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The neoconservative war on modernity: The Bush Doctrine and its resistance to legitimation

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The Neoconservative War on Modernity:
The Bush Doctrine and its Resistance to Legitimation

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The Bush Doctrine represents a paradigm shift in international security policy. Never had a foreign policy demonstrated such will through unilateralism, preemptive militarism, and a sense of exceptionalism. I argue that this shift in policy resists modern international order in an attempt to reestablish ancient modes of power and control.

The international system maintains order through rules and institutions which are perceived to be legitimate because they have the consent of the governed. An example of this would be the UN, where member states engage in a democratic deliberation geared towards reaching understanding and consensus. However, order breaks down when a member state fails to recognize the legitimacy of a rule or institution. This was the case for the Bush Doctrine when the U.S. decided to invade Iraq without a UN resolution.

The Bush Doctrine is the embodiment of neoconservatism, an intellectual movement influenced by the thoughts of Leo Strauss. What neoconservatism has inherited from Strauss was a fear of relativism. Strauss's critique of modernity holds that liberal society fosters moral relativism which, in turn, destroys the moral fabric of society. Strauss calls for a revival of antiquity, more specifically a Platonic design of society, where elites rule through the use of myths which provide society with moral truth and national purpose.

Neoconservatism has projected Strauss's war on modernity onto the international level. The Bush Doctrine assumes its core democratic values to be universal and thus views consensus building as unnecessary. Rather, deliberating on 'right' may enlighten us to the conventional nature of morality. Therefore, neoconservatism works to reestablish ancient modes of control through the use of moral absolutes, where the

practice of these values, consequentially, resists international order governed by liberal principles. As a result, neoconservative policies disrupt international order and isolate the U.S. from the modern world.

Introduction

Problem/Argument

Global order is maintained principally through compliance with international laws. Voluntary compliance with international law often reflects the high degree of legitimacy of international institutions. Legitimacy, which refers to the recognition of the public right to exercise authority, then, routinely requires deliberation, rational argumentation, bargaining, and compromise to reach consensus on issues. Over the years, however, legitimacy has either been contested on various fronts, or manipulated by states to serve their coercive ends on a domestic and international level.

The most notable example is the Bush Administration's manipulation of the United Nations (UN) to justify the launching of the Iraq war. The UN, which is perceived as the most legitimate international organization, provides a forum for member states to engage in debate and deliberation. Here member states deliberate to reach mutual understanding on issues involving major international threats and the need to invoke military measures (pursuant to the Chapter VII mandate) to enforce compliance with the law. The decision to invade Iraq not only reflected the failure to exhaust all options; it also reflected a violation of the UN charter pursuant to Article 51 (self-defense).

The problem then is that the Bush Administration used the legitimacy of the UN to justify or pursue its own coercive ends (principles of the Bush Doctrine: preemptive action and unilateralism). This raises an important question: How does the Bush Administration's manipulation of this legitimacy reflect the ideological underpinnings of its own resistance of legitimization (processes)? **In addressing this question, I argue that the Bush Doctrine was predicated upon an aggressive national security policy who moral absolutes took precedence over the need to legitimize authority and action. These moral absolutes include the spread of democracy for its national**

security policy, and resulted in a resistance to the legitimation process at the international level.

I explain the use of moral absolutes in the Bush Doctrine as the constituent elements of the neoconservative movement and the political philosophy of Leo Strauss. Strauss was critical of modernity, arguing that liberalism and rationality have exposed morality as relativistic. He contended that society be governed by educated elites, whose roles were to transmit 'noble lies' to the masses. In this paper, I examine how neoconservatism incorporated many of the elements of Strauss's political philosophy, especially his doubts that liberalism can maintain social order and his preference for Platonic elites.

However, translating Straussianism into foreign policy, I claim, projects the fear of relativism and elitist inclinations on the international level. This means the spread of political and moral absolutism across the globe and justifies the unfettered use of American power. This became evident during the Security Council's deliberation on resolution 1441. Here, as already noted, the U.S. resisted modern international order when it invaded Iraq without securing the consensus for a new UN resolution

In short, legitimation requires democratic deliberation; but elitism compromises any domination-free communication arena. Legitimation also requires rational communication, not unyielding absolutism. Straussianism works to reestablish ancient modes of power and control, most notably myths that are self-legitimizing, and that helps to explain the tension between the Bush Doctrine and the (objective) legitimacy of the UN. A society that demands rational justification is incapable of propagating myths. Rather, bargaining and compromise expose the relativism in our notions of 'right'. For a foreign policy that harbors Straussian tendencies, then, safeguarding the nation against potential nihilism requires resisting modern conceptions of legitimacy to preserve American ideals. Neoconservatism had done just this; it has designed an uncompromising doctrine of pro-American imperatives that assume self-legitimation. Ultimately, a foreign policy founded on the fears of relativism cannot engage properly in modern legitimation. Resisting such international order governed by liberal principles illustrates the neoconservatives' willingness to carry on Strauss's war on modernity.

Literature Review

Legitimacy

As stated before, legitimacy refers to the approval of and compliance to rules by those subject to those rules. Legitimacy is an important concept because the approval of and compliance to rules maintains social order. However, it is important to mention that throughout history order has been maintained through different conceptions of legitimacy. I distinguish between modern and ancient forms. Both imply compliance to rules but differ on the reasons for that compliance.

Modern forms of legitimacy emerged during the enlightenment and stress the consent of the governed. John Locke argued that “the liberty of man in society, is to be under no other legislative power, but the established, by consent, in the commonwealth”.¹ Montesque argued that “the government most comfortable to nature, is that whose particular disposition best aggress with the humour and disposition of the people in whose favour it is established”.² Rousseau argued that “the sovereign, being formed wholly of the individuals who compose it, neither has nor can have any interest contrary to theirs”.³ This consent of the governed is formed through a process by which the rule may become legitimate. This process is called legitimation and is built upon liberal principles. More specifically, the process follows a democratic deliberation with the intentions of reaching consensus. Consensus can only be reached if the communication is rational, meaning that actors provide reasons for their claims. Then all actors bargain and compromise to reach consensus.⁴ In general, for modern forms, rules are seen as legitimate if those subject to the rule approve of the process at which it came into being.

I contrast modern forms of legitimacy with ancient ones. Ancient legitimacy is different where rules can assume a Bodinian sovereignty, where the compliance to rules does not require the approval of its coming into being. Rules are followed simply

¹ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*. (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, Inc. 1980), 17.

² Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 104.

³ Jean Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract and its Discourses* (New York: Dutton and Company, Inc., 1950), 16-18.

⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) p. 448.

because the authority of those rules is assumed. In general, for ancient forms, rules are thus self-legitimizing.

Straussianism

Leo Strauss was a political philosopher whose ideas have influenced much of the neoconservative movement. The most important thoughts of Strauss are those concerning his ‘crisis of modernity’. His ‘crisis of modernity’ holds that the enlightenment’s liberalism and scientific progress has exposed morality as conventional and relativistic.⁵ For Strauss, relativism in society was a crisis because it ultimately led to the rejection of all notions of ‘natural right’ where society becomes nihilistic.⁶ Straus feared that such nihilism had the power to destroy society.

His philosophy comes from his experience in Germany. He fled the Weimer Republic before they drafted their constitution after World War I. When Hitler rose to power he concluded that liberalism inevitably collapses into itself.⁷ His logic was that liberalism leads to relativism and relativism logically leads to nihilism, and the rise of Hitler in the Weimer Republic was proof of this. To safeguard society from history repeating itself, Strauss calls for a return to the ancients. More specifically, Strauss advises society to adopt a Platonic design of social hierarchy where the elites rule through the use of the ‘noble lie’.⁸ He argued that the masses must believe in certain absolute truths. These truths took the form of national and religious ideals and provided them with purpose and moral clarity. Thus, for Strauss, elitism is meant to combat relativism and maintain social order through the transmission of truths said to be absolute. In the end, he favored a romanticist aristocratic society, not an enlightened egalitarian one.

⁵ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) 12.

⁶ Ibid p. 14-20.

⁷ Shadia Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997) 4-6.

⁸ Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 102.

Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism is an intellectual movement that was born as a reaction to the counterculture of the 1960s. Neoconservatives saw counterculture as the breakdown of social and moral order and viewed themselves as the culture warriors who would reestablish order through orthodoxy and tradition.⁹ They were also vehemently anti-communist and adopted uncompromising and militaristic foreign policies against Soviet expansionism which they would pursue after gaining ranks in the Reagan administration.¹⁰ In general, neoconservatism emphasizes the need for social order and espouses democratic principles.

However, neoconservatives found their home in the George W. Bush administration and provided the philosophical foundation for the Bush Doctrine, a foreign policy idealistic in principle yet militaristic in practice.¹¹ There are four main pillars of the Bush Doctrine. The first and most important one is democratization. Democracy is the core ideal to which the rest of the Bush Doctrine's principles stem from. Democracy is regarded as a universal truth that all mankind deserves and America should lead the struggle.¹² The second pillar is militarist primacy. According to the Bush Doctrine, American might is unmatched and should be used to actively to reshape the world rather than used passively as deterrence. The third pillar is preemption because the Bush Doctrine views threats of the 21st century no longer to enemy states but rather terrorist organizations that cannot be deterred. The fourth pillar is unilateralism out of the necessity to act quickly and decisively when other ally nations might hesitate to act.¹³

The Bush Doctrine, as the embodiment of the neoconservative movement, has Straussian undertones to it. The Bush Doctrine becomes elitist in the Straussian sense through its core principle that democracy is an absolute truth. However, a foreign policy

⁹ Irving Kristol "Countercultures," *Neoconservatism: An Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press, 1995) 146

¹⁰ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Design: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, New York) 8-10.

