Orientalist terms as a battle of identities rather than a clash of states, as a contest between Western civilization and an amorphous sump of “Muslim rage.” In *The War Against the Terror Masters* (2003), Ledeen insisted that the Islamists’ “fanatical desire to destroy the West grows out of a deep-seated Muslim rage, and is buttressed by a powerful Muslim doctrine.” This rage and its doctrine sustained “a global Islamic terror network, resting on an Islamic fundamentalist mass movement.”<sup>42</sup>

As David Frum and Richard Perle argued, this radical, insensate “strain” of Islam needed to be acknowledged as the most recent successor to the great ideological movements of the twentieth century, the latest threat to the United States’ identity. That is, it

seeks to overthrow our civilization and remake the nations of the West into Islamic societies, imposing on the whole world its religion and its law. . . . Like communism, this ideology perverts the language of justice and equality to justify oppression and murder. Like Nazism, it exploits the injured pride of once-mighty nations. Like both communism and Nazism, militant Islam is opportunistic—it works willingly with all manner of unlikely allies, as the communists and Nazis worked with each other against the democratic West.<sup>43</sup>

Frum and Perle contended further than the relationships between militant Islam, Nazism and communism are not merely analogical but genealogical as well. After siding with Germany during World War II, they argued, Muslim “xenophobes and fanatics” turned to the Soviet Union for inspiration and aid during the cold war, producing “socialist republics” in Libya, Egypt, Syria and Algeria. “Revolutionary Marxism,” they explained, “offered hope that Arabs could obtain the benefits of modernity without the humiliation of Westernization,” conjuring up “a seductive vision of progress without compromise with the wealthy West.” After the fall of the Soviet Union, Arab economies stagnated while the United States commenced a period of economic and technological growth that demonstrated to the world that no viable historical alternatives existed to Western progress. Rejecting this vision of progress, Osama bin Laden and his followers turned instead to “Islam as an ideology,” the latest expression of Middle Eastern extremism, heir to the fascists, communists and pan-Arabists who had previously made war against the West.<sup>44</sup>

As they revive cold war notions about the global indispensability of the United States (and the global perils created by its enemies), neoconservatives stressed the ideological dimensions of the current struggle and routinely argued

that Americans must name their foe precisely, that the war should be conceived as one waged not against the tactic of “terrorism” but against the ideology of “militant Islam,” “Islamism” or “Islamofascism.” The discursive surreality of the war perhaps reached a peak in late July 2005, when a brief controversy erupted within the Bush administration over the question of whether the United States was waging a “war against terrorism” or a “global struggle against violent extremism.”<sup>45</sup> To neoconservatives, neither of these terms would suffice, primarily because they failed to suggest the ideological magnitude of the struggle. Eliot Cohen and Norman Podhoretz, for instance, referred to the conflict as “World War IV” to emphasize that the conflict is global and that it has “ideological roots.” In February 2002, Podhoretz predicted that this war, like all “big wars,” would “end with the world being reshaped in forms unanticipated when they begin.”<sup>46</sup> Such language suggested not only that the war was a campaign against beliefs rather than tactics—and that those beliefs were promoted by a coherent alliance of organizations and states—but also that they led logically to the conclusion that the aims of the United States needed to include the replacement of malignant cultural values by ones more suited to the fulfillment of humanity’s universal interests. As Ledeen explained

The radical transformation of several Middle Eastern countries from oppressive tyrannies to freer societies is entirely in keeping with American character and the American tradition. Creative destruction is our middle name, both without our own society and abroad. We tear down the old order every day, from business to science, literature, art, architecture and cinema to politics and law. Our enemies have always hated this whirlwind of energy and creativity, which menaces their traditions (whatever they may be) and shames them for their inability to keep pace. Seeing America undo traditional societies, they fear us, for they do not wish to be undone. They cannot feel secure so long as we are there, for our very existence—our existence, not our policies—threatens their legitimacy. They must attack in order to survive, just as we must destroy them to advance our historic mission.<sup>47</sup>

