

Neocon 101: Some basic questions answered.

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What do neoconservatives believe?

“Neocons” believe that the United States should not be ashamed to use its unrivaled power – forcefully if necessary – to promote its values around the world. Some even speak of the need to cultivate a US empire. Neoconservatives believe modern threats facing the US can no longer be reliably contained and therefore must be prevented, sometimes through preemptive military action.

Most neocons believe that the US has allowed dangers to gather by not spending enough on defense and not confronting threats aggressively enough. One such threat, they contend, was Saddam Hussein and his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. **Since the 1991 Gulf War, neocons relentlessly advocated Mr. Hussein’s ouster.**

Most neocons share unwavering support for Israel, which they see as crucial to US military sufficiency in a volatile region. They also see Israel as a key outpost of democracy in a region ruled by despots. Believing that authoritarianism and theocracy have allowed anti-Americanism to flourish in the Middle East, neocons advocate the democratic transformation of the region, starting with Iraq. They also believe the US is unnecessarily hampered by multilateral institutions, which they do not trust to effectively neutralize threats to global security.

What are the roots of neoconservative beliefs?

The original neocons were a small group of mostly Jewish liberal intellectuals who, in the 1960s and 70s, grew disenchanted with what they saw as the American left’s social excesses and reluctance to spend adequately on defense. Many of these neocons worked in the 1970s for Democratic Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson, a staunch anti-communist. **By the 1980s, most neocons had become Republicans, finding in President Ronald Reagan an avenue** for their aggressive approach of confronting the Soviet Union with bold rhetoric and steep hikes in military spending. After the Soviet Union’s fall, the neocons decried what they saw as American complacency. **In the 1990s, they warned** of the dangers of reducing both America’s defense spending and its role in the world.

Unlike their predecessors, most younger neocons never experienced being left of center. They’ve always been “Reagan” Republicans.

What is the difference between a neoconservative and a conservative?

Liberals first applied the “neo” prefix to their comrades who broke ranks to become more conservative in the 1960s and 70s. The defectors remained more liberal on some domestic policy issues. But foreign policy stands have always defined neoconservatism. Where other conservatives favored détente and containment of the Soviet Union, neocons pushed direct confrontation, which became their *raison d’être* during the 1970s and 80s.

Today, both conservatives and neocons favor a robust US military. But **most conservatives express greater reservations about military intervention and so-called nation building. Neocons share no such reluctance.** The post 9/11-campaigns against regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate that the neocons are **not afraid to force regime change** and reshape hostile states in the American image. Neocons believe the US must do to whatever it takes to end state-supported terrorism. For most, this means an aggressive push for democracy in the Middle East. Even after 9/11, many other conservatives, particularly in the isolationist wing, view this as an overzealous dream with nightmarish consequences.

How have neoconservatives influenced US foreign policy?

Finding a kindred spirit in President Reagan, neocons greatly influenced US foreign policy in the 1980s.

But in the 1990s, neocon cries failed to spur much action. Outside of Reaganite think tanks and Israel's right-wing Likud Party, **their calls for regime change in Iraq were deemed provocative and extremist by the political mainstream.** With a few notable exceptions, such as President Bill Clinton's decision to launch isolated strikes at suspected terrorist targets in Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998, their talk of preemptive military action was largely dismissed as overkill.

Despite being muted by a president who called for restraint and humility in foreign affairs, neocons used the 1990s to hone their message and craft their blueprint for American power. Their forward thinking and long-time ties to Republican circles helped many neocons win key posts in the Bush administration.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 moved much of the Bush administration closer than ever to neoconservative foreign policy. Only days after 9/11, one of the top neoconservative think tanks in Washington, the Project for a New American Century, wrote an open letter to President Bush calling for regime change in Iraq. Before long, Bush, who campaigned in 2000 against nation building and excessive military intervention overseas, also began calling for regime change in Iraq. In a highly significant nod to neocon influence, Bush chose the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) as the venue for a key February 2003 speech in which he declared that a US victory in Iraq "could begin a new stage for Middle Eastern peace." AEI – the **de facto headquarters for neoconservative policy** – had been calling for democratization of the Arab world for more than a decade.

What does a neoconservative dream world look like?

Neocons envision a world in which the United States is the unchallenged superpower, immune to threats. They believe that the US has a responsibility to act as a "benevolent global hegemon." In this capacity, the US would maintain an empire of sorts by helping to create democratic, economically liberal governments in place of "failed states" or oppressive regimes they deem threatening to the US or its interests. In the neocon dream world the entire Middle East would be democratized in the belief that this would eliminate a prime breeding ground for terrorists. This approach, they claim, is not only best for the US; it is best for the world. In their view, the world can only achieve peace through strong US leadership backed with credible force, not weak treaties to be disrespected by tyrants.

Any regime that is outwardly hostile to the US and could pose a threat would be confronted aggressively, not "appeased" or merely contained. The US military would be reconfigured around the world to allow for greater flexibility and quicker deployment to hot spots in the Middle East, as well as Central and Southeast Asia. The US would spend more on defense, particularly for high-tech, precision weaponry that could be used in preemptive strikes. It would work through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations when possible, but must never be constrained from acting in its best interests whenever necessary.

Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy

William Kristol and Robert Kagan (*Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996)

THE TEPID CONSENSUS

IN FOREIGN policy, conservatives are adrift. They disdain the Wilsonian multilateralism of the Clinton administration; they are tempted by, but so far have resisted, the neoisolationism of Patrick

Buchanan; for now, they lean uncertainly on some version of the conservative “realism” of Henry Kissinger and his disciples. Thus, in this year’s election campaign, they speak vaguely of replacing Clinton’s vacillation with a steady, “adult” foreign policy under Robert Dole. But Clinton has not vacillated that much recently, and Dole was reduced a few weeks ago to asserting, in what was heralded as a major address, that there really are differences in foreign policy between him and the president, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. But the fault is not Dole’s; in truth, there has been little attempt to set forth the outlines of a conservative view of the world and America’s proper role in it.

Is such an attempt necessary, or even possible? For the past few years, Americans, from the foreign policy big-thinker to the man on the street, have assumed it is not. Rather, this is supposed to be a time for unshouldering the vast responsibilities the United States acquired at the end of the Second World War and for concentrating its energies at home. The collapse of the Soviet Empire has made possible a “return to normalcy” in American foreign and defense policy, allowing the adoption of a more limited definition of the national interest, with a commensurate reduction in overseas involvement and defense spending.