¹¹ Mearsheimer, John. "Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism Versus Neo-conservatism". 21-04-2005. www.openDemocracy.net. p. 3

¹² The White House. "The National Security Strategy of the United State of America", September 20th 2002; available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss.pdf>>

¹³ Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine", *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 118 N.3 2003

that assumes some values to be absolutely true see legitimation as undermining the natural authority of those values.

Analytical Framework/Objectives

Neoconservatism versus legitimacy: The Bush administration and the UN

First, the paper must evidence how neoconservatism has resisted modern legitimation. To do this I will demonstrate how the Bush Doctrine has resisted proper protocols in the Security Council's deliberation on resolution 1441. This will be done by describing how UN deliberations are a process of legitimation using a Habermasian model, one that is built on validating claims. According to Habermas, claims are validated upon them being factually true (truth), that they conform to basic norms of how the social world should act (rightness), and that they are sincere (truthfulness). To evidence how the Bush Doctrine resists legitimation, then, entails demonstrating how it did not satisfy validity claims during UN deliberations. I will demonstrate how the U.S. could not validate their decision to invade on any of the validity dimensions of truth, rightness, and truthfulness, thus demonstrating that neoconservatism does resist modern legitimation.

Moral Authority versus Relativism: Neoconservatives and the Fear of Relativism

The next task is to link neoconservatism to Straussianism. To do this I will demonstrate that the neoconservative movement has adopted Strauss's fear of relativism that casts suspicions on liberalism and calls for cultural elites. This will be done through an historical examination of the neoconservative movement during two periods.

The first period will be the neoconservatives' reaction to the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. They viewed the permissive egalitarianism and cultural relativism of the counterculture as a disintegration of values. The paper will demonstrate how neoconservatives saw this as evidence that liberalism was incapable of maintaining social order and that the neoconservative solution was for educated elites to reestablish cultural orthodoxy.

The second period will be their rise to power in the Reagan administration and their efforts to overturn détente. Neoconservatives viewed détente not as peace between nations but as a sign of ideological malaise and became concerned that America had lost its convictions. The paper will demonstrate how neoconservatives blamed this tolerance and diplomatic passivity on the liberal intelligentsia and, after gaining ranks in the Reagan administration, worked to reconstitute America's unique role in international politics.

Moral Authority Undermining the Governing Liberalist Principles of International Order

The last task is to explain that the Bush Doctrine is a neoconservative document that harbors the same fear of relativism and that it is this fear of relativism that resisted legitimation in the UN. First the paper will evidence the fear of relativism in the Bush Doctrine through its belief that democratic values are absolute and universal. Then the paper will demonstrate how the fear of relativism resists legitimation on the grounds that legitimation requires the compromise and bargaining of values. The Bush Doctrine becomes elitist in the Straussian sense by working to reestablish ancient modes of power and control through the use of myth, where myths are self-legitimizing because their truth or rightness is natural or inherent.

Structure

The paper will be divided into five chapters. Chapter one will explain the theory of modern legitimacy and demonstrate how the U.S. legal argument for war could not validate its claim to be conceived as legitimate under modern standards. Chapter two will discuss Leo Strauss's critique of modernity where his fear of relativism casts doubts on liberalism and attempts to reestablish ancient modes of power and control through cultural elites. Chapter three will discuss the link between neoconservatism and Straussianism through the fear of relativism. Chapter four will explain what makes the Bush Doctrine a distinctively neoconservative document by providing evidence that it harbors a Straussian fear of relativism. Chapter five, then, explains that the Bush

Doctrine's inability to validate the decision for war in the UN is explained by its fear of relativism and why this fear ultimately resists modern conceptions of legitimation.

Chapter 1: Legitimation

Introduction

Modern forms of legitimacy, compared to ancient forms, require reaching consent through a democratic deliberative process. Conflict arises when this process breaks down and when a member of this process undermines the need for consent. This chapter will demonstrate that the Bush Doctrine does just this.

First, the chapter will explain what legitimacy is and the role it has in the world. Second, it will relate legitimacy to the United Nations and explain why the UN works as a form of legitimation. Third, this chapter will explain how the Bush Doctrine has resisted legitimation by critiquing the U.S.'s legal argument for military action against Iraq and its inability to satisfy validity claims in the UN.

The Relevance of the Enlightenment

Scholars agree on a rather general meaning for the concept of legitimacy. Weber provides us with a concept of legitimacy in its most basic form. For Weber, any authority is legitimate when its subjects desire and comply with its rules.¹⁴ Though Weber provides us with different forms of legitimate rule, those being traditional, charismatic, rational and legal, the greater question is where an authority's legitimacy derives from? It is important, then, to turn to the Enlightenment because it was during this period that society began to question the authority of rules and institutions and provided us with a modern framework of legitimacy.

The Enlightenment was progressive and championed liberal ideals that were completely discontinuous with ancient and medieval modes of thinking. Modern thought

¹⁴ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Free Press, 1947), 124-132.

had a much more optimistic view of human nature which could be seen in Immanuel Kant's short essay, *What is Enlightenment?*:

“Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's ability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* “Have courage to use your own reason!” – that is the motto of the enlightenment.”¹⁵

The optimism of modernity's enlightened thinkers had led it to embrace a number of liberal tenets such as individual autonomy, scientific rationalism, free market economy, etc. In general, modern thinkers emphasized the individual at the center of society, where now the authority of laws and institutions would have to be recognized by the individual. The best way to demonstrate this is by reviewing some major thinkers of this time.

This can best be evidenced through John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, which outlines a political society based on the social contract. Locke asserts the role of the individual in the legitimation of a political system under the idea that the rule of government is legitimate only under the consensus of those governed.

“The liberty of man in society, is to be under no other legislative power, but the established, by consent, in the common-wealth; nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what that legislative shall enact, according to the trust put into it.”¹⁶

This is an important concept for Locke because this illustrates that each man has “property in his own person”¹⁷, meaning that men are free from arbitrary rule from any other. Furthermore, the idea of “property in his own person” assumes each person's self-

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment.” In *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick, (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 1.

¹⁶ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 1980), 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

determination, that each person determines their own destiny and thus reserves the right to revolution if that law is in breach of the social contract. Locke has placed consent-of-the-governed at the center of social order, where the legitimacy of authority is constructed only through the consensus of the social contract.

This contractarianism is evident also in Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* written in 1748. He wrote: "Better is it to say that the government most comfortable to nature, is that whose particular disposition best agrees with the humour and disposition of the people in whose favour it is established."¹⁸ Montesquieu also offers us a system of checks and balances to counter power monopolies in government and ensure that policy reflects those it governs. "There would be an end of everything, where the same man or same body, whether of the nobles or of the people, to exercise those three powers"¹⁹

Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote *The Social Contract and its Discourses* in 1762 where he places much importance on consensus. He argued that only the individual, not the state, knows best of his or her own interest, thus the state's power derives from those individuals it meant to govern, still allowing their own self-determination. This would place the state as the subject to the will of the people, rather than the people as subject to the will of the state, a concept Rousseau would call the 'general will'.

"Again, the Sovereign, being formed wholly of the individuals who compose it, neither has nor can have any interest contrary to theirs; and consequently the sovereign power need give no guarantee to its subjects because it is impossible for the body to wish to hurt all its members."²⁰

Democratic rule is formed through Rousseau's 'general will', dictating the state's policy. Many other enlightenment thinkers saw that the state should reflect the general will of the people and that a democratic process was the appropriate method for actualizing that general will. If the state was to be legitimate, some democratic process was necessary for the state to reflect those it meant to govern.

¹⁸ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 104.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract and its Discourses* (New York: Dutton and Company, Inc., 1950), 16-18.

However, a democratic process could only thrive under the practice of other ideals that safeguard self-determination and thus act as main ingredients for democracy. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* notes two important concepts for a healthy liberal democracy, those being freedom of speech and the harm principle. For Mill, freedom of speech was necessary, not only in a democracy, but necessary for the discovery of truth. Freedom of speech allowed for debate and dialogue amongst members of society. Only through dialogue and the exchange of ideas could the people determine which ideas were right and wrong. He wrote:

“We can never be sure that the opinions we are endeavoring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still.”²¹ The second concept in *On Liberty*, is the harm principle. Mill claimed that the only reason to assert power over an individual is to protect the well-being of another.

“The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.”²²

All members of society have the right to act as they saw fit until their action intervened with another's. This personal sovereignty extends into two spheres of an individual's life, his mind and body. Not only are individuals free from physical coercion but also from the mental coercion or persuasion. This personal sovereignty safeguards the individual's right to self-determination by allowing that individual to recognize and actualize what is in their interest from others and allowing others to do the same. It is this notion of self-determination, or at least participation, that frames the notion of legitimacy.

²¹ John Stewart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: Barnes and Nobel Books, 2004), 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 10.

Habermasian Legitimacy

Today legal scholars have better articulated what legitimacy is and what the process of reaching legitimate rule looks like. Thomas M. Franck argues that legitimacy is a “property of a rule or rule-making institutions which itself exerts a pull towards compliance on those addressed normatively because those addressed believe that the rule or institution has come into being and operates in the accordance with generally accepted principles of right process.”²³ He accounts for all of the characteristics of a law that add to its legitimacy, those being: determinacy, symbolic, coherence, and adherence.²⁴ However, while Franck offers a thorough explanation of why international law is for the most part obeyed, he does not explain the mechanics of how legitimate rule is produced. It is important then to turn to Habermas.

Communicative Rationality

Habermas provides us with a very thorough understanding of legitimacy and credits modernity for its “courage to use reason”. Habermas sees modernity as a project worth ‘finishing’. His universal pragmatics holds that the rationality that has built our modern society should be further used to substantiate our universal impulse to communicate, where intersubjective understanding is made possible. Only then, through the processes of mutually desired understanding and agreement, can society recognize mutual “normative backgrounds”.²⁵ For Habermas, rational communication binds society together. Much like Mill’s belief that freedom of speech was necessary for reaching understanding in a democratic process, so to does Habermas hold that much weight for speech and language.