Ledeen wrote that the messianic vision of the “terror masters” would fail just as predictably as the Soviet vision. Radical Islam, he explained, “is to this war what communism was to the Cold War. Like the Soviet Union, the terror states were both believers in a revolutionary doctrine and commanders of armies. Like the Soviets, the radical Islamists believe they have found the key to getting on the right side of history.” The vision of radical Islamists, he wrote, depended upon continuous success. Once they were shown to be “losers,” they would be “rejected by their former and would-be followers . . . . As they begin to lose, their people will turn on them, for most of their people are neither crazy nor

stupid.”<sup>48</sup> Podhoretz likewise insisted on the inevitability of the United States as an evangelical power, citing the record of World War II (with its transformations of Japan and Germany) and “World War III” (with its reinvention of the “old heartland of the evil empire”) as a prelude to the future transformation of the Islamic world, which could not “eternally remain an exception” to the advance of democracy and capitalism. No matter the “exact contours” of the change, “the Islamic countries in particular, and the world in general, will look very different by the time this war is over. Very different, and very much better for the vast majority of people everywhere.”<sup>49</sup>

Ledeem and Podhoretz were not alone in modeling their vision for the future on the United States’ transformative mission during and after World War II. In the archives of neoconservative historical memory, the early years of the cold war are afforded a special place as a time when American leadership awoke to its global responsibilities before losing its grip on history. Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol, writing just prior to the Iraq War, insisted that American leaders decided in 1943 and 1944 (“well before the Soviet Union had emerged as the great challenge to American security and American principles”) that the role of the United States in the world was quite simply to “deter aggression globally, whoever the aggressor might be, in order to build a safer world.”<sup>50</sup> Consequently, they argued—reviving one of the major neoconservative themes of the 1990s—it was an error to assume that the disappearance of the Soviet Union marked the end of this exceptional, expansionist period of U.S. foreign policy. As Robert Kagan claimed in *Of Paradise and Power*, the end of the cold war “was taken by Americans as an opportunity not to retract but to expand their reach,” to expand its alliances, “to stake out its interests in parts of the world, like Central Asia, that most Americans never knew existed before.”<sup>51</sup> Having failed to pursue this expansive vision, the United States reaped the bitter harvest. Saul Singer, editorial page editor of the *Jerusalem Post*, explained in 2002 that the post-cold war “new world” had been “defined more by the absence of Soviet expansionism than by an American evangelism for democracy. The result of this complacency, it was belatedly discovered, was a new menace—militant Islam —[that was] tempted to challenge the hegemony of the free world.”<sup>52</sup>

Over the years, one of neoconservatism’s chief narrative elements has been its emphasis on the faltering “credibility” of a nation unwilling to sustain the posture appropriate to an indispensable, universal power. As they recoiled from the Democratic Party of George McGovern and Jimmy Carter in the 1970s, the first generation of neoconservatives envisioned themselves as torch-carriers for a version of cold war liberalism they believed to be crystallized in the messianic words of the Truman Doctrine or in the classified, apocalyptic national security sermon that came to be known as NSC-68. Although most contemporary neoconservatives were too young to have experienced this transformation personally, they inherited the traditional neoconservative view that the global vision of the early cold war liberals had been abandoned in the pursuit of mere containment of and coexistence with tyranny. While second-generation neo-

conservatives typically reached their political maturity during and after Ronald Reagan's presidency—"when conservatism was cool," Max Boot recalls—they often reflect favorably on Truman, Dean Acheson, James Forrestal, Paul Nitze and other "muscular liberals" of the early cold war, if for no other reason than to deride contemporary liberals by comparison.<sup>53</sup> David Brooks, a former editor of the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*, wrote during the 2004 campaign that these were "Democrats Americans trusted," the ones who "lived in the shadow of World War II." They saw America engaged in a titanic struggle against tyranny and believed in using military means for idealistic ends.<sup>54</sup> As neoconservatism developed in the 1970s and 1980s, its proponents were animated by a sense that Americans had deviated from an aggressive path laid out during the Truman administration. The Truman Doctrine especially struck neoconservatives as a landmark declaration that effectively Americanized the entire project of internationalism. Contrasted with the hazy and legalistic mandate of the United Nations, the Truman Doctrine acknowledged that the nation's refusal to act in regions outside its narrow spheres of national interest would bring about disastrous global consequences.