Republicans and conservatives at first tended to be wary of this new post-Cold War consensus. But they joined it rapidly after 1992, in the wake of the defeat of the quintessential “foreign policy president” by a candidate who promised to focus “like a laser” on the domestic economy. Now conservatives tailor their foreign and defense policies to fit the presumed new political reality: an American public that is indifferent, if not hostile, to foreign policy and commitments abroad, more interested in balancing the budget than in leading the world, and more intent on cashing in the “peace dividend” than on spending to deter and fight future wars. Most conservatives have chosen to acquiesce in rather than challenge this public mood.

In a way, the current situation is reminiscent of the mid-1970s. But Ronald Reagan mounted a bold challenge to the tepid consensus of that era – a consensus that favored accommodation to and coexistence with the Soviet Union, accepted the inevitability of America’s declining power, and considered any change in the status quo either too frightening or too expensive. Proposing a controversial vision of ideological and strategic victory over the forces of international communism, Reagan called for an end to complacency in the face of the Soviet threat, large increases in defense spending, resistance to communist advances in the Third World, and greater moral clarity and purpose in U.S. foreign policy. He championed American exceptionalism when it was deeply unfashionable. Perhaps most significant, he refused to accept the limits on American power imposed by the domestic political realities that others assumed were fixed.

Many smart people regarded Reagan with scorn or alarm. Liberal Democrats still reeling from the Vietnam War were, of course, appalled by his zealotry. So were many of Reagan’s fellow Republicans, especially the Kissingerian realists then dominant in foreign affairs. Reagan declared war on his own party, took on Gerald Ford for the 1976 Republican presidential nomination (primarily over issues of foreign policy), and trained his guns on Kissinger, whose stewardship of U.S. foreign policy, he charged, had “coincided precisely with the loss of U.S. military supremacy.” Although Reagan lost the battle to unseat Ford, he won the fight at the Republican convention for a platform plank on “morality in foreign policy.” Ultimately, he succeeded in transforming the Republican party, the conservative movement in America, and, after his election to the presidency in 1980, the country and the world.

BENEVOLENT HEGEMONY

TWENTY YEARS later, it is time once again to challenge an indifferent America and a confused American conservatism. Today’s lukewarm consensus about America’s reduced role in a post-Cold War world is wrong. Conservatives should not accede to it; it is bad for the country and, incidentally,

bad for conservatism. Conservatives will not be able to govern America over the long term if they fail to offer a more elevated vision of America's international role.

What should that role be? Benevolent global hegemony. Having defeated the "evil empire," the United States enjoys strategic and ideological predominance. The first objective of U.S. foreign policy should be to preserve and enhance that predominance by strengthening America's security, supporting its friends, advancing its interests, and standing up for its principles around the world.

The aspiration to benevolent hegemony might strike some as either hubristic or morally suspect. But a hegemon is nothing more or less than a leader with preponderant influence and authority over all others in its domain. That is America's position in the world today. The leaders of Russia and China understand this. At their April summit meeting, Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin joined in denouncing "hegemonism" in the post-Cold War world. They meant this as a complaint about the United States. It should be taken as a compliment and a guide to action.

Consider the events of just the past six months, a period that few observers would consider remarkable for its drama on the world stage. In East Asia, the carrier task forces of the U.S. Seventh Fleet helped deter Chinese aggression against democratic Taiwan, and the 35,000 American troops stationed in South Korea helped deter a possible invasion by the rulers in Pyongyang. In Europe, the United States sent 20,000 ground troops to implement a peace agreement in the former Yugoslavia, maintained 100,000 in Western Europe as a symbolic commitment to European stability and security, and intervened diplomatically to prevent the escalation of a conflict between Greece and Turkey. In the Middle East, the United States maintained the deployment of thousands of soldiers and a strong naval presence in the Persian Gulf region to deter possible aggression by Saddam Hussein's Iraq or the Islamic fundamentalist regime in Iran, and it mediated in the conflict between Israel and Syria in Lebanon. In the Western Hemisphere, the United States completed the withdrawal of 15,000 soldiers after restoring a semblance of democratic government in Haiti and, almost without public notice, prevented a military coup in Paraguay. In Africa, a U.S. expeditionary force rescued Americans and others trapped in the Liberian civil conflict.

These were just the most visible American actions of the past six months, and just those of a military or diplomatic nature. During the same period, the United States made a thousand decisions in international economic forums, both as a government and as an amalgam of large corporations and individual entrepreneurs, that shaped the lives and fortunes of billions around the globe. America influenced both the external and internal behavior of other countries through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Through the United Nations, it maintained sanctions on rogue states such as Libya, Iran, and Iraq. Through aid programs, the United States tried to shore up friendly democratic regimes in developing nations. The enormous web of the global economic system, with the United States at the center, combined with the pervasive influence of American ideas and culture, allowed Americans to wield influence in many other ways of which they were entirely unconscious. The simple truth of this era was stated last year by a Serb leader trying to explain Slobodan Milosevic's decision to finally seek rapprochement with Washington. "As a pragmatist," the Serbian politician said, "Milosevic knows that all satellites of the United States are in a better position than those that are not satellites."

And America's allies are in a better position than those who are not its allies. Most of the world's major powers welcome U.S. global involvement and prefer America's benevolent hegemony to the alternatives. Instead of having to compete for dominant global influence with many other powers, therefore, the United States finds both the Europeans and the Japanese -- after the United States, the two most powerful forces in the world -- supportive of its world leadership role. Those who anticipated the dissolution of these alliances once the common threat of the Soviet Union disappeared have been proved wrong. The principal concern of America's allies these days is not that it will be too dominant but that it will withdraw.

Somehow most Americans have failed to notice that they have never had it so good. They have never lived in a world more conducive to their fundamental interests in a liberal international order, the spread of freedom and democratic governance, an international economic system of free-market capitalism and free trade, and the security of Americans not only to live within their own borders but to travel and do business safely and without encumbrance almost anywhere in the world. Americans have taken these remarkable benefits of the post-Cold War era for granted, partly because it has all seemed so easy. Despite misguided warnings of imperial overstretch, the United States has so far exercised its hegemony without any noticeable strain, and it has done so despite the fact that Americans appear to be in a more insular mood than at any time since before the Second World War. The events of the last six months have excited no particular interest among Americans and, indeed, seem to have been regarded with the same routine indifference as breathing and eating.