Habermas is most known for his work on communicative rationality which is a model of communication based on intersubjective understanding through rationally justified speech acts. At the heart of this theory is the role of language:

²³ Thomas M. Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy Among Nations* (England: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3-26.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 3.

“If we were not in a position to refer to a model of speech, we could not even begin to analyze what it means for two subjects to come to an understanding with one another. Reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech. Naturally, speech and understanding are not related to one another as means to and end. But we can explain the concept of reaching understanding only if we specify what it means to use sentences with communicative intent.”²⁶

For Habermas, speech is not only necessary for reaching understanding, “understanding is the inherent telos of human speech”. However, we can reach understanding only when our intentions are rationally based. Habermas gives rationality a central role in communication and refers to the intentions of our speech acts. What we express to other participants in communication must be rationalized and justified; we must have reasons for it.

“The rationality inherent in this practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based *in the end* on reasons. And the rationality of those who participate in this communicative practice is determined whether, if necessary, they could, *under suitable circumstances*, provide reasons for their expressions.”²⁷

Only by providing reasons for what we express can others understand our expressions and regard them as valid. Habermas calls these validity claims which could be assessed on three dimensions: truth, rightness, and truthfulness.

“In uttering a sentence the speaker makes a claim which, were he to make it explicitly, might take the form: “It is true that *p*,” or “It is right that *a*,” or “I mean what I say when I here and now utter *s*” (where *p* stands for a proposition, *a* for a description of an action, and *s* for a first person sentence). A *validity claim* is

²⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society, Volume I* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1981), 287.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

equivalent to the assertion that the *conditions for the validity* of an utterance are fulfilled.”²⁸

By mutual recognition of these dimensions in validity claims, the hearer’s criticism, if any, articulates the dimension in question back to the speaker and does so “in light of reasons or grounds” and illustrates “insight and understanding.”²⁹ Such consensus achieved by validity claims results in a communicative action. For Habermas, communicative rationality creates an “orientation toward reaching understanding” which transforms consensus into action. In other words communicative action is the movement from communication to action coordinated by validity claims.

“Reach understanding functions as a mechanism for coordinating actions only through the participants in interaction coming to an agreement concerning the claimed validity of their utterances, that is, through intersubjectively recognizing the validity claims they reciprocally raise.”³⁰

Habermas makes a distinction between this communicative action, which serves as a social cohesive, and a more infectious model he calls instrumental. Where a communicative model promotes sociality and relates individuals to each other as “subject to subject” and having “shared expectations, beliefs, and norms, Instrumental models focus on the individual and his or her relationship to “external nature, as subject to object, oriented toward its efficient mastery.”³¹ Instrumental action is designed to advance one’s own intentions rather than promote understanding. Instrumental action ignores and defeats the ‘telos’ inherent in our use of language and leaves no foundation for social order. Only a model based on mutual understanding offers the building blocks for an integrated society.

²⁸ Ibid., 38.

²⁹ Ibid., 38.

³⁰ Ibid., 99.

³¹ Jurgen Habermas and Steven Seidman, *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), 11-12.

Deliberative Legitimacy

The argument for communicative rationality articulates an important principle that Habermas calls the discourse principle or (D): “Just those actions norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourse.”³² (D) operates as a specification for Habermas’s condition that the validation of claims leads to consensus. This principle allows Habermas to employ his communicative model into a legal theory of legitimation.

However, rational discourse is often times not enough to produce social order, especially in culturally diverse societies. If humankind was naturally inclined to act towards social order, then we would not need notions of right to govern our actions. This is not the case and where discourse falls short, law maintains the standard of rational communication and thus social order.

“Through communicative action the rationality potential of language for functions of social integration is tapped, mobilized and unleashed in a course of social evolution. Modern law steps in to fill the functional gaps in social order whose integrative capacities are overtaxed. The tension between validity and facticity, already built into informal everyday practice in virtue of the ideal content of the pragmatic presuppositions of communicative action, becomes more acute in the validity dimension of modern law.”³³

Modern law “fills the functional gap” of civil society’s discourse by providing a dual structure to law. Where the civil society attempts to reach consensus communicatively and uphold its claims based on mere validity, law provides a dual structure for the compliance of its rules: “Its positivity and its claim to rational acceptability.”³⁴ Not only is law rational but also enforceable and thus binds facticity with validity. Ultimately,

³² Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 107.

³³ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

Habermas believes that “moral content can spread throughout a society along the channels of legal regulation”³⁵

Law becomes rationally acceptable through Habermas’s democracy principle, which is a legal variation of (D). The democracy principle states that: “only those statutes may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent (*Zustimmung*) of all citizens in a discursive process of legislation that in turn has been legally constituted.”³⁶ The assent that Habermas is referring to is the “democratic opinion and will-formation” of civil society reached through discourse and rational communication.³⁷ This assent brings with it a will that is distinctively legal, a civic motivation to bind the rationality of communication with the facticity of law. Habermas refers to this will as communicative power. Communicative power works to influence and inform governance by processing the general will through democratic structures, that would hopefully, once institutionalized as law, reflect the general will and its rationality that motivated it originally, whereby its legitimacy originates.

“The democratic procedure for the production of law evidently forms the only postmetaphysical source of legitimacy. But what provides this procedure with its legitimating force? Discourse theory answers this question with a simple, and at first glance, unlikely answer: democratic procedure makes it possible for issues and contributions, information and reasons to float freely; it secures a discursive character for political will-formation; and it thereby grounds the fallibilistic assumption that results issuing from proper procedures are more or less reasonable.”³⁸

Habermas’s legitimation of rules and law comes full circle with his advocating for modernity’s completion and the upholding of enlightenment ideals. It is the practice of these ideals, reason, communication, democracy etc that not only describes what legitimate rule may look like, but also where it comes from.

³⁵ Ibid., 118.

³⁶ Ibid., 110.

³⁷ Ibid., 300.

³⁸ Ibid., 448.

The Legal Argument for War and Resisting Legitimation

I will use the UN to contextualize legitimation for it engages its members in democratic deliberative decision-making and generally enjoys a healthy level of compliance with its rules. This section will critique the U.S.'s legal argument in the UN that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction to be used in conjunction with its ties to terrorist networks with the intent of attacking the United States and therefore constituted an imminent threat that justified military action against Iraq. The argument in this section is that Bush Doctrine resisted legitimation by failing to satisfy validity requirements (truth, rightness, truthfulness) necessary for creating understanding and consensus in the UN. As a result, no communicative power materialized to bind the general will into law, however, the U.S. would invade Iraq anyway.

The U.S.'s argument for preemptive action against Iraq was based on the idea that Iraq was advancing its development of WMDs and that it would exploit its supposed ties to terrorist networks to carry out an attack on the U.S. Bush outline this claim in a speech he delivered October 6th 2008.

“Eleven years ago, as a condition for ending the Persian Gulf War, the Iraqi regime was required to destroy its weapons of mass destruction, to cease all development of such weapons, and to stop all support for terrorist groups. The Iraqi regime has violated all of those obligations. It possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons. It has given shelter and support to terrorism, and practices terror against its own people. The entire world has witnessed Iraq's eleven-year history of defiance, deception and bad faith.”³⁹

Bush's speech asserted that Iraq stockpiled at least 60,000 liters of anthrax, “thousands of tons of chemical agents, including mustard gas, sarin nerve gas, VX nerve gas”, and was

³⁹ The White House. “President Bush Outlines Iraq Threat”; available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>; accessed 1 October, 2008.

“rebuilding facilities that it had used to produce chemical and biological weapons”.⁴⁰ Bush further warned that these deadly agents need not be deployed by conventional military means but rather could be concealed and detonated by hand by terrorist agents.

“And, of course, sophisticated delivery systems aren't required for a chemical or biological attack; all that might be required are a small container and one terrorist or Iraqi intelligence operative to deliver it. And that is the source of our urgent concern about Saddam Hussein's links to international terrorist groups. Over the years, Iraq has provided safe haven to terrorists such as Abu Nidal, whose terror organization carried out more than 90 terrorist attacks in 20 countries that killed or injured nearly 900 people, including 12 Americans.”⁴¹

Bush specified in the above statement that the danger of WMDs in Iraq was linked to Iraq's ties to terrorists organizations and was sure to make this case to the UN.

In his address to to the UN, Bush argued that Iraq “admitted to producing tens of thousands of liters of anthrax and other deadly biological agents for use with Scud warheads, aerial bombs, and aircraft spray tanks” and that “U.N. inspectors believe Iraq has produced two to four times the amount of biological agents it declared, and has failed to account for more than three metric tons of material that could be used to produce biological weapons.”⁴² His speech then claimed that “Iraq continues to shelter and support terrorist organizations that direct violence against Iran, Israel, and Western governments.”⁴³

The U.S.'s legal argument (and thus there claim which requires validation from all parties) was twofold: First, it assumed that Iraq would “supply these weapons to terrorist allies”⁴⁴ and therefor U.S. military action was appropriate out of self-defense. Second, Iraq had breached UN resolutions 686, 687, and 688, under the accusation that

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The White House, “President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly”; available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html>; accessed 1 October, 2008.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Iraq continued to repress its own people and still held ties to terrorist networks. These arguments will be examined first through validity claims

Self-Defense and 'Truth' Dimension of Validity

The legal argument for invasion for the reason that Iraq posed an imminent threat failed to satisfy basic validity requirements discussed in a Habermasian legitimation process. First, this claim did not satisfy the 'truth' dimension of validity claims that required an empirical and factual argument for the use of military force against Iraq. This dimension required evidence for both assertions that Iraq was furthering its development of WMDs and that it held strong ties to terrorist organizations. None of these assertions could be factually backed.