Significantly, many neoconservatives referred to the contest with the Soviets as "World War III," underscoring what they believed to be the continuous nature of democratic struggle. As the central force in that struggle, the United States was obliged to remain mobilized for a conflict whose terrain extended throughout the world. In his 1979 memoir *Breaking Ranks*, Norman Podhoretz insisted that only the first phase of the cold war was worthy of emulation, that the "New Politics" of the 1960s had introduced an "anti-growth" doctrine that rejected the extension of capitalism and democracy—and by necessity invited the expansion of Soviet power. In his view, with the brief exception of John F. Kennedy's inaugural vow to "pay any price, bear any burden" in defense of liberty, American foreign policymakers, deriving the wrong lessons from the Vietnam War, had come to disavow an aggressive anti-Soviet and pro-American consensus, forgetting the cold war's global dimensions and its resemblance to the previous struggle against fascism. Recalling the formation of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority in 1972, Podhoretz observed that disaffected Democrats like Jeane Kirkpatrick, Ben Wattenberg, and Max Kampelman advocated "the liberal tradition as embodied in the Democratic party of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and Johnson." Drawing on that tradition, the CDM "believed that the United States should continue to play an active role in the defense of freedom throughout the world, and we supported maintaining the military capability required by such a role."<sup>55</sup>

Not surprisingly, twenty-first-century neoconservatives revived this argument, contextualizing the war on terror as the next phase in a war for democratic expansion that began in earnest after the second world war. In doing so, supporters of George W. Bush frequently enlisted desirable, bipartisan ancestors to vindicate contemporary policies (however much the broader landscape of Republican policy deviates from the substance of cold war liberalism). Adopting the "consensus liberalism" of the early cold war years as the gold standard for

foreign policy virtue, neoconservatives like Kaplan and Kristol depicted the Bush administration as the true heirs of a broad national faith and not, as critics would perhaps have suggested, as the promoters of a narrow ideological agenda. Bush's controversial doctrine of pre-emption, for instance, was frequently measured favorably against the audacity of the 1947 Truman Doctrine, whose rhetorical commitments included the promise to mobilize the bottomless resources of the United States to the worldwide struggle against tyranny.<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere, celebrants noted the similarities between George W. Bush's second inaugural address and John F. Kennedy's first, or between NSC-68 and the Bush administration 2002 document on national security strategy. Jeff Jacoby, conservative columnist for *The Boston Globe*, was so moved by these comparisons that he concluded in the summer of 2004 that George W. Bush was "the real Democrat" in the race to the Oval Office, that his "explicit policy of advancing democracy" placed him in a line of succession that included not only Ronald Reagan but Truman and Kennedy as well.<sup>57</sup> As Kaplan and Kristol wrote in *The War Over Iraq* (2003)—constructing an argument that resonated with Podhoretz' recollection of the formation of the CDM—the apogee of "American internationalism" occurred during the Truman administration. This version of internationalism, they regretted, lost favor after 1968, at which point "liberals and conservatives alike abandoned the foreign policy tenets that had guided American through the first phase of the Cold War." This capitulation left only a "small group of Democrats and Republicans" to defend the faith, patiently awaiting a presidency dedicated to the redemption of those goals.<sup>58</sup>

This ecumenical history, however, served as a preface to a narrative of Republican triumphalism. Because neoconservatives were no longer affiliated with the Democratic Party after the 1980s, their historical analogies could simply end with Truman or Kennedy, who in any event did not survive to witness the redemption of their ideals. If neoconservatives claimed that the ideals of cold war liberalism were expressed and abandoned by Democrats, they unanimously insisted that the apotheosis of neoconservatism (the alleged inheritor of those ideals) came during the 1980s under Ronald Reagan, who presided over a Republican administration that committed itself, in rhetoric if not always in policy, to nearly everything the neoconservatives had been urging since the mid-1970s. If neoconservatives condemned American leadership under Johnson, Nixon and Carter for the "betrayal" of the national covenant, they canonized the presidency of Ronald Reagan for reviving the winning strategy. Reagan vowed not to contain communism but to transcend it, and his policy of "rollback" refocused the nation's attention on democratizing "peripheral" regions of the world that had been abandoned to the Soviets after the disaster in Vietnam. Reagan, who had campaigned as a Democrat for Harry Truman in 1948, did not follow the same political trajectory as the neoconservatives, switching party affiliation in 1962 as an early participant in the rise of the Goldwater Right. Nevertheless, neoconservatives welcomed him as one of their own. As hagiographer Peter Schweitzer has written, Reagan was interested in the "metaphysics" of the cold war rather