And that is the problem. The most difficult thing to preserve is that which does not appear to need preserving. The dominant strategic and ideological position the United States now enjoys is the product of foreign policies and defense strategies that are no longer being pursued. Americans have come to take the fruits of their hegemonic power for granted. During the Cold War, the strategies of deterrence and containment worked so well in checking the ambitions of America's adversaries that many American liberals denied that our adversaries had ambitions or even, for that matter, that America had adversaries. Today the lack of a visible threat to U.S. vital interests or to world peace has tempted Americans to absentmindedly dismantle the material and spiritual foundations on which their national well-being has been based. They do not notice that potential challengers are deterred before even contemplating confrontation by their overwhelming power and influence.

The ubiquitous post-Cold War question -- where is the threat? -- is thus misconceived. In a world in which peace and American security depend on American power and the will to use it, the main threat the United States faces now and in the future is its own weakness. American hegemony is the only reliable defense against a breakdown of peace and international order. The appropriate goal of American foreign policy, therefore, is to preserve that hegemony as far into the future as possible. To achieve this goal, the United States needs a neo-Reaganite foreign policy of military supremacy and moral confidence.

THREE IMPERATIVES

SETTING FORTH the broad outlines of such a foreign policy is more important for the moment than deciding the best way to handle all the individual issues that have preoccupied U.S. policymakers and analysts. Whether or not the United States continues to grant most-favored-nation status to China is less important than whether it has an overall strategy for containing, influencing, and ultimately seeking to change the regime in Beijing. Whether NATO expands this year or five years from now is less important than whether NATO remains strong, active, cohesive, and under decisive American leadership. Whether America builds 20 B-2 bombers or 3 is less important than giving its military planners enough money to make intelligent choices that are driven more by strategic than by budget requirements. But it is clear that a neo-Reaganite foreign policy would have several implications.

The defense budget. Republicans declared victory last year when they added \$ 7 billion to President Clinton's defense budget. But the hard truth is that Washington -- now spending about \$ 260 billion per year on defense -- probably needs to spend about \$ 60-\$ 80 billion more each year in order to preserve America's role as global hegemon. The United States currently devotes about three percent of its GNP to defense. U.S. defense planners, who must make guesses about a future that is impossible to predict with confidence, are increasingly being forced to place all their chips on one guess or another. They are being asked to predict whether the future is likely to bring more conflicts like the Gulf War or peacekeeping operations like those in Bosnia and Haiti, or more great-power confrontations similar to the Cold War. The best answer to these questions is: who can tell? The odds are that in the coming decades America may face all these kinds of conflict, as well as some that have yet to be imagined.

For the past few years, American military supremacy has been living off a legacy, specifically, the legacy of Ronald Reagan. As former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell once noted, it was Reagan's military, built in the 1980s to deter the Soviet Union, that won the war against Iraq. No serious analyst of American military capabilities today doubts that the defense budget has been cut much too far to meet America's responsibilities to itself and to world peace. The United States may no longer have the wherewithal to defend against threats to America's vital interests in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, much less to extend America's current global preeminence well into the future.

The current readiness of U.S. forces is in decline, but so is their ability to maintain an advantage in high-technology weapons over the coming decades. In the search for some way to meet extensive strategic requirements with inadequate resources, defense planners have engaged in strategic fratricide. Those who favor current readiness have been pitted against those who favor high-tech research and development; those who favor maintaining American forward deployment at bases around the world have been arrayed against those who insist that for the sake of economizing the job be accomplished at long range without bases. The military is forced to choose between army combat divisions and the next generation of bombers, between lift capacities and force projection, between short-range and long-range deterrence. Constructing a military force appropriate to a nation's commitments and its resources is never an easy task, and there are always limits that compel difficult choices. But today's limits are far too severe; the choices they compel are too dramatic; and because military strategy and planning are far from exact sciences, the United States is dangerously cutting its margin for error.

The defense budget crisis is now at hand. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General John Shalikashvili has complained that the weapons procurement budget has been reduced to perilously low levels, and he has understated the problem. Since 1985, the research and development budget has been cut by 57 percent; the procurement budget has been cut 71 percent. Both the Clinton administration and the Republican Congress have achieved budget savings over the next few years by pushing necessary procurement decisions into the next century. The Clinton administration's so-called "Bottom-Up Review" of U.S. defense strategy has been rightly dismissed by Democrats like Senate Armed Services Committee member Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) as "already inadequate to the present and certainly to the future." Both the General Accounting Office and the Congressional Budget Office have projected a shortfall of \$ 50 billion to \$ 100 billion over the next five years in funding just for existing force levels and procurement plans.

These shortfalls do not even take into account the development of new weapons, like a missile defense system capable of protecting American territory against missiles launched from rogue states such as North Korea or shielding, say, Los Angeles from nuclear intimidation by the Chinese during the next crisis in the Taiwan Strait. Deployment of such a system could cost more than \$ 10 billion a year.

Add together the needed increases in the procurement budget called for by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the justifiable increases in funding for existing forces to make up the shortfalls identified by the GAO and the CBO, and it becomes obvious that an increase in defense spending by \$ 60 billion to \$ 80 billion is not a radical proposal. It is simply what the United States will require to keep the peace and defend its interests over the coming decades. If this number sounds like a budget-buster, it should not. Today, defense spending is less than 20 percent of the total federal budget. In 1962, before the Vietnam War, defense spending ran at almost 50 percent of the overall budget. In 1978, before the Carter-Reagan defense buildup, it was about 23 percent. Increases of the size required to pursue a neo-Reaganite foreign policy today would require returning to about that level of defense spending -- still less than one-quarter of the federal budget.

These days, some critics complain about the fact that the United States spends more on defense than the next six major powers combined. But the enormous disparity between U.S. military strength and

that of any potential challenger is a good thing for America and the world. After all, America's world role is entirely different from that of the other powers. The more Washington is able to make clear that it is futile to compete with American power, either in size of forces or in technological capabilities, the less chance there is that countries like China or Iran will entertain ambitions of upsetting the present world order. And that means the United States will be able to save money in the long run, for it is much cheaper to deter a war than to fight one. Americans should be glad that their defense capabilities are as great as the next six powers combined. Indeed, they may even want to enshrine this disparity in U.S. defense strategy. Great Britain in the late 19th century maintained a "two-power standard" for its navy, insisting that at all times the British navy should be as large as the next two naval powers combined, whoever they might be. Perhaps the United States should inaugurate such a two- (or three-, or four-) power standard of its own, which would preserve its military supremacy regardless of the near-term global threats.