First, the White House asserted that Iraq was purchasing uranium from Africa as evidence of their nuclear ambitions. However, CIA intelligence stated that "no contracts had been signed with Iraq or other "rogue states" after 1997, and that no uranium ore had been shipped to those states."⁴⁵ Even before Bush's address to the General Assembly, the CIA told the State Department that there was no factual basis to this claim. The White House also asserted that Iraq had built new factories to further develop biological and chemical weaponry. However, according to the George Tenet of the CIA, there was "no confirming intelligence" of any such developments and nothing suggested that these factories were developing any weapons. Tenet stated that the claim that these were factories developing weapons was so unsubstantiated that if an invasion occurred with the intention of targeting military complexes "we'd be going in there blind."⁴⁶ There was very little evidence for the White House to validate the 'truth' dimension of their claim. To this day, no weapons were found.

The second claim, that Saddam Hussein harbored terrorists or had any close ties to Al Qaeda, lacked sufficient material evidence also. Many in Bush's cabinet could not make a strong case for a link between Iraq and Al Qaeda. Richard Armitage, Deputy

⁴⁵ John Diamond, "Uranium Reports Doubted Early On". *USAToday*, June 12, 2003; available from http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-06-12-niger-usat_x.htm; accessed 1 December, 2008.

⁴⁶ Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neill* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 72-73.

Secretary of State, said that “A lot of folks out of the administration have spent a lot of time and energy trying to tie Iraq and Al Qaeda together, but thus far it hasn’t been able to be done.”⁴⁷ The 9/11 Commission Report would later come out and reject the claim that there were any collaborative efforts between Iraq and Al Qaeda.

“But to date we have seen no evidence that these or the earlier contacts ever developed into a collaborative operational relationship. Nor have we seen any evidence indicating that Iraq cooperated with al Qaeda in developing or carrying out any attacks against the United States”⁴⁸

In general both claims that Iraq was acquiring and developing WMDs and that it had close ties to terrorist networks were unsubstantiated and thus were not valid claims.

Self-Defense and the ‘Truthfulness’ Dimension of Validity

The White House’s claim falls short also on the ‘truthfulness’ dimension, the dimension that requires all parties to demonstrate sincere interest in reaching understanding and consensus. Documentation has emerged exposing possibilities that U.S. officials have manipulated or fixed intelligence concerning Iraq. The most egregious case was the Downing Street memo which revealed that the “intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.”⁴⁹ This type of ‘fixing’ was made public when George Tenet stated that Bush aids ignored CIA intelligence concerning Iraq’s possible WMDs. The CIA’s National Intelligence Estimate never concluded that Iraq was an ‘imminent threat’.⁵⁰ After it was clear that Bush aids ignored CIA intelligence, Wesley Clark has said that “We need an independent, comprehensive investigation into the administration’s

⁴⁷ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 310.

⁴⁸ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York, W. W. Norton and Company), 66.

⁴⁹ Mark Danner, *The Secret Way to War: The Downing Street Memo and the Iraq War’s Buried History* (New York: New York Review Book, 2006), 88.

⁵⁰ Walter Pincus and Dana Priest, “Bush, Aides Ignored CIA Caveats on Iraq: Clear-Cut Assertions Were Made Before Arms Assessment Was Completed”. *Washington Post*, February 7, 2004; available on <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A20194-2004Feb6.html>; accessed December 1, 2008.

handling of the intelligence leading to war in Iraq”. Clark was approached by President Bush on September 12th asking for links between Iraq and al Qaeda. Bush told him “See if Saddam did this. See if he’s linked in any way”.⁵¹ The New York Times article wrote:

“Gen. Wesley K. Clark delivered a searing indictment of the Bush administration on Friday, asserting that its “headlong rush to war” was based on twisted facts and had violated the nation's democratic principles “with dire consequences for our security”.⁵²

Defense Dept. Inspector General Tom Gimble stated that top Pentagon officials misled the White House concerning intelligence by exaggerating ties between Iraq and al Qaeda and by withholding intelligence from agencies that challenged Pentagon intelligence.⁵³ Most cases concerning the manipulation of data and twisting intelligence is traced back to the Office of Special Planning. Karen Kwiatkowski, a Pentagon officer wrote what she witnessed in the OSP:

“I witnessed neoconservative agenda bearers within OSP usurp measured and carefully considered assessments, and through suppression and distortion of intelligence analysis promulgate what were in fact falsehoods to both Congress and the executive office of the president.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York, W. W. Norton and Company), 334.

⁵² Katharine Q. Seelye, “Clark Says 'Rush to War' Based on Twisted Facts”, *New York Times*, October 6, 2008; available on <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F04E7DB153CF937A35753C1A9659C8B63>; accessed December 1, 2008.

⁵³ Dawn Kopecki, “Accusations of ‘Twisted Intelligence’: Defense Dept. Inspector General Tom Gimble told lawmakers that Pentagon officials manipulated data before the invasion of Iraq”, *BusinessWeek*, February 9, 2007; available on http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/feb2007/db20070209_682557.htm?chan=top+news_top+news+index_businessweek+exclusives; accessed December 1, 2008.

⁵⁴ Karen Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon papers”, *Salon*; available on http://dir.salon.com/story/opinion/feature/2004/03/10/osp_moveon/index.html; accessed December 10, 2008.

Scott McClellan, former White House Press Secretary to Bush, has recently said that “in the permanent campaign era, it was all about manipulating sources of public opinion to the president's advantage.”⁵⁵ He wrote in his book:

“Our lack of candor and honesty in making the case for war would later provoke a partisan response from our opponents that, in its own way, further distorted and obscured a more nuanced reality. Another cycle of deception would cloud the public’s ability to see larger, underlying important truths that are critical to understand in order to avoid the same problems in the future.”⁵⁶

In March of 2006 the New York Times published the contents of a confidential memo written by David Manning, Tony Blair’s foreign policy adviser. The NY Times article wrote:

“But behind closed doors, the president was certain that war was inevitable. During a private two-hour meeting in the Oval Office on Jan. 31, 2003, he made clear to Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain that he was determined to invade Iraq without the second resolution, or even if international arms inspectors failed to find unconventional weapons.”⁵⁷

In that memo Manning said that “Our diplomatic strategy had to be arranged around the military planning.”⁵⁸ Overall, enough documentation has exposed suspect methods of data gathering and policy planning on behalf of the U.S. to question the ‘truthfulness’ validity of the legal argument for invasion on grounds of self-defense.

⁵⁵ The Associated Press “Ex-aide Scott McClellan Rips Bush's Iraq ‘Propaganda’”, *Daily News*, May 28 2008, available on http://www.nydailynews.com/news/us_world/2008/05/28/2008-05-28_exaide_scott_mcclellan_rips_bushs_iraq_p.html; accessed December 10, 2008.

⁵⁶ Scott McClellan, *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington’s Culture of Deception*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 125

⁵⁷ Don Van Natta, “Bush Was Set on Path to War, British Memo Says”, *New York Times*, March 27, 2006; available on <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/27/international/europe/27memo.html>; accessed December 10, 2008.

⁵⁸ Ibid

Breach of UN Resolutions and the 'Rightness' Dimension of Validity

The U.S. legal argument of invasion for reason of Iraq's breach of UN resolutions did not satisfy the 'rightness' dimension, the dimension that requires the claim to adhere to basic norms of how the social world should operate. 'Rightness' adds an epistemic dimension to moral and legal decisions or rules, where notions of legal justice and morality become interlaced. "An agreement about norms or actions that has been attained discursively under ideal conditions carries more than merely authorizing force: it warrants the rightness of moral judgment"⁵⁹ Habermas makes a case then that rightness pertains to the compliance of rules as long as those rules are consensually accepted by society. Rightness in this legal argument then pertains to compliance of legal protocols when a state in question is in breach of UN resolutions. What then is the protocol? According to the UN charter Chapter 7, article 39:

"The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security."⁶⁰

This article states that only the UN Security Council may determine a threat to the peace, not an individual member state. This article would discredit the U.S.'s justification for invasion which was based on the argument that resolution 1441 somehow authorized military use. Resolution 1441 states: "that the Council has repeatedly warned Iraq that it will face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations".⁶¹ This point however, does not authorize any particular member state the power to use military force. John Negroponte even acknowledged in his statement to the Security Council.

⁵⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification* (Boston: MIT Press, 2003), 258.

⁶⁰ United Nations, *The Charter of the United Nations*; available on <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/pdf/uncharter.pdf>; accessed December 10, 2008.

⁶¹ United Nations, *Resolution 1441*, available on <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/682/26/PDF/N0268226.pdf?OpenElement>; accessed on December 10, 2008.

“this Resolution contains no ‘hidden triggers’ and no ‘automaticity’ with respect to the use of force. If there is a further Iraqi breach, reported to the Council by UNMOVIC, the IAEA, or a member state, the matter will return to the Council for discussions as required in paragraph 12.”⁶²

These two legal arguments by the U.S. did not satisfy all validity dimensions and thus could not reach understanding and consensus during the UN deliberations. Of the permanent five members of the Security Council, France, China and Russia were strongly against the premature invasion of Iraq. France threatened to veto any military action taken. China aligned itself with France in advocating for further inspections. Russia was willing to back the U.S. if the situation in Iraq did not change but rested on continued weapons inspections and multilateral consensus. Furthermore, of the temporary ten, the only members that supported the use of force were Bulgaria and Spain. Of the total fifteen members of the Security Council, U.S. ambitions to invade Iraq were backed only by the UK, Spain and Bulgaria. This was not enough given the nine out of fifteen supermajority required to pass a resolution. Despite no passage of any resolution, the U.S. invaded Iraq on March 20th 2003. Kofi Annan reported to the BBC after reviewing the charter and indicated that the invasion “was not in conformity with the UN charter from our point of view, from the charter’s point of view, it was illegal.”⁶³

The failure of the U.S. to reach consensus, especially the absence of ‘truthfulness’ during decision-making, doesn’t illustrate misunderstanding or miscommunication, it illustrates outright instrumental and strategic action, which according to Habermas is a parasitic form of communication and obstructs a process designed with communicative intent. This further comes to light when the U.S. was “determined to invade” despite the lack of consensus, which indicates the Bush Doctrine’s strong resistance to legitimation. What then is the reason for this resistance?