than its strategic minutia, and his personal “epic” was defined by a sense that the United States was involved in a “titanic struggle between good and evil.” Like the hedgehog in Isaiah Berlin’s famous essay, Reagan knew “one big thing.”<sup>59</sup>

Under Reagan, defense budgets bloomed, the final confrontation with communism commenced, the United Nations was spurned and scolded, and the Great Society was rebuked. Important neoconservative voices such as Eliot Abrams, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Eugene Rostow and Richard Perle accepted positions within the new administration, and Reagan’s willingness to place the anti-Soviet struggle at the center of United States foreign policy seemed a welcome relief to neo-conservatives who had spent much of their time arguing that “engagement” was nothing less than a geopolitical rationalization for appeasement.<sup>60</sup> Throughout the 1980s, neoconservatives argued that Soviet military power equaled or surpassed the American arsenal; that the anti-nuclear movement in the United States and Western Europe had no equivalent among Soviet citizens; that deterrence was an unhealthy fantasy that overlooked the potential usefulness of nuclear weapons as an *offensive* force; and that any sign of weakness, whether in Latin America, Northeast Asia or the Middle East, could prove fatal to the United States.<sup>61</sup>

Although the political history of the Reagan administration is complex, and while it is clear that moderates and conservative nationalists rather than neoconservatives came to define the nation’s foreign policy during the 1980s, neoconservatives subsequently encased the Reagan presidency in amber. By the late 1990s, Kristol and others began to argue that only a “neo-Reaganite”—and by extension a “neo-Trumanite”—foreign policy could successfully guide the nation into a new millennium. Emphasizing unilateral Reagan-era military interventions in Grenada, Libya, and Central America, neoconservative memories of Reagan also celebrate his “belief in the power of American values and ideals” and his willingness to use democracy as an “offensive weapon” at the end of the cold war.<sup>62</sup> In *The War Over Iraq*, Lawrence Kaplan and Kristol insisted that Reagan was no mere conservative realist focused narrowly on interests and power. Rather, he embraced a larger vision of American history, finding “no contradiction between the assertion of American power and American ideals.”<sup>63</sup>

The routine and oversimplified claim that Reagan’s administration was thoroughly or even preponderantly “neoconservative” became an important component to the ubiquitous claim that the Bush administration revived Reagan’s (or Truman’s) foreign policy principles.<sup>64</sup> Norman Podhoretz, reflecting on the similarities between George W. Bush and Reagan, found abundant room for comparison in late 2002, a year after the terrorist attacks. With the Taliban seemingly routed from power in Afghanistan and with the administration organizing its justifications for war in Iraq, Podhoretz celebrated George W. Bush for “following in Ronald Reagan’s footsteps.” As Podhoretz noted, both Reagan and Bush were dismissed by various domestic elites as inarticulate simpletons during their runs for the presidency, and both were widely viewed by bemused international audiences as reckless cowboys who “by some freak of democratic perversity landed in the White House.” In the face of such dismissals, Podhoretz observed, both

Reagan and Bush presided over a nation they sincerely believed to be inherently righteous and good. Moreover, they did so at moments of great danger and—at least for Bush—at a time when the power of the United States was unrivaled, “greater than anything recorded in human history.” Both presidents, Podhoretz concluded, had risen to the challenge. “What Communism had been to Reagan in that war,” he wrote, “terrorism was to Bush in this one; and as Reagan had been persuaded that the United States of America had a mission to hasten the demise of the one, Bush believed we had a mission to rid the world of the other.” Like many neoconservative writers, Podhoretz was especially pleased by the rhetorical commitments expressed in Bush’s landmark speeches, including his September 20, 2001 speech to Congress and the 2002 State of the Union address. Even if the fit between presidential rhetoric and policy was not always smooth, Podhoretz observed that words “exert an impact all by themselves.” Reagan’s deeds “were not always in perfect harmony with his words,” falling short of their promises and sometimes even contradicting stated policies. “But as we have discovered from former dissidents throughout the ‘evil empire’ of cursed memory, those words had a power of their own that enhanced immeasurably the weight of the missiles behind them.”<sup>65</sup>