Citizen involvement. A gap is growing, meanwhile, between America's professional military, uncomfortable with some of the missions that the new American role requires, and a civilian population increasingly unaware of or indifferent to the importance of its military's efforts abroad. U.S. military leaders harbor justifiable suspicions that while they serve as a kind of foreign legion, doing the hard work of American-style "empire management," American civilians at home, preoccupied with the distribution of tax breaks and government benefits, will not come to their support when the going gets tough. Weak political leadership and a poor job of educating the citizenry to the responsibilities of global hegemony have created an increasingly distinct and alienated military culture. Ask any mechanic or mess boy on an aircraft carrier why he is patrolling the oceans, and he can give a more sophisticated explanation of power projection than 99 percent of American college graduates. It is foolish to imagine that the United States can lead the world effectively while the overwhelming majority of the population neither understands nor is involved, in any real way, with its international mission.

The president and other political leaders can take steps to close the growing separation of civilian and military cultures in our society. They can remind civilians of the sacrifices being made by U.S. forces overseas and explain what those sacrifices are for. A clear statement of America's global mission can help the public understand why U.S. troops are deployed overseas and can help reassure military leaders of public support in difficult circumstances. It could also lay the groundwork for reasserting more comprehensive civilian control over the military.

There could be further efforts to involve more citizens in military service. Perhaps the United States has reached the point where a return to the draft is not feasible because of the high degree of professionalization of the military services. But there are other ways to lower the barriers between civilian and military life. Expanded forms of reserve service could give many more Americans experience of the military and an appreciation of military virtues. Conservatives preach that citizenship is not only about rights but also about responsibilities. There is no more profound responsibility than the defense of the nation and its principles.

Moral clarity. Finally, American foreign policy should be informed with a clear moral purpose, based on the understanding that its moral goals and its fundamental national interests are almost always in harmony. The United States achieved its present position of strength not by practicing a foreign policy of live and let live, nor by passively waiting for threats to arise, but by actively promoting American principles of governance abroad -- democracy, free markets, respect for liberty. During the Reagan years, the United States pressed for changes in right-wing and left-wing dictatorships alike, among both friends and foes -- in the Philippines, South Korea, Eastern Europe and even the Soviet Union. The purpose was not Wilsonian idealistic whimsy. The policy of putting pressure on authoritarian and totalitarian regimes had practical aims and, in the end, delivered strategic benefits. Support for American principles around the world can be sustained only by the continuing exertion of American influence. Some of that influence comes from the aid provided to friendly regimes that are trying to

carry out democratic and free market reforms. However strong the case for reform of foreign aid programs, such programs deserve to be maintained as a useful way of exerting American influence abroad. And sometimes that means not just supporting U.S. friends and gently pressuring other nations but actively pursuing policies in Iran, Cuba, or China, for instance -- ultimately intended to bring about a change of regime. In any case, the United States should not blindly "do business" with every nation, no matter its regime. Armand Hammerism should not be a tenet of conservative foreign policy.

FROM NSC-68 TO 1996

THIS SWEEPING, neo-Reaganite foreign policy agenda may seem ambitious for these tepid times. Politicians in both parties will protest that the American people will not support the burdens of such a policy. There are two answers to this criticism.

First, it is already clear that, on the present course, Washington will find it increasingly impossible to fulfill even the less ambitious foreign policies of the realists, including the defense of so-called "vital" interests in Europe and Asia. Without a broad, sustaining foreign policy vision, the American people will be inclined to withdraw from the world and will lose sight of their abiding interest in vigorous world leadership. Without a sense of mission, they will seek deeper and deeper cuts in the defense and foreign affairs budgets and gradually decimate the tools of U.S. hegemony.

Consider what has happened in only the past few years. Ronald Reagan's exceptionalist appeal did not survive the presidency of George Bush, where self-proclaimed pragmatists like James Baker found it easier to justify the Gulf War to the American people in terms of "jobs" than as a defense of a world order shaped to suit American interests and principles. Then, having discarded the overarching Reaganite vision that had sustained a globally active foreign policy through the last decade of the Cold War, the Bush administration in 1992 saw its own prodigious foreign policy successes swept into the dustbin by Clinton political adviser James Carville's campaign logic: "It's the economy, stupid." By the time conservatives took their seats as the congressional opposition in 1993, they had abandoned not only Reaganism but to some degree foreign policy itself.

Now the common wisdom holds that Dole's solid victory over Buchanan in the primaries constituted a triumphant reassertion of conservative internationalism over neoisolationism. But the common wisdom may prove wrong. On the stump during the Republican primaries this year, what little passion and energy there was on foreign policy issues came from Buchanan and his followers. Over the past four years Buchanan's fiery "America First" rhetoric has filled the vacuum among conservatives created by the abandonment of Reagan's very different kind of patriotic mission. It is now an open question how long the beleaguered conservative realists will be able to resist the combined assault of Buchanan's "isolationism of the heart" and the Republican budget hawks on Capitol Hill.

History also shows, however, that the American people can be summoned to meet the challenges of global leadership if statesmen make the case loudly, cogently, and persistently. As troubles arise and the need to act becomes clear, those who have laid the foundation for a necessary shift in policy have a chance to lead Americans onto a new course. In 1950, Paul Nitze and other Truman administration officials drafted the famous planning document NSC-68, a call for an all-out effort to meet the Soviet challenge that included a full-scale ideological confrontation and massive increases in defense spending. At first, their proposals languished. President Truman, worried about angering a hostile, budget-conscious Congress and an American public which was enjoying an era of peace and prosperity, for months refused to approve the defense spending proposals. It took the North Korean invasion of South Korea to allow the administration to rally support for the prescriptions of NSC-68. Before the Korean War, American politicians were fighting over whether the defense budget ought to be \$ 15 billion or \$ 16 billion; most believed more defense spending would bankrupt the nation. The next year, the defense budget was over \$ 50 billion.

A similar sequence of events unfolded in the 1970s. When Reagan and the “Scoop” Jackson Democrats began sounding the alarm about the Soviet danger, the American public was not ready to listen. Then came the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the seizure of American hostages in Iran. By the time Jimmy Carter professed to have learned more about the Soviet Union than he had ever known before, Reagan and his fellow conservatives in both parties had laid the intellectual foundation for the military buildup of the 1980s.