⁶² John Negroponte, “Explanation of Vote on Resolution 1441: Statement by Ambassador John Negroponte of the US” *Global Policy Forum*; available on <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/document/2002/1108usstat.htm>; accessed on December 10, 2008.

⁶³ “Iraq War Illegal, Says Annan,” *BBC*; available on http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3661134.stm; accessed on December 10, 2008.

The paper will argue that this resistance can be explained by examining Leo Strauss's critique of modernity because it is his thought that has been the most influential for the neoconservative movement. In particular, it is his fear of relativism that has been internalized by the neoconservative movement and embedded in the Bush Doctrine that resists the modern legitimation of rules.

Chapter 2: Leo Strauss

Introduction

The thoughts of Leo Strauss have received great attention, especially after the Iraq invasion. More and more scholars have found it necessary to explore the relationship between Strauss and the neoconservatives, and indeed there is one. James Atlas was one of the first to report on Strauss's influence saying that "the Bush Administration is rife with Straussians."⁶⁴ Jim Lobe later wrote "Strauss is a popular figure among the neoconservatives. Adherents of his ideas include prominent figures both within and outside the administration...Strauss' philosophy is hardly incidental to the strategy and mindset adopted by these men."⁶⁵ Anne Norton, a student of many of the Straussians such as Joseph Cropsey and Ralph Lerner, argues in respect to Straussians that "they were bound by politics as well: a distinctly and distinctively conservative politics. They have come to power and influenced the character of governance in the United States."⁶⁶ Shadia Drury writes "The power and influence of Strauss's students in Washington is a well-documented fact."⁶⁷ It is because of his influence on the neoconservative movement that it is so important to turn to his philosophy.

Strauss can be viewed as a sort of postmodernist given his critique of liberalism and rationalism in a modern era. For Strauss, both rationalism and liberalism cultivate a dangerous relativism that could destroy society's moral fabric. If modernity is the problem, then society must unearth the ways of its ancestors, which requires reversing our enlightenment and embracing ancient modes of power and control. Rather than building society on a foundation of reason, elites would be trusted to provide the masses

⁶⁴ James Atlas "Leo-Cons; A Classicist's Legacy: New Empire Builders," *The New York Times*; available on <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C07E7D8153CF937A35756C0A9659C8B63>; accessed on 10 December 2008.

⁶⁵ Jim Lobe "Leo Strauss' Philosophy of Deception," *AlterNet*; available on <http://www.alternet.org/story/15935/>; accessed on 10 December 2006.

⁶⁶ Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 2.

⁶⁷ Shadia Shadia, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) xi.

with information concerning morality and meaning. For Strauss, it is the ancients rather than the moderns that have built a stable society given their ability to safeguard against relativism. This chapter will focus on two aspects that are important to understand Strauss's political thought: 1) his suspicions of liberalism, and 2) his preference for cultural elites.

The Ancient and Modern Dichotomy

A key feature of Strauss's political thought is his dichotomy between the ancients and the moderns, more specifically the departure from antiquity and the crisis of modernity, a debate that is essentially at the heart of Straussianism. This dichotomy is not to be understood as an evolution of an ancient world to a modern one, but rather a transformation of moral and political understanding through a new conception of nature. According to Strauss:

Traditional natural law is primarily and mainly an objective 'rule and measure', a binding order prior to, and independent of, the human will, while modern natural law is, or tends to be, primarily and mainly a series of 'rights', of subjective claims, originating in the human will.⁶⁸

The antiquarian conception of nature was a world order in which human behavior would act in accordance with. Conversely, modern conceptions of nature departed from the subjugation of man's will and would champion what Strauss would call a 'conquest of nature'. This conquest was, for Strauss, a "present-day tyranny" of progress made possible through the advancement of science and knowledge. What seemed unnatural and perverse to the ancients would now dominate present-day political philosophy — that man would rule over nature.⁶⁹ It is the opposing notions of nature, and therefore ultimately opposing epistemological understanding of moral behavior, that makes distinct modernity from antiquity.

⁶⁸ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1952) vii – viii.

⁶⁹ Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963) 189-191.

Strauss traces the advent of modernity back to Machiavelli as the first modern philosopher. Strauss would call this the first wave of modernity which would be developed further by the Enlightenment.⁷⁰ Machiavelli's distinct conception of nature can be understood through the notion of virtue. As Strauss puts it:

The Traditional approach was based on the assumption that morality is something substantial: that it is a force in the soul of man, however ineffective it may be especially in the affairs of states and kingdoms. Against this assumption Machiavelli argues as follows: virtue can be practiced only within society; man must be habituated to virtue by laws, customs and so forth. Men must be educated to virtue by human beings.⁷¹

What makes Machiavelli's conception of virtue modern is his humanism. This is a departure from ancient virtue in that it no longer precedes, and therefore provides, guiding principles for the good of society. Rather, virtue is achieved now through actions taken for the ends of society, despite how those actions might be viewed in terms of ancient virtue. Modern political philosophy thus has transformed the notion of virtue into a construction no longer to be understood in terms of morality but rather in terms of the civic. The argument thus becomes: what is virtuous is so because it is good for the city.^{72,73}

It is important to note, for the purpose of this paper, what is crucial to understanding Machiavelli's virtù — his critical stance towards religion, specifically Christianity. According to Machiavelli:

Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative men, rather than men of action... But though it looks as if the world were become effeminate, and if heaven were powerless, this undoubtably is due rather to the pusillanimity of

⁷⁰ Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) 84-87.

⁷¹ Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959) 41-42.

⁷² *Ibid* 40-49.

⁷³ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1952) 129-131.

those who have interpreted our religion in terms of *laissez faire*, not in terms of virtù.⁷⁴

Christianity glorified nature's rule over man and was therefore antithetical to virtue. On the other hand, civic virtue was aggressive and passionate; it drove men to action.

It is here that we understand Strauss's distinction between the moderns and the ancients. Modernity's conception of virtue is no longer compatible with antiquity's political philosophy. By constructing virtue in terms of the civic, the moderns have transformed political philosophy from what was once antiquity's purely reflective pursuits to now be bonded with a present-day praxis. Political philosophy would finally waken in modernity to find man ruling over nature.

The Crisis of Modernity

Modernity is central to much of Strauss's work and, again understood as a present-day political philosophy and a new conception of nature, would become a major point of his criticism. Strauss is well known for advising a return to the ancients. Strauss writes:

It is not self-forgetting and pain-loving antiquarianism nor self-forgetting and intoxicating romanticism which induces us to turn with passionate interest, with unqualified willingness to learn, toward the political thought of classical antiquity. We are impelled to do so by the crisis of our time, the crisis of the West.⁷⁵

To better understand why modernity or the West was in crisis it is important to start with the thoughts of those who first recognized a crisis thus laying the foundation for much of Strauss's work. Those thoughts belong to Nietzsche. In fact much of Strauss's work was in response to the ideas of Nietzsche. Strauss's letter to Karl Löwith illustrates this as he

⁷⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 278.

⁷⁵ Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 1.

said “Nietzsche so dominated and bewitched me between my 22nd and 30th years, that I literally believed everything that I understood of him”.⁷⁶

It is *The Birth of Tragedy* where Strauss was introduced to Nietzsche’s crisis of the West.⁷⁷ Nietzsche uses Socrates as a symbol of false hope that true knowledge is attainable, that we can understand the self and use knowledge to improve the self. According to Nietzsche:

By contrast with this practical pessimism, Socrates is the prototype of the theoretical optimist who, with his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed, ascribes to knowledge and insight the power of a panacea, while understanding error as the evil par excellence...But science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly toward its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck.⁷⁸

For Nietzsche we can never know things-in-themselves including ourselves. Humanity was promised, by science and knowledge, an improvement of our condition only to find the loss of meaning for our existence.⁷⁹

Strauss’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* further displays what is at the heart of Nietzsche’s crisis — our perspectivism. For Nietzsche, there is no objective judgment of truth but rather there are several ways to see the world based on each person’s perspective of truth. Nietzsche provides three assumptions:

- Everything is interpretation or construction
- Constructed truths are ‘life-giving’
- No constructed truth is everlasting

⁷⁶ Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 83.

⁷⁷ Ibid 80-82.

⁷⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) 97.

⁷⁹ Catherine and Michael Zuckert. *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 80-83.

Thus we understand how knowledge destroys the meanings humanity lives by. Understanding that truth is nothing more than construction and temporary enlightens us about our perspectivism, and we become nihilistic.⁸⁰

Strauss's interpretation of Nietzsche does not end with an existential dilemma but pursues this nihilism further into the moral and political. The sciences of modernity provide the knowledge of other notions of 'right', harboring a sense of conventionalism, the "contention that the variety of notions of right proves the nonexistence of natural right or the conventional character of all right."⁸¹ Strauss's conventionalism recognizes the varying notions of right spatially but focuses more so on their temporal nature; notions of right are subject not only to location but have also been subject to the whims of historical conditions. In Strauss's words:

The fundamental premise of conventionalism is, then, nothing other than the idea of philosophy as the attempt to grasp the eternal. The modern opponents of natural right reject precisely this idea. According to them, all human thought is historical and hence unable ever to grasp anything eternal. Whereas, according to the ancients, philosophizing means to leave the cave, according to our contemporaries all philosophizing essentially belongs to a "historical world", "culture," "civilization," "Weltanschauung," that is, to what Plato had called the cave. We shall call this view "historicism."⁸²

This historicism, a particular form of positive science in search for objective truths, would confess rather our perspectivism, destroying all normative universal principles and declare a state of nihilism for the new world.⁸³ Here we understand the crisis of modernity in Strauss's thought. The conquest over nature is humanity's attempt to improve its situation through scientific understanding which inadvertently results in the historicization of morality. Machiavelli's modernizing of political philosophy produced the foundation for the second and third wave of modernity, reaching its climax in

⁸⁰ Shadia B. Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 170-172.