Analogies between the Bush and Reagan Doctrines, or between Bush’s foreign policy and Truman’s, served not merely to sanctify the war but also to condemn its skeptics. As Kaplan and Kristol argued, “The Bush national security strategy bears little resemblance to strategy documents produced by the Clinton administration or, for that matter, by Bush’s father. Harry Truman or Ronald Reagan, on the other hand, would have found this robust approach to the international scene familiar.” Indeed, on their view “the Bush Doctrine signals a return to [an] earlier era, when Munich, not Vietnam, was the cautionary lesson and admonitions about the ‘arrogance of power’ . . . had little traction among U.S. policymakers.”<sup>66</sup> If Truman and Reagan were conceived as the alpha and omega of cold war foreign policy, neoconservative historical narratives included an array of villains and false prophets whose contributions to the struggle have been unwittingly detrimental, if not actively hostile, to the benevolent mission of the United States. This indictment included the usual suspects—media professionals, university professors, lawyers and the like—but extended as well to the foreign policy discourses whose errors were presumably revealed by the history of the cold war. On this view, the direction of U.S. foreign policy since 1989 had been nothing more than a “holiday from history” devoted to “commerce and globalization” among other unfulfilling projects, distracting the nation’s attention from the fact that a new existential threat had already declared war on the United States.<sup>67</sup>

Not unexpectedly, Bill Clinton’s presidency represented a malignant inversion of everything neoconservatives believe the United States should represent. Having already taken Clinton to the woodshed throughout the 1990s, neoconservative intellectuals like Krauthammer and Kristol had merely to update their earlier critiques, this time with the additional conviction that the foreign policy

“drift” of the 1990s had weakened the nation both morally and strategically, laying the foundation for the 2001 attacks. “When Mr. Clinton’s focus did wander abroad,” wrote Lawrence F. Kaplan and William Kristol, “the result was a world view that reduced a complex and dangerous world environment to a simple narrative of material progress and moral improvement.”<sup>68</sup> In *The War Over Iraq*, Kaplan and Kristol ridiculed the “wishful liberalism” of Clinton, observing that “Clintonism” looked to international institutions as the only source of legitimacy. Seeking “arms control agreements, international treaties, and an aversion to the use of force,” the Clinton years thus produced a “quixotic and legalistic” policy that accelerated rather than resolved international disorder. By refusing to act forcefully in Bosnia, by coddling China, North Korea and Iran, by refusing to confront Iraq with anything more than ineffective missile strikes, and by refusing to challenge U.N. members and allies who flouted sanctions on Iraq, Clinton revived a “strain of liberalism” that had been “kept in check during the first two decades of the Cold War by the dominance of muscular liberals like Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy, who harbored no illusions about the perils that existed beyond America’s shores.”<sup>69</sup> Charles Krauthammer similarly described the Clinton years as “a waste, eight years of sleepwalking, of the absurd pursuit of one treaty more useless than the last, while the rising threat—Islamic terrorism—was treated as a problem of law enforcement.”<sup>70</sup> Most disconcerting to writers like Krauthammer and Kristol was the suggestion—which they believed to be implicit in “Clintonism”—that America’s global power was somehow in decline, or (worse) that it should be subjected to self-restraint through multilateral institutions that could not possibly serve America’s national interest. To Kaplan and Kristol, Clinton had raised the dead, reanimating the “reflexive suspicion of American power that had plagued the Democratic Party after Vietnam.”<sup>71</sup> This unconscionably “declinist” perspective, Norman Podhoretz explained, had produced historically familiar results. As the Ayatollah Khomeini had been encouraged “by the decline of American power in the 1970s” to seize American hostages and humiliate an entire nation, “so the ineffectual policy toward terrorism” during the 1990s had convinced Osama Bin Laden that he could “strike us massively on our own soil and get away with it.”<sup>72</sup>