AN ELEVATED PATRIOTISM

IN THEORY, either party could lay the groundwork for a neo-Reaganite foreign policy over the next decade. The Democrats, after all, led the nation to assume its new global responsibilities in the late 1940s and early 1950s under President Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson. It is unlikely, however, that they are prepared to pursue such a course today. Republicans may have lost their way in the last few years, but the Democrats are still recovering from their post-Vietnam trauma of two decades ago. President Clinton has proved a better manager of foreign policy than many expected, but he has not been up to the larger task of preparing and inspiring the nation to embrace the role of global leadership. He, too, has tailored his internationalist activism to fit the constraints of a popular mood that White House pollsters believe is disinclined to sacrifice blood and treasure in the name of overseas commitments. His Pentagon officials talk more about exit strategies than about national objectives. His administration has promised global leadership on the cheap, refusing to seek the levels of defense spending needed to meet the broad goals it claims to want to achieve in the world. Even Clinton’s boldest overseas adventures, in Bosnia and Haiti, have come only after strenuous and prolonged efforts to avoid intervention.

Republicans are surely the genuine heirs to the Reagan tradition. The 1994 election is often said to have represented one last victory for Ronald Reagan’s domestic agenda. But Reagan’s earlier successes rested as much on foreign as on domestic policy. Over the long term, victory for American conservatives depends on recapturing the spirit of Reagan’s foreign policy as well. Indeed, American conservatism cannot govern by domestic policy alone. In the 1990s conservatives have built their agenda on two pillars of Reaganism: relimiting government to curtail the most intrusive and counterproductive aspects of the modern welfare state, and reversing the widespread collapse of morals and standards in American society. But it is hard to imagine conservatives achieving a lasting political realignment in this country without the third pillar: a coherent set of foreign policy principles that at least bear some resemblance to those propounded by Reagan. The remoralization of America at home ultimately requires the remoralization of American foreign policy. For both follow from Americans’ belief that the principles of the Declaration of Independence are not merely the choices of a particular culture but are universal, enduring, “self-evident” truths. That has been, after all, the main point of the conservatives’ war against a relativistic multiculturalism. For conservatives to preach the importance of upholding the core elements of the Western tradition at home, but to profess indifference to the fate of American principles abroad, is an inconsistency that cannot help but gnaw at the heart of conservatism.

Conservatives these days succumb easily to the charming old metaphor of the United States as a “city on a hill.” They hark back, as George Kennan did in these pages not long ago, to the admonition of John Quincy Adams that America ought not go “abroad in search of monsters to destroy.” But why not? The alternative is to leave monsters on the loose, ravaging and pillaging to their hearts’ content, as Americans stand by and watch. What may have been wise counsel in 1823, when America was a small, isolated power in a world of European giants, is no longer so, when America is the giant. Because America has the capacity to contain or destroy many of the world’s monsters, most of which can be found without much searching, and because the responsibility for the peace and security of the international order rests so heavily on America’s shoulders, a policy of sitting atop a hill and leading by example becomes in practice a policy of cowardice and dishonor.

And more is at stake than honor. Without a broader, more enlightened understanding of America's interests, conservatism will too easily degenerate into the pinched nationalism of Buchanan's "America First," where the appeal to narrow stir-interest masks a deeper form of stir-loathing. A true "conservatism of the heart" ought to emphasize both personal and national responsibility, relish the opportunity for national engagement, embrace the possibility of national greatness, and restore a sense of the heroic, which has been sorely lacking in American foreign policy -- and American conservatism in recent years. George Kennan was right 50 years ago in his famous "X" article: the American people ought to feel a "certain gratitude to a Providence, which by providing [them] with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear." This is as true today -- if less obviously so -- as it was at the beginning of the Cold War.

A neo-Reaganite foreign policy would be good for conservatives, good for America, and good for the world. It is worth recalling that the most successful Republican presidents of this century, Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, both inspired Americans to assume cheerfully the new international responsibilities that went with increased power and influence. Both celebrated American exceptionalism. Both made Americans proud of their leading role in world affairs. Deprived of the support of an elevated patriotism, bereft of the ability to appeal to national honor, conservatives will ultimately fail in their effort to govern America. And Americans will fail in their responsibility to lead

After Neoconservatism

Francis Fukuyama (*The New York Times*, February 19, 2006)

As we approach the third anniversary of the onset of the Iraq war, it seems very unlikely that history will judge either the intervention itself or the ideas animating it kindly. By invading Iraq, the Bush administration created a self-fulfilling prophecy: Iraq has now replaced Afghanistan as a magnet, a training ground and an operational base for jihadist terrorists, with plenty of American targets to shoot at. The United States still has a chance of creating a Shi'ite-dominated democratic Iraq, but the new government will be very weak for years to come; the resulting power vacuum will invite outside influence from all of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran. There are clear benefits to the Iraqi people from the removal of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, and perhaps some positive spillover effects in Lebanon and Syria. But it is very hard to see how these developments in themselves justify the blood and treasure that the United States has spent on the project to this point.

The so-called Bush Doctrine that set the framework for the administration's first term is now in shambles. The doctrine (elaborated, among other places, in the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States) argued that, in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, America would have to launch periodic preventive wars to defend itself against rogue states and terrorists with weapons of mass destruction; that it would do this alone, if necessary; and that it would work to democratize the greater Middle East as a long-term solution to the terrorist problem. But successful pre-emption depends on the ability to predict the future accurately and on good intelligence, which was not forthcoming, while America's perceived unilateralism has isolated it as never before. It is not surprising that in its second term, the administration has been distancing itself from these policies and is in the process of rewriting the National Security Strategy document.

But it is the idealistic effort to use American power to promote democracy and human rights abroad that may suffer the greatest setback. Perceived failure in Iraq has restored the authority of foreign policy "realists" in the tradition of Henry Kissinger. Already there is a host of books and articles decrying America's naïve Wilsonianism and attacking the notion of trying to democratize the world. The administration's second-term efforts to push for greater Middle Eastern democracy, introduced with the soaring rhetoric of Bush's second Inaugural Address, have borne very problematic fruits. The

Islamist Muslim Brotherhood made a strong showing in Egypt's parliamentary elections in November and December. While the holding of elections in Iraq this past December was an achievement in itself, the vote led to the ascendance of a Shiite bloc with close ties to Iran (following on the election of the conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president of Iran in June). But the clincher was the decisive Hamas victory in the Palestinian election last month, which brought to power a movement overtly dedicated to the destruction of Israel. In his second inaugural, Bush said that "America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one," but the charge will be made with increasing frequency that the Bush administration made a big mistake when it stirred the pot, and that the United States would have done better to stick by its traditional authoritarian friends in the Middle East. Indeed, the effort to promote democracy around the world has been attacked as an illegitimate activity both by people on the left like Jeffrey Sachs and by traditional conservatives like Pat Buchanan.