⁸¹ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) 10.

⁸² *Ibid* 12.

⁸³ *Ibid* 14-20.

Nietzsche's nihilism and illustrating our greatest irony — "The attempt to make man absolutely at home in this world ended in man's becoming absolutely homeless."⁸⁴ By transforming virtue from the moral to the civic we paved the way for a destructive nihilism and lost our ability to act morally in the city. For Strauss, historicism's destruction of all natural right authorities would elevate itself as the new and only authority of relativism, leaving humanity in moral loath and despair.

Modernity and American Liberalism

It is important, then, to understand Strauss's crisis of modernity in context of the West's liberal traditions (in particular the U.S.), for they are closely related. For Strauss, liberalism is very much a part of modernity. In fact modernity assumes liberalism, thus also assumes an integral part for liberalism in modernity's crisis.⁸⁵ Catherine and Michael Zuckert, both former students of Strauss, write:

"What is needed, in other words, is Enlightenment, that is, the spread within society of truths discerned by philosophy and the replacement of old opinions, understood now as mere prejudices, by these new truths. Philosophy thus became particularly eager to have an effect — to remake the world. As Strauss puts it, philosophy, while not giving up its aspiration to truth, also becomes propaganda, the conscious effort to reshape opinion through public teaching. America was founded by men who were heirs to this project."⁸⁶

Machiavelli's 'modern project' was inherited by John Locke, Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, Voltaire and other prominent Enlightenment thinkers who would further develop modernity and champion the liberal ideal, an ideal that Strauss would show suspicion for.

Strauss's unique perspective of liberalism is due in part to his experience in the Germany. The Weimer Republic would draft its constitution after World War I and thus

⁸⁴ Ibid 18.

⁸⁵ Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth About Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 58-64.

⁸⁶ Ibid 6.

began its liberal experiment. However, Germany had no history of democracy and this would prove problematic for an effective republic. Democracy was predestined to fail as most political groups were opposed to a parliamentary structure. Hitler would become chancellor in 1933 and brought Germany to Nazi rule a year later.⁸⁷

Though there are several reasons as to why Germany's republic failed, Strauss claims that it's simply the nature of liberalism to "plant the seeds for its own destruction". The rise of Hitler and the horrors of Nazi Germany both illustrate, for Strauss, the inevitable tyranny that awaits liberalism.⁸⁸

Strauss's critique of liberalism is understood through the crisis of modernity, more specifically he feared modern relativism would surface through America's liberal traditions. Thomas Pangle wrote, referring to American culture, that "Ours is the culture of "humanism" and "humanity's enlightenment", "to and through reason and rationalism."⁸⁹ Reason and rationalism would, however, cultivate for Strauss a deadly tolerance.

"But there is a tension between the respect for diversity or individuality and the recognition of natural right. When liberals became impatient of the absolute limits to diversity or individuality that are imposed even by the most liberal version of natural right, they had to make a choice between natural right and the uninhibited cultivation of individuality. They chose the latter. Once this step was taken, tolerance appeared as one value or ideal among many, and not intrinsically superior to its opposite. In other words intolerance appeared as a value equal in dignity to tolerance."⁹⁰

Our inability to discern any natural right has led to the acceptance of all notions of natural right, leading furthermore to nihilism and eventually to tolerate the intolerant. For Strauss this would lead to humankind's inability to live as "responsible beings" and

⁸⁷ Shadia Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 4-6.

⁸⁸ Ibid 7-9.

⁸⁹ Thomas Pangle, *Leo Strauss: An Introduction to his Thought and Intellectual Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) 8.

⁹⁰ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) 5.

ultimately the destruction of history and our moral fabric. His prescription would be to “silence the easily silenced voice of reason” lest we fell to “radical obscurantism”.⁹¹

Platonic Elitism and Deception through Culture

Strauss recognized the conventional nature of morality and meaning and understood those conventions as products of power. Silencing the voice of reason meant maintaining power in society. Unlike the Enlightenment, which was advocated for egalitarian designs, the ancients accepted inequality and subordination as natural. Accordingly, the best form of government should be one exemplary of nature, where power is the determining force. Strauss would find such a society in Plato’s Republic, socially designed to maintain a natural hierarchy. In that were the tools necessary for silencing reason – myths handed down from the nobles, providing for the demos meaning and purpose for their stratification, ultimately maintaining hierarchical integrity. Plato illustrates for us this noble lie:

Citizens, we shall say to them in our tale, you are brothers, yet God has framed you differently. Some of you have the power of command, and in the composition of these he has mingled gold. Wherefore also they have the greatest honor; others he has made of silver, to be auxiliaries; others against who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen he has composed of brass and iron.⁹²

Strauss believed, like Plato, that “the good city is not possible than without a fundamental falsehood; it cannot exist in the element of truth, of nature.”⁹³ For Strauss deception was an integral and necessary component of the healthy society. He elaborated on two dimensions of Plato’s noble lie. The first is designed to bind the citizens together for reasons of social cohesion. It would foster a national fraternity among the citizens through myths of the nation. According to Strauss, “The fraternity of all human beings is

⁹¹ Ibid 6.

⁹² Plato, *Republic* (New York: Barnes and Nobles Classics, 2004) 112.

⁹³ Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 102.

to be replaced by the fraternity of all fellow citizens.”⁹⁴ The second was to qualify the inequality of fellow citizens through the myth of religion. Again, he writes: “While the fraternity is traced to the earth, the inequality is traced to the god.”⁹⁵ Religion would provide justification for the natural hierarchy that takes place in humankind. The justification for hierarchy plays a practical role, not just as part of the myth but in the very dissemination of myths. Lies are “useful only as a medicine to men” and “the use of such medicines should be restricted to physicians”, those physicians being the elite.⁹⁶ However, it is important to note the nature of Strauss’s elite, that being the distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers. According to Zuckert and Zuckert, “what distinguishes Strauss’s elite is not wealth, status, political, military, or economic power, but recognition of ‘the truth’”.⁹⁷ It was, for Straus, the manipulative role of the philosopher kings to deceive the masses to assure a healthy society:

Again, truth should be highly valued; If, as we were saying; private individuals have no business with them... Then if anyone at all is to have the privilege of lying, the rulers of the state should be the persons.

As this passage suggests, only the elite is morally equipped to design and deceive the nation. The use of nationalism and religion ensure social cohesion by creating culture. Culture provides society with purpose and moral identity. It is these two dimensions of the noble lie that maintain the health of the society and safeguard it from the dangers of relativism.

Strauss on Schmitt: The Concept of the Political

Carl Schmitt’s essay, *Concept of the Political* offered a new domain of interest, that being the political, which would provide the state with its own domain of predominance. This concept of the political is understood through a distinction, and this distinction in which

⁹⁴ Ibid 102.

⁹⁵ Ibid 102.

⁹⁶ Plato, *Republic* (New York: Barnes and Nobles Classics, 2004) 78.

⁹⁷ Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth About Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 7.

“political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friends and enemy.”⁹⁸ He elaborates on the nature of the other:

The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in a extreme case conflicts with him are possible.⁹⁹

For Schmitt the unity and identity of a group or the state is possible only in the juxtaposition to the “other”. This ‘othering’ makes war between groups very real, however, at the same time, provides those groups with an identity formation process; thus it is our struggle against each other that is the “pervasive and determining forces of human existence”.¹⁰⁰

Strauss would find this Hobbesian existentialism attractive because it was affirming of the political and critical of liberalism. He writes:

It thus becomes clear why Schmitt rejects the ideal of pacifism (more fundamentally: of civilization), why he affirms the political: he affirms the political because he sees in the threatened status of the political a threat to the seriousness of life.¹⁰¹

For Schmitt, the political was a necessary condition, one of threat and struggle, so that we may place value on our lives and take responsibility for it. In an age of modernity

⁹⁸ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 26.

⁹⁹ Ibid 27.

¹⁰⁰ Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 188.

¹⁰¹ Leo Strauss, “Notes on *The Concept of the Political*,” in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996) 101.

however, liberalism and its promotion of ethical universalism would depoliticize the world, thus trivializing and destroying the meaning of our existence.¹⁰²

Strauss would agree with Schmitt that liberalism has failed but he would disagree with Schmitt's critique of liberalism. For Strauss, Schmitt "remained within the orbit of modernity" by employing a main architect of liberalism, Hobbes, to explain the friend/enemy distinction as intrinsic to the political.¹⁰³ Thus Schmitt's affirmation of the political never materialized as a negation of liberalism, and, furthermore, such negation was never really necessary to begin with. Strauss argues:

We said that Schmitt undertakes the critique of liberalism in a liberal world; and we meant thereby that his critique of liberalism occurs in the horizon of liberalism; his unliberal tendency is restrained by the still unvanquished "systematics of liberal thought." The critique introduced by Schmitt against liberalism can therefore be completed only if one succeeds in gaining a horizon beyond liberalism.¹⁰⁴

Moving beyond the horizon of liberalism, beyond Hobbes, would challenge the idea of the friend/enemy distinction as intrinsic to the political. Such an understanding could be found in the ancients, where the distinction between friends and enemies is only a derivative of the political. Like Schmitt's conception of the political, the ancients too recognized the tendency for man to form into groups. However, such groupings would not rise out of enmity for another but instead were born out of man's desire to "perfect human nature as social and rational."¹⁰⁵ Each society, again, traced to the earth for territorial boundaries, would also be traced to the God for moral boundaries. These moral boundaries, what was moral permissible and not, binds society together and provides meaning and purpose, making each group morally particularistic.