Dwelling selectively on the foreign-policy history of the cold war—especially its beginnings and conclusion—post-9/11 neoconservatives insisted that the 1990s replicated in miniature fashion the deeper foreign-policy problems of the entire cold war. Elsewhere, neoconservatives restaged the intra-conservative foreign policy wars of the 1970s, chastising unreconstructed realists for refusing to endorse the virtues of “democratic globalism” and for offering counsel that bore an unpleasant resemblance to “détente” and “appeasement.” Brent Scowcroft, former national security adviser to George H.W. Bush, became a symbol for this allegedly “soft-line” approach when he publicly advised against an attack on Iraq in August 2002. Explaining Saddam Hussein’s motives in the language of traditional realism, Scowcroft insisted that Saddam was a “power-hungry survivor” with “regional ambitions” that gave him few “incentives” to ally himself

with those responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. He warned that a military campaign against Iraq could prove to be an expensive distraction from the war on terrorism, producing a “large-scale, long-term military occupation,” threatening “stability” and “security” in a “vital region of the world.” Scowcroft urged the Bush administration not to make war unilaterally, to press instead for renewed inspections led by the United Nations.<sup>73</sup>

In the weeks that followed, Scowcroft earned respectful criticism in some conservative quarters while being practically hung in effigy elsewhere. *The Wall Street Journal*, which published Scowcroft’s original essay, noted in a house editorial that while his version of realism represented “a legitimate point of view” with a distinguished tradition in the Republican Party, its recent history did not “inspire confidence.” The *Journal* recalled that Scowcroft had once advised against the dissolution of the Soviet Union and in 1991 had urged President Bush to leave Saddam Hussein in power. By contrast, the administration of George W. Bush was clearly uninspired by the realist pleas for stability and had chosen instead to commit his presidency to a “Reaganite” policy of democracy promotion. Scowcroft, the *Journal* implied, was guilty merely of offering antiquated counsel.<sup>74</sup> Other conservatives were somewhat less forgiving. In *The Weekly Standard*, William Kristol described Scowcroft as one of the chief figures in an “axis of appeasement,” a group of conservatives who “hate the idea of a morally grounded foreign policy that seeks aggressively and unapologetically to advance American principles around the world.”<sup>75</sup> Michael Kelly of *The Washington Post*—who would eventually become one of the first American journalists to die in the Iraq War—derided Scowcroft and others as “true isolationists,” offering “tut-tuts” and “singing nonsense loudly.”<sup>76</sup> Rounding out the neoconservative critique, Krauthammer diagnosed Scowcroft, Democratic Senator Carl Levin, former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and others as “deterrence nostalgics” who urged the United States to pursue a policy of “containment” that was no longer necessary in a unipolar world. Emphasizing the practical costs of “realism,” Krauthammer insisted that Cold War cautions were a function of unique historical circumstances. “At least during the Cold War,” Krauthammer wrote in *The Weekly Standard*, “one could justify deterrence on the grounds that there was simply no other choice.” Because the Soviets “could not be disarmed” and because a policy of preemption “would have required a surprise American nuclear attack,” the United States accepted decades of deterrent policies that kept the nation “closer to the abyss than any event in human history.” Unlike the Soviets, however, Iraq could be disarmed swiftly. Thus, a renewed policy of deterrence would amount to an immoral refusal on the part of the United States to challenge a dangerous (and vulnerable) regime, with one consequence being the unchecked proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>77</sup>

After 2001, neoconservative criticism of the unreconstructed “realists” recapitulated many of their arguments from the 1970s, in some of the same ways that their critiques of liberal internationalism dredged up hostile memories of Carter’s “declinist” views of American power after Vietnam. Indeed, it became