The reaction against democracy promotion and an activist foreign policy may not end there. Those whom Walter Russell Mead labels Jacksonian conservatives — red-state Americans whose sons and daughters are fighting and dying in the Middle East — supported the Iraq war because they believed that their children were fighting to defend the United States against nuclear terrorism, not to promote democracy. They don't want to abandon the president in the middle of a vicious war, but down the road the perceived failure of the Iraq intervention may push them to favor a more isolationist foreign policy, which is a more natural political position for them. A recent Pew poll indicates a swing in public opinion toward isolationism; the percentage of Americans saying that the United States "should mind its own business" has never been higher since the end of the Vietnam War.

More than any other group, it was the neoconservatives both inside and outside the Bush administration who pushed for democratizing Iraq and the broader Middle East. They are widely credited (or blamed) for being the decisive voices promoting regime change in Iraq, and yet it is their idealistic agenda that in the coming months and years will be the most directly threatened. Were the United States to retreat from the world stage, following a drawdown in Iraq, it would in my view be a huge tragedy, because American power and influence have been critical to the maintenance of an open and increasingly democratic order around the world. The problem with neoconservatism's agenda lies not in its ends, which are as American as apple pie, but rather in the overmilitarized means by which it has sought to accomplish them. What American foreign policy needs is not a return to a narrow and cynical realism, but rather the formulation of a "realistic Wilsonianism" that better matches means to ends.

The Neoconservative Legacy

How did the neoconservatives end up overreaching to such an extent that they risk undermining their own goals? The Bush administration's first-term foreign policy did not flow ineluctably from the views of earlier generations of people who considered themselves neoconservatives, since those views were themselves complex and subject to differing interpretations. Four common principles or threads ran through much of this thought up through the end of the cold war: a concern with democracy, human rights and, more generally, the internal politics of states; a belief that American power can be used for moral purposes; a skepticism about the ability of international law and institutions to solve serious security problems; and finally, a view that ambitious social engineering often leads to unexpected consequences and thereby undermines its own ends.

The problem was that two of these principles were in potential collision. The skeptical stance toward ambitious social engineering — which in earlier years had been applied mostly to domestic policies like affirmative action, busing and welfare — suggested a cautious approach toward remaking the world and an awareness that ambitious initiatives always have unanticipated consequences. The belief in the potential moral uses of American power, on the other hand, implied that American activism could reshape the structure of global politics. By the time of the Iraq war, the belief in the transformational uses of power had prevailed over the doubts about social engineering.

In retrospect, things did not have to develop this way. The roots of neoconservatism lie in a remarkable group of largely Jewish intellectuals who attended City College of New York (C.C.N.Y.) in the mid- to late 1930's and early 1940's, a group that included Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Irving Howe, Nathan Glazer and, a bit later, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The story of this group has been told in a number of places, most notably in a documentary film by Joseph Dorman called "Arguing the World." The most important inheritance from the C.C.N.Y. group was an idealistic belief in social progress and the universality of rights, coupled with intense anti-Communism.

It is not an accident that many in the C.C.N.Y. group started out as Trotskyites. Leon Trotsky was, of course, himself a Communist, but his supporters came to understand better than most people the utter cynicism and brutality of the Stalinist regime. The anti-Communist left, in contrast to the traditional American right, sympathized with the social and economic aims of Communism, but in the course of the 1930's and 1940's came to realize that "real existing socialism" had become a monstrosity of unintended consequences that completely undermined the idealistic goals it espoused. While not all of the C.C.N.Y. thinkers became neoconservatives, the danger of good intentions carried to extremes was a theme that would underlie the life work of many members of this group.

If there was a single overarching theme to the domestic social policy critiques issued by those who wrote for the neoconservative journal *The Public Interest*, founded by Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Bell in 1965, it was the limits of social engineering. Writers like Glazer, Moynihan and, later, Glenn Loury argued that ambitious efforts to seek social justice often left societies worse off than before because they either required massive state intervention that disrupted pre-existing social relations (for example, forced busing) or else produced unanticipated consequences (like an increase in single-parent families as a result of welfare). A major theme running through James Q. Wilson's extensive writings on crime was the idea that you could not lower crime rates by trying to solve deep underlying problems like poverty and racism; effective policies needed to focus on shorter-term measures that went after symptoms of social distress (like subway graffiti or panhandling) rather than root causes.

How, then, did a group with such a pedigree come to decide that the "root cause" of terrorism lay in the Middle East's lack of democracy, that the United States had both the wisdom and the ability to fix this problem and that democracy would come quickly and painlessly to Iraq? Neoconservatives would not have taken this turn but for the peculiar way that the cold war ended.

Ronald Reagan was ridiculed by sophisticated people on the American left and in Europe for labeling the Soviet Union and its allies an "evil empire" and for challenging Mikhail Gorbachev not just to reform his system but also to "tear down this wall." His assistant secretary of defense for international security policy, Richard Perle, was denounced as the "prince of darkness" for this uncompromising, hard-line position; his proposal for a double-zero in the intermediate-range nuclear arms negotiations (that is, the complete elimination of medium-range missiles) was attacked as hopelessly out of touch by the bien-pensant centrist foreign-policy experts at places like the Council on Foreign Relations and the State Department. That community felt that the Reaganites were dangerously utopian in their hopes for actually winning, as opposed to managing, the cold war.

And yet total victory in the cold war is exactly what happened in 1989-91. Gorbachev accepted not only the double zero but also deep cuts in conventional forces, and then failed to stop the Polish, Hungarian and East German defections from the empire. Communism collapsed within a couple of years because of its internal moral weaknesses and contradictions, and with regime change in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact threat to the West evaporated.