¹⁰²Tracy B Strong, "Forward: Dimensions of the New Debate Around Carl Schmitt" in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) xiii-xx.

¹⁰³ Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 187.

¹⁰⁴ Leo Strauss, "Notes on *The Concept of the Political*," in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 107.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 193.

Strauss sought for a higher, not a lower, understanding of the significance and priority of the political. Strauss came to understand the political in relation to the highest in humanity, and that led him to emphasize the dignity, not the viciousness, of potential life.¹⁰⁶

For Strauss the concept of the political is not defined by friends and enemies but rather a desire to reach perfection through the practice of moral behavior. Friend/enemy distinctions are only derivatives of each groups' moral particularism.

However, Strauss is quick to remind us that though humankind's intentions are virtuous, the friend/enemy distinction that derives from it remains real and grim and reminds us as to why it, at times, seems appropriate for Schmitt to explain it through Hobbes. Strauss writes:

In other words, it became clearer that it had been for some time that no bloody or unbloody change of society can eradicate the evil in man: as long as there will be men, there will be malice, envy and hatred.¹⁰⁷

The consequences of this reveal themselves as ironic; it is our desire to reach perfection through moral practice that paints the world as a constant struggle between good and evil leaving humankind to conceive the world normatively in terms of 'us and them', and the prophecy fulfills itself.

Strauss, like Schmitt, finds that it is important for the world to remain political. He claims that "there cannot be a universal state, unitary or federative".¹⁰⁸ However, unlike Schmitt, Strauss does not think it is necessary because it negates liberalism, but rather it is a result of our highest moral aspirations which are necessary for making humankind responsible members of society. A universal state can only signal an erosion of our 'life-giving' myths and the disintegration of society. Strauss argues this point when talking about the West's "experience of Communism" and the lessons learned:

¹⁰⁶ Ibid 194.

¹⁰⁷ Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) 5.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid 6.

Apart from the fact that there does not exist now a universal federation of nations but only of those nations which are called peace-loving, the federation that exists masks the fundamental cleavage. If that federation is taken to seriously, as a milestone on man's onward march toward the perfect and hence universal society, one is bound to take great risks supported by nothing but an inherited and perhaps antiquated hope, and thus to endanger the very progress one endeavors to bring about...Even if one would still contend that the Western purpose is as universal as the Communist, one must rest satisfied for the foreseeable future with a practical particularism.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore Strauss agrees with Schmitt that the threatened status of the political threatens the seriousness of life. However, Strauss goes further than Schmitt and traces the seriousness of life not to the political but what, as the classics understood, creates the political, that being our desire to reach perfection through moral practice. Strauss continues:

The situation resembles the one which existed during the centuries in which Cristianity and Islam each raised its universal claim but had to be satisfied with uneasily coexisting with its antagonist. All this amounts to saying that for the foreseeable future, political society remains what it always has been: a partial or particular society who most urgent and primary task is its self-preservation and whose highest task is its self-improvement.¹¹⁰

Ultimately for Strauss, it is our sense of self, our character and virtue, which is defined through moral practice and self-improvement, that separates life-as-serious from life-as-mere-entertainment. This arranges humankind into conflicting groups, because, in Schmitt's words, "the political world is a pluriverse, not a universe"¹¹¹ where war is not born out of blind enmity but out of moral necessity and though this conflict is

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 6.

¹¹⁰ Ibid 6.

¹¹¹ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 53.

unfortunate, Strauss considers this better than the depolitical alternative that dehumanizes and trivializes our existence.

Conclusion

To summarize, Strauss's postmodernism can be understood through his arguments against the rationalism and egalitarianism that emerge under liberalism. For Strauss, social order depends on the cultivation of life-giving myths; more specifically societies need to be founded on strong religious and nationalistic convictions that constitute a culture. Rationalism and science, however, expose these religious and national beliefs as having no inherent truth or natural right. Modernity would then witness this nihilism converge with the liberal movement's celebration of the individual. Strauss feared that liberal societies would destroy culture and collapse without a sense of natural right to constrain the individual's self-interests.

Understanding Strauss's anxieties about modernity's rationalism and liberalism clarifies as to what his 'return to the ancients' is and why he prescribes it. It is a contraposition to modernity by prescribing what is antithetical to both rationalism and liberalism. Strauss argues that it is the role of the elites to propagate myths that provide the masses with cultural truth and natural right. He perceives a destructive self-interested relativism growing from liberalism's egalitarian designs and the advancement of knowledge. He combats this by supplanting liberalism with cultural elites and knowledge with myths of nation and origin. For Strauss, elites and myths co-act to form the concept of Platonic elitism, where the role of the elite is to transmit such myths in order to protect society from the dangers of relativism. Simply put, Platonic elites safeguard society from moral relativism by the use of their power to assert religious and nationalistic values. These values constitute a culture that informs what the regime, the nature of the political society, would look like. It is the character of the regime that frames foreign policy, an expression of its own particular character, which inevitably becomes contentious among differing regimes. For Strauss, regime is at the core of the 'political' – friend/enemy distinctions are only a symptom of the 'political'.

It is these two major points of Strauss's fear of relativism, 1) his suspicion of liberalism and 2) Platonic elitism, that neoconservatives have internalized as their own. The next chapter will demonstrate how these two points have been translated and employed by the neoconservative movement.

Chapter 3: Linking Neoconservatism to Straussianism

Introduction

Many neoconservatives were quite open about their admiration for Strauss. Irving Kristol, often called the “godfather” of neoconservatism, describes reading Strauss as “the kind of intellectual shock that is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. He turned one’s intellectual universe upside down.”¹¹² Allan Bloom claimed that meeting Strauss had been the “decisive moment” of his life.¹¹³ Strauss’s thought would have such an impact on his students and readers that it would form a close circle of scholars and intellectuals faithful to the Straussian discipline. Werner J. Dannhauser illustrates this best by saying, “Leo Strauss was like a sun around which we thought ourselves privileged to orbit”.¹¹⁴ Many have referred to such students of Strauss as ‘disciples’. Whether the term has risen out of mockery or endearment, several Straussians have accepted the title.

What truly links neoconservatism to Straussianism is the fear of relativism that is suspicious of liberalism and works to establish cultural elites. The neoconservative movement, which grew around intellectuals such as Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, believed they were witnessing the disintegration of Western society through the culture wars of the 1960s and 1970s and the Cold War. They feared that the anti-Americanism during the culture wars and détente with the Soviets were signs of growing relativism in our modern society. Norman Podhoretz writes:

¹¹² Irving Kristol, “An Autobiographical Memoir” in *Neoconservatism: An Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press) 7.

¹¹³ Walter Nicgorski, “Allan Bloom: Strauss, Socrates, and Liberal Education” ed. Kenneth L. Deutsch and John Albert Murley, *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1999) 208.

¹¹⁴ Dannhauser, Werner J, “Allan Bloom: A Reminiscence” ed. Robert Palmer and Thomas Pangle, *Political Philosophy and the Human Soul: Essays in Memory of Allan Bloom* (Maryland: Roman and Littlefield, 1995) 5.

“Finally, there was the realm of culture. If anti-Communism was the ruling passion of the neoconservatives in foreign affairs, opposition to the counterculture of the 1960s was their ruling passion at home. Indeed, I suspect that revulsion against the counterculture accounted for more converts to neoconservatism than any other single factor.”¹¹⁵

This chapter, then, will evidence the link between Straussianism and neoconservatism by demonstrating the fear of relativism in two historical periods: 1) the neoconservative response to the culture wars of the mid 1960s and early 1970s and 2) their rise of political power during the Cold War.

The Culture Wars

“Leo Strauss became a significant factor in the culture war, and neoconservatives brought Strauss in.”¹¹⁶ – Irving Kristol

Neoconservative fear of relativism will be demonstrated through their hostility towards liberalism and desire to establish cultural elites. The hostility towards liberalism will be evidenced through their opposition towards the counterculture’s tolerance, individualism and egalitarianism. Such liberalism would invite a moral relativism through the emergence of multiculturalism and general anti-Americanism that would follow. Platonic elitism, again meaning the employment of power or status to affirm traditional and cultural values, will be evidenced through the assertion of religious truths and the championing of American nationalism.

¹¹⁵ Norman Podhoretz, “Neoconservatism: A Eulogy”; available on http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.18103,filter.all/pub_detail.asp; accessed 10 December, 2008.

¹¹⁶ Ronald Bailey, “The Voice of Neoconservatism ‘We in America fought a culture war, and we lost’”; available on <http://www.reason.com/news/show/34900.html>; accessed 10 December, 2008

Hostility towards Liberalism – Opposition to Counterculture

America in the 1960s witnessed new and progressive political and cultural trends. This era saw the emergence of the New Left and Johnson's "Great Society". Issues of equality became more urgent during this time as seen with the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the war on poverty. Under the civil rights movement new reforms passed such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Right Act of 1965. Johnson's War on Poverty passed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 which was followed by a number of programs aimed at eliminating poverty. The Higher Education Act of 1965 granted more money to universities and made loans more accessible to students.

But reform did not take place without struggle. Race riots broke out in Watts, Detroit, and Cleveland in the late 1960s.¹¹⁷ The Stonewall riots marked the beginning of violent struggles for the LGBT. Possibly the largest radical movement was the student rebellions voicing a variety of issues ranging from curricular reforms to protesting against the Vietnam War. Students, for instance, engaged in campus riots, sit-in, and marches. The death of four students by the National Guard at Kent State marked the violent consequences of crackdowns.¹¹⁸

In addition, there was religious and sexual experimentalism in which younger generations pushed the boundaries of decency through homosexuality, libertinism, intoxication, excess. Suicide, out-of-wedlock-birth, divorce, drug use and other signs of crisis rose. For the neoconservatives, these times highlighted a time of moral decadence and crisis and marked a new culture emerging in opposition to the current one, a counterculture. Peter Steinfels accurately describes the neoconservatives' reactions to this period.