an article of faith among neoconservatives that the 1970s and the 1990s bore considerable resemblance to one another as decades in which realists (Nixon, Ford and George H. W. Bush) and liberal internationalists (Carter and Clinton) advanced delusional policies that prolonged confrontations that might well have been ended, had only a less accommodating course of action been chosen. The incapacity of realists to appreciate their policy errors led to renewed accusations of “appeasement,” accompanied by reminders that their views were historically deviant. In early 2004 David Frum and Richard Perle, for instance, castigated the “soft-line ideologues”—including Scowcroft as well as former Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage—for trusting “institutions and tactics that have consistently failed in the past. . . . In their devotion to the U.N., their belief in the efficacy of international law, and their nostalgia for the alliances of the Cold War (and Gulf War I), the soft-liners cling to exploded illusions about the way the world should work.”<sup>78</sup> On this account, the “soft-liners” in the Republican ranks had become virtually indistinguishable from the liberal internationalists of yesteryear, wringing their hands over problems of “stability” and the maintenance of “alliances;” at the same time, liberal internationalists, having watched the Bush administration adopt and improve upon their own idealism, were left with no other means of opposition than to suddenly discover the antiquated language of “deterrence,” “containment,” and “prudence.”

Among others, Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol and Lawrence Kaplan argued that the ascent of neoconservative ideas merely represented the latest foreign-policy “turn,” assuming a position previously occupied by the failed “soft-line” ideologies of liberal internationalism and realism, the two “mutually reinforcing barriers to the exercise of American power.”<sup>79</sup> For Krauthammer, the Bush Doctrine marked “neoconservatism’s own transition from a position of dissidence . . . to a position of governance.”<sup>80</sup> Following the lead of Podhoretz, others writers simply argued that “neoconservatism” became indistinguishable from “conservatism” itself in the foreign policy arena. Traditional “Fortress America” conservatives like Patrick Buchanan, realists like Brent Scowcroft, or libertarians at the Cato Institute were swiftly dismissed as obstructionist relics who had not adjusted their views of the world to comport with the realities of American power in a unipolar world. With rival factions thus no longer relevant, Krauthammer believed, neoconservatism had ceased to live as a distinct phenomenon, “converging” with other forms of conservative thinking. At the same time, Krauthammer and others viewed the policies of the Bush administration as having “converged” once again with the irrepressible doctrines of Truman and Reagan, marking a glorious restoration of foreign-policy views that placed no part of the world beyond the reach of the United States and its democratic pursuits. As Podhoretz insisted, the contemporary struggle would no doubt prove difficult. “World War IV” had produced an enemy “even more elusive than the Communists,” and Americans would need “to summon at least as much perseverance as the American people of those days

did. . . . Indeed, in this area the generation of World War IV has an even more difficult row to hoe than its predecessors in World War II and World War III.” Yet as Podhoretz explained further, if the United States proved successful in the “spread of liberty,” it would “bring greater security and prosperity not only to the people of this country, and not only to the people of the greater Middle East, but also to the people of Europe and beyond, in spite of the sorry fact that so many of them do not wish to know it yet.”<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

Over the course of four decades, neoconservatives have envisioned the United States as an impossibly virtuous nation facing perpetual siege from abroad as well as from within. For neoconservatives past and present who either cut their teeth during the cold war or reached political maturity at the moment of its conclusion, the 40-year contest with the Soviet Union represents a period during which a victorious strain of American foreign policy was immediately and forcefully articulated at the close of World War II. In the years that followed, those confrontational policies wavered in the face of “realist” and “liberal internationalist” apostasy but were renewed by Ronald Reagan, who carried them aloft to their triumphant conclusion. This linear, moralistic and dramatically oversimplified narrative nonetheless plays an important part in framing what neoconservative intellectuals believe to be the appropriate conditions for winning the war against the “terror masters.” Arguing that the history of the cold war shows that Americans are capable of restoring abandoned paths to victory, neoconservatives like Michael Ledeen nevertheless urge their readers to avoid the “loss of nerve” that characterized the middle decades of the cold war. Furthermore, they claim that the “lessons” of the cold war must be revived, arguing that American leaders—having lost their focus during the first decade after the end of the cold war—must reflect once more upon the follies of realism and liberal internationalism. For contemporary neoconservatives, the conclusions are self-evident: an aggressive foreign policy that promotes the spread of America’s central values represents the only legitimate path to winning the war in terror and preserving American identity.