The way the cold war ended shaped the thinking of supporters of the Iraq war, including younger neoconservatives like William Kristol and Robert Kagan, in two ways. First, it seems to have created an expectation that all totalitarian regimes were hollow at the core and would crumble with a small

push from outside. The model for this was Romania under the Ceausescus: once the wicked witch was dead, the munchkins would rise up and start singing joyously about their liberation. As Kristol and Kagan put it in their 2000 book "Present Dangers": "To many the idea of America using its power to promote changes of regime in nations ruled by dictators rings of utopianism. But in fact, it is eminently realistic. There is something perverse in declaring the impossibility of promoting democratic change abroad in light of the record of the past three decades."

This overoptimism about postwar transitions to democracy helps explain the Bush administration's incomprehensible failure to plan adequately for the insurgency that subsequently emerged in Iraq. The war's supporters seemed to think that democracy was a kind of default condition to which societies reverted once the heavy lifting of coercive regime change occurred, rather than a long-term process of institution-building and reform. While they now assert that they knew all along that the democratic transformation of Iraq would be long and hard, they were clearly taken by surprise. According to George Packer's recent book on Iraq, "The Assassins' Gate," the Pentagon planned a drawdown of American forces to some 25,000 troops by the end of the summer following the invasion.

By the 1990's, neoconservatism had been fed by several other intellectual streams. One came from the students of the German Jewish political theorist Leo Strauss, who, contrary to much of the nonsense written about him by people like Anne Norton and Shadia Drury, was a serious reader of philosophical texts who did not express opinions on contemporary politics or policy issues. Rather, he was concerned with the "crisis of modernity" brought on by the relativism of Nietzsche and Heidegger, as well as the fact that neither the claims of religion nor deeply-held opinions about the nature of the good life could be banished from politics, as the thinkers of the European Enlightenment had hoped. Another stream came from Albert Wohlstetter, a Rand Corporation strategist who was the teacher of Richard Perle, Zalmay Khalilzad (the current American ambassador to Iraq) and Paul Wolfowitz (the former deputy secretary of defense), among other people. Wohlstetter was intensely concerned with the problem of nuclear proliferation and the way that the 1968 Nonproliferation Treaty left loopholes, in its support for "peaceful" nuclear energy, large enough for countries like Iraq and Iran to walk through.

I have numerous affiliations with the different strands of the neoconservative movement. I was a student of Strauss's protégé Allan Bloom, who wrote the bestseller "The Closing of the American Mind"; worked at Rand and with Wohlstetter on Persian Gulf issues; and worked also on two occasions for Wolfowitz. Many people have also interpreted my book "The End of History and the Last Man" (1992) as a neoconservative tract, one that argued in favor of the view that there is a universal hunger for liberty in all people that will inevitably lead them to liberal democracy, and that we are living in the midst of an accelerating, transnational movement in favor of that liberal democracy. This is a misreading of the argument. "The End of History" is in the end an argument about modernization. What is initially universal is not the desire for liberal democracy but rather the desire to live in a modern — that is, technologically advanced and prosperous — society, which, if satisfied, tends to drive demands for political participation. Liberal democracy is one of the byproducts of this modernization process, something that becomes a universal aspiration only in the course of historical time.

"The End of History," in other words, presented a kind of Marxist argument for the existence of a long-term process of social evolution, but one that terminates in liberal democracy rather than communism. In the formulation of the scholar Ken Jowitt, the neoconservative position articulated by people like Kristol and Kagan was, by contrast, Leninist; they believed that history can be pushed along with the right application of power and will. Leninism was a tragedy in its Bolshevik version, and it has returned as farce when practiced by the United States. Neoconservatism, as both a political symbol and a body of thought, has evolved into something I can no longer support.

The Failure of Benevolent Hegemony

The Bush administration and its neoconservative supporters did not simply underestimate the difficulty of bringing about congenial political outcomes in places like Iraq; they also misunderstood the way the world would react to the use of American power. Of course, the cold war was replete with instances of what the foreign policy analyst Stephen Sestanovich calls American maximalism, wherein Washington acted first and sought legitimacy and support from its allies only after the fact. But in the post-cold-war period, the structural situation of world politics changed in ways that made this kind of exercise of power much more problematic in the eyes of even close allies. After the fall of the Soviet Union, various neoconservative authors like Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol and Robert Kagan suggested that the United States would use its margin of power to exert a kind of “benevolent hegemony” over the rest of the world, fixing problems like rogue states with W.M.D., human rights abuses and terrorist threats as they came up. Writing before the Iraq war, Kristol and Kagan considered whether this posture would provoke resistance from the rest of the world, and concluded, “It is precisely because American foreign policy is infused with an unusually high degree of morality that other nations find they have less to fear from its otherwise daunting power.” (Italics added.)

It is hard to read these lines without irony in the wake of the global reaction to the Iraq war, which succeeded in uniting much of the world in a frenzy of anti-Americanism. The idea that the United States is a hegemon more benevolent than most is not an absurd one, but there were warning signs that things had changed in America’s relationship to the world long before the start of the Iraq war. The structural imbalance in global power had grown enormous. America surpassed the rest of the world in every dimension of power by an unprecedented margin, with its defense spending nearly equal to that of the rest of the world combined. Already during the Clinton years, American economic hegemony had generated enormous hostility to an American-dominated process of globalization, frequently on the part of close democratic allies who thought the United States was seeking to impose its antistatist social model on them.

There were other reasons as well why the world did not accept American benevolent hegemony. In the first place, it was premised on American exceptionalism, the idea that America could use its power in instances where others could not because it was more virtuous than other countries. The doctrine of pre-emption against terrorist threats contained in the 2002 National Security Strategy was one that could not safely be generalized through the international system; America would be the first country to object if Russia, China, India or France declared a similar right of unilateral action. The United States was seeking to pass judgment on others while being unwilling to have its own conduct questioned in places like the International Criminal Court.

Another problem with benevolent hegemony was domestic. There are sharp limits to the American people’s attention to foreign affairs and willingness to finance projects overseas that do not have clear benefits to American interests. Sept. 11 changed that calculus in many ways, providing popular support for two wars in the Middle East and large increases in defense spending. But the durability of the support is uncertain: although most Americans want to do what is necessary to make the project of rebuilding Iraq succeed, the aftermath of the invasion did not increase the public appetite for further costly interventions. Americans are not, at heart, an imperial people. Even benevolent hegemony sometimes have to act ruthlessly, and they need a staying power that does not come easily to people who are reasonably content with their own lives and society.

Finally, benevolent hegemony presumed that the hegemon was not only well intentioned but competent as well. Much of the criticism of the Iraq intervention from Europeans and others was not based on a normative case that the United States was not getting authorization from the United Nations Security Council, but rather on the belief that it had not made an adequate case for invading Iraq in the first place and didn’t know what it was doing in trying to democratize Iraq. In this, the critics were unfortunately quite prescient.

The most basic misjudgment was an overestimation of the threat facing the United States from radical Islamism. Although the new and ominous possibility of undeterrable terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction did indeed present itself, advocates of the war wrongly conflated this with the threat presented by Iraq and with the rogue state/proliferation problem more generally. The misjudgment was based in part on the massive failure of the American intelligence community to correctly assess the state of Iraq's W.M.D. programs before the war. But the intelligence community never took nearly as alarmist a view of the terrorist/W.M.D. threat as the war's supporters did. Overestimation of this threat was then used to justify the elevation of preventive war to the centerpiece of a new security strategy, as well as a whole series of measures that infringed on civil liberties, from detention policy to domestic eavesdropping.

What to Do

Now that the neoconservative moment appears to have passed, the United States needs to reconceptualize its foreign policy in several fundamental ways. In the first instance, we need to demilitarize what we have been calling the global war on terrorism and shift to other types of policy instruments. We are fighting hot counterinsurgency wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and against the international jihadist movement, wars in which we need to prevail. But "war" is the wrong metaphor for the broader struggle, since wars are fought at full intensity and have clear beginnings and endings. Meeting the jihadist challenge is more of a "long, twilight struggle" whose core is not a military campaign but a political contest for the hearts and minds of ordinary Muslims around the world. As recent events in France and Denmark suggest, Europe will be a central battleground in this fight.

The United States needs to come up with something better than "coalitions of the willing" to legitimate its dealings with other countries. The world today lacks effective international institutions that can confer legitimacy on collective action; creating new organizations that will better balance the dual requirements of legitimacy and effectiveness will be the primary task for the coming generation. As a result of more than 200 years of political evolution, we have a relatively good understanding of how to create institutions that are rulebound, accountable and reasonably effective in the vertical silos we call states. What we do not have are adequate mechanisms of horizontal accountability among states.

The conservative critique of the United Nations is all too cogent: while useful for certain peacekeeping and nation-building operations, the United Nations lacks both democratic legitimacy and effectiveness in dealing with serious security issues. The solution is not to strengthen a single global body, but rather to promote what has been emerging in any event, a "multi-multilateral world" of overlapping and occasionally competing international institutions that are organized on regional or functional lines. Kosovo in 1999 was a model: when the Russian veto prevented the Security Council from acting, the United States and its NATO allies simply shifted the venue to NATO, where the Russians could not block action.

The final area that needs rethinking, and the one that will be the most contested in the coming months and years, is the place of democracy promotion in American foreign policy. The worst legacy that could come from the Iraq war would be an anti-neoconservative backlash that coupled a sharp turn toward isolation with a cynical realist policy aligning the United States with friendly authoritarians. Good governance, which involves not just democracy but also the rule of law and economic development, is critical to a host of outcomes we desire, from alleviating poverty to dealing with pandemics to controlling violent conflicts. A Wilsonian policy that pays attention to how rulers treat their citizens is therefore right, but it needs to be informed by a certain realism that was missing from the thinking of the Bush administration in its first term and of its neoconservative allies.

We need in the first instance to understand that promoting democracy and modernization in the Middle East is not a solution to the problem of jihadist terrorism; in all likelihood it will make the short-term problem worse, as we have seen in the case of the Palestinian election bringing Hamas to

power. Radical Islamism is a byproduct of modernization itself, arising from the loss of identity that accompanies the transition to a modern, pluralist society. It is no accident that so many recent terrorists, from Sept. 11's Mohamed Atta to the murderer of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh to the London subway bombers, were radicalized in democratic Europe and intimately familiar with all of democracy's blessings. More democracy will mean more alienation, radicalization and — yes, unfortunately — terrorism.

But greater political participation by Islamist groups is very likely to occur whatever we do, and it will be the only way that the poison of radical Islamism can ultimately work its way through the body politic of Muslim communities around the world. The age is long since gone when friendly authoritarians could rule over passive populations and produce stability indefinitely. New social actors are mobilizing everywhere, from Bolivia and Venezuela to South Africa and the Persian Gulf. A durable Israeli-Palestinian peace could not be built upon a corrupt, illegitimate Fatah that constantly had to worry about Hamas challenging its authority. Peace might emerge, sometime down the road, from a Palestine run by a formerly radical terrorist group that had been forced to deal with the realities of governing.

If we are serious about the good governance agenda, we have to shift our focus to the reform, reorganization and proper financing of those institutions of the United States government that actually promote democracy, development and the rule of law around the world, organizations like the State Department, U.S.A.I.D., the National Endowment for Democracy and the like. The United States has played an often decisive role in helping along many recent democratic transitions, including in the Philippines in 1986; South Korea and Taiwan in 1987; Chile in 1988; Poland and Hungary in 1989; Serbia in 2000; Georgia in 2003; and Ukraine in 2004-5. But the overarching lesson that emerges from these cases is that the United States does not get to decide when and where democracy comes about. By definition, outsiders can't "impose" democracy on a country that doesn't want it; demand for democracy and reform must be domestic. Democracy promotion is therefore a long-term and opportunistic process that has to await the gradual ripening of political and economic conditions to be effective.

The Bush administration has been walking — indeed, sprinting — away from the legacy of its first term, as evidenced by the cautious multilateral approach it has taken toward the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea. Condoleezza Rice gave a serious speech in January about "transformational diplomacy" and has begun an effort to reorganize the nonmilitary side of the foreign-policy establishment, and the National Security Strategy document is being rewritten. All of these are welcome changes, but the legacy of the Bush first-term foreign policy and its neoconservative supporters has been so polarizing that it is going to be hard to have a reasoned debate about how to appropriately balance American ideals and interests in the coming years. The reaction against a flawed policy can be as damaging as the policy itself, and such a reaction is an indulgence we cannot afford, given the critical moment we have arrived at in global politics.

Neoconservatism, whatever its complex roots, has become indelibly associated with concepts like coercive regime change, unilateralism and American hegemony. What is needed now are new ideas, neither neoconservative nor realist, for how America is to relate to the rest of the world — ideas that retain the neoconservative belief in the universality of human rights, but without its illusions about the efficacy of American power and hegemony to bring these ends about.