Amid the ubiquitous, clichéd insistence that Americans regard September 11, 2001 as a “break” from the past, a threshold beyond which nothing would ever be the same, neoconservatives have offered a somewhat different narrative about the continuities and discontinuities of recent history. The historical gloss that appears in recent neoconservative writing encourages the view that neoconservatives have been right all along, that their proposals hearken back to the muscularity of Truman and the victorious world of Reagan, that they are merely continuing the legacy of the cold war, in which the United States transformed the world in its own image. The ultimate significance of neoconservatism may lie in its efforts to generate cultural resonance, to project an appealing narrative about the exceptional obligations of the United States and the “lessons of his-

tory” in a moment of historical crisis. For many contemporary neoconservative writers, the ultimate success of the cold war clarified the historic mission of the United States, exposed those who would undermine that mission from within, and endorsed foreign policy priorities oriented around national defense and the promotion of democracy. To this way of thinking, September 11, 2001—and the wars that have followed—did not mark a departure from history but instead a grim but necessary return to familiar landscapes.

## Notes

1. Lawrence F. Kaplan and William Kristol, *The War Over Iraq* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003), vii.

2. See, for example, Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Stephen Bronner, *Blood in the Sand: Imperial Fantasies, Right-Wing Ambitions, and the Erosion of American Democracy* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005); Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Earl Shorris, “Ignoble Liars: Leo Strauss, George Bush, and the Philosophy of Mass Deception,” *Harper’s*, June 2004, 65-71; Michael Lind, “The Weird Men Behind George W. Bush’s War,” *New Statesman*, April 7, 2003, 10-13. The best historical perspectives on neoconservative thought may be found in Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) and John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). For an early account of neoconservatism, see Peter Steinfels, *The Neo-conservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America’s Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). For a devotional history of the movement, see Mark Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (New York: Madison Books, 1996). For personal histories of neoconservatism, see Irving Kristol’s *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press, 1995) and Norman Podhoretz, *Breaking Ranks: A Political Memoir* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

3. David Kirkpatrick, “War Heats Up in the Neoconservative Fold,” *New York Times*, August 22, 2004, sec. 4, p. 3.

4. In the early phase of the war on Iraq, Virginia Representative Jim Moran erroneously surmised that “the strong support of the Jewish community” (most of whom actually *opposed* the war) had led the nation into war. “The leaders of the Jewish community are influential enough that they could change the direction of where this is going, and I think they should.” Quoted in Jonah Goldberg, “Jews and the War,” *National Review Online*, March 13, 2003, <http://www.nationalreview.com/goldberg/goldberg031303.asp> (accessed September 3, 2004).

5. Michael Ledeen, *The War Against the Terror Masters* (New York: Truman Talley, 2003), xxii.

6. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Race and Gender in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

7. On Bush and World War II, see David H. Noon, “Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, the War on Terror, and the Use of Historical Memory,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 7 (Fall 2004): 339-65. Although Bush occasionally invoked the cold war from 2001-2005, his remarks in fall 2005 tended more frequently to evoke the cold war. Appearing at the National Endowment for Democracy in October 2005, Bush observed that “[t]he murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals is the great challenge of our new century. Yet, in many ways, this fight resembles the struggle against communism in the last century. Like the ideology of communism, Islamic radicalism is elitist, led by a self-appointed vanguard that presumes to speak for the Muslim masses.” Bush also observed that the “new enemy” resembled communists in their “pursuit of totalitarian aims,” their disdain for “free peoples,” and their adherence to contradictions that ultimately “doom it to failure.” See George W. Bush, “Remarks to the National Endowment for Democracy, October 6, 2005,” *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 41:40 (October 10, 2005), 1505.

8. Michael Shapiro, “Moral Geographies and the Ethics of Post-Sovereignty,” *Public Culture* 6:3 (1994): 479-502, cited in Melanie McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and US Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

9. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 5.

10. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds., *The Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire and the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).
11. Jonathan Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy," *International Security* 29 (Spring 2005): 112-56; Denise Bostdorff, "George W. Bush's Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (November 2003): 293-319; David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 154.
12. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), 286.
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31. Tod Lindberg, "Neoconservatism's Liberal Legacy," *Policy Review* 127 (October/Nov 2004): 9-10, 20-1.
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