"The current crisis is primarily a cultural crisis, a matter of values, morals, and manners. Though this crisis has causes and consequences on the level of socioeconomic structures, neoconservatism, unlike the Left, tends to think these

¹¹⁷ Michael A. Peters "Leo Strauss and the Neoconservative Critique of the Liberal University: Postmodernism, Relativism and the Culture Wars," *Critical Studies in Education*, Vol 49, No. 1 (March 2008) 15

¹¹⁸ Ibid 16.

have performed well. The problem is that our convictions have gone slack, our morals loose, our manners corrupt.”¹¹⁹

Here is where we understand the neoconservative critique of liberalism, through their concerns of the counterculture. The New Left of the 1960s spawned a counterculture that neoconservatives viewed as “cynical, nihilistic, and exploitative.”¹²⁰ As one of the main actors in this countercultural movement, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) popularized political radicalism and extremism through various student rebellions.¹²¹ However, while the SDS saw their struggle on campuses as one that might improve society, neoconservatives saw it as one that would destroy society. Neoconservatives, such as Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Irving Kristol and Allan Bloom were some of the most vocal against the student rebellions. Bloom, referring to the universities in the 1960s, has said “I know of nothing positive coming from that period; it was an unmitigated disaster for them”.¹²² Kristol wrote in his memoirs:

“The major event of that period was the student rebellion and the rise of the counterculture, with its messianic expectations and its apocalyptic fears... Suddenly we discovered that we had been cultural conservatives all along.”¹²³

Glazer wrote in “The Campus Crucible”:

“...My first reaction to the student disruption – and it is not only an emotional one – is to consider how the disrupters can be isolated and weakened, how their influence, which is now enormous among students, can be reduced, how

¹¹⁹ Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 55.

¹²⁰ Irving Kristol “Countercultures,” *Neoconservatism: An Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press, 1995) 146.

¹²¹ Waldemar A. Nielsen *Golden Donors: A New Anatomy of the Great Foundations* (Transaction Publishers, 2001) 40-41.

¹²² Allan Bloom *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) 320.

¹²³ Irving Kristol “An Autobiographical Memoir,” *Neoconservatism: An Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press) 31.

dissension among them can be encouraged, and how they can be finally removed from a community they wish to destroy.”¹²⁴

Podhoretz wrote in “Neoconservatism: A Eulogy”:

“Indeed, I suspect that revulsion against the counterculture accounted for more converts to neoconservatism than any other single factor. This revulsion was not only directed against the counterculture itself; it was also inspired by the abject failure of the great institutions of liberal community to resist the counterculture...In part the problem was simple moral cowardice, but in part it was sheer inability of these institutions to defend themselves intellectually when they came under attack.”¹²⁵

Podhoretz illustrates here not only revulsion against the counterculture but liberalism itself. Here is where we can draw one of the links between Straussianism and neoconservatism, not simply because of their mutual criticism of liberalism but because the founders of neoconservatism had adopted Strauss’s logic that “liberalism leads to relativism”. To critique this point requires understanding the neoconservative reaction to the New Left’s egalitarian demands. Irving Kristol, considered to be the ‘godfather of neoconservatism’ demonstrates this best in his work. He argues that demands for greater equality are not rooted in inequality at all. In fact, Kristol claims that inequality is healthy in society. Much like Strauss who favored the ancient’s model of social hierarchy exemplary of the inequalities found in nature, so too does Kristol advocate for Aristotle’s legitimate society, “in which inequalities – of property, or station, or power – are generally perceived by the citizenry as necessary for the common good”.¹²⁶ He goes on to say that dissatisfaction with this definition of a legitimate society arises from

¹²⁴ Nathan Glazer “The Campus Crucible: Student Politics and the University,” in *The Essential Neoconservative Reader*, ed. Mark Gerson (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1996) 55.

¹²⁵ Norman Podhoretz “Neoconservatism: A Eulogy,” *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research* available on; http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.18103,filter.all/pub_detail.asp; accessed on January 10, 2000.

¹²⁶ Irving Kristol “About Equality,” in *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Free Press, 1995) 167.

liberalism's conception of it. However, he claims that liberalism *itself* is inequitable because it is "based on a deficient conception of the common good".¹²⁷ It cannot provide the equality that it promises and so its critics become more enraged but "there are no reforms that are going to placate the egalitarian impulse".¹²⁸

For Kristol, much like Strauss, crisis in society is not rooted in inequality but rather how equality leads to nihilism. His crisis of liberalism, then, isn't understood to end with egalitarianism but rather how egalitarian struggles leave societies in a "religious vacuum – a lack of meaning in their own lives, and the absence of a sense of larger purpose in their society – that terrifies them and provokes them to 'alienation' and unappeasable indignation".¹²⁹ According to Kristol:

"They have obtained enough of the comforts of bourgeois civilization, and have a secure enough grip upon them, to permit themselves the luxury of reflecting uneasily upon the inadequacies of their civilization. They then discover that a life that is without a sense of purpose creates an acute experience of anxiety, which in turn transforms the universe into a hostile, repressive place. The spiritual history of mankind is full of such existential moments, which are the seedbeds of Gnostic and millenarian movements – movements that aim at both spiritual and material reformations. Radical egalitarianism is, in our day, exactly such a movement."¹³⁰

Kristol claims that a secular sense of success has replaced the religious sense of virtue. Understanding Kristol's argument further links neoconservatism to Strauss's suspicions of liberalism. Kristol's argument reflects Strauss's concerns of constructing virtue in terms of the civic. This was the virtue of Machiavelli, the original modern thinker who glorified men of action, launching a direction of human history towards the enlightenment and Adam Smith's market economy. This was important for Kristol because for him Smith was the first in history to establish a "moral legitimacy of a market

¹²⁷ Ibid p. 172

¹²⁸ Ibid p. 172

¹²⁹ Ibid p. 178

¹³⁰ Ibid p. 172

economy based on self-interested activity”.¹³¹ However, this would lead to cultural attitudes being subject to self-interest and matters of taste which would leave the heirs of Adam Smith “powerless against capitalism’s cultural critics” and void of a moral compass.¹³² Kristol Writes:

“Bourgeois Society is [Smiths] legacy, for good and ill. For good, in that it has produced through the market economy a world prosperous beyond all previous imaginings – even social imaginings. For ill, in that this world, with every passing decade, has become ever more spiritually impoverished. That war on poverty is the great unfinished task before us.”¹³³

Our capitalist society, though originally successful in because of its incorporation of moral tradition, entered into a “crisis of faith” because it “erred in cutting this moral tradition away from the religious context that nourished it”.¹³⁴ Instead, for Kristol, American capitalism had popularized consumerism and materialism, pandering to our physical wants rather than our spiritual needs. Launching our history in such a direction would culminate with Nietzsche’s nihilism, an era that provided no “transcendent meaning” and therefore no metaphysical justification for inequality in bourgeois society¹³⁵; rather inequality was a function of the market economy’s neutrality. Thus history culminates, for Kristol with his ‘crisis of faith’ or rather his ‘crisis of bourgeois society’, and to further draw the link, runs parallel with Strauss’s crisis of modernity. According to Kristol:

“Nietzsche and his disciple, the Nazi sympathizer Martin Heidegger, are almost unanimously regarded as the two philosophical giants of the modern era. It is important to understand that their teachings are subversive not only of bourgeois society and Judeo-Christian tradition but also of secular humanism, secular

¹³¹ Ibid p. 124

¹³² Ibid p. 128

¹³³ Ibid p. 135

¹³⁴ Ibid p. 133

¹³⁵ Ibid p. 133

rationalism, bourgeois morality – and, in the end, of Western civilization itself.”¹³⁶

According to Kristol religion and cultural orthodoxy are imperative for societal stability. However, with the countercultural attack on orthodoxy, Kristol and the neoconservatives believed they were witnessing the breakdown of Western civilization itself. For them the culture wars were evidence that liberal society fostered a deadly relativism that led to nihilism. The New Left’s egalitarian struggles championed the individual’s right to equal access and recognition but at the expense of moral society. The stability of a society is dependant on a shared sense of religious origin and a unique national destiny, or indeed a strong sense of collectivism. However, American liberalism cultivated an atomistic individualism that ran counter to the neoconservative conception of stability through collectivism. Individual preferences were now as legitimate as the next and should be tolerated as such. What would follow were the temptations of Dionysus and our fall into moral decadence.

Crisis became more evident when individual’s particular moral beliefs challenged those shared forms of identity meant to hold society together, more specifically when Americans protested against the Vietnam War. In a sense the counterculture was “alienated from the modern traditions that created them.”¹³⁷ America became enlightened to the conventional nature of its myths especially the myth of the nation which was evident in the protests against the Vietnam War.

“The central aspect of the antiwar movement was less its rejection of Vietnam War than its rejection of the United States. The argument was less that the war was unwise or unnecessary than that the United States was immoral – a ‘sick society’ guilty of racism, materialism, imperialism, and murder of the Third World people of Vietnam”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Ibid p. 134

¹³⁷ Ibid p. 137

¹³⁸ Jeane Kirkpatrick “Neoconservatism as a Response to the Counterculture,” in *The Neocon Reader*, ed. Irwin M. Stelzer. Grove Press. 2004 p. 239

In general, for neoconservatives counterculture was inevitable because its cause were internal, originating from America's latest secular and humanist inclinations.¹³⁹ American modern humanism provided counterculture with a new found agency to improve our political and social conditions, to construct virtue in terms of the civic. Neoconservatives were apprehensive; the liberalism of this period for them, all too suggestive of the modern problem – that our conquest over nature would undoubtedly direct us towards relativism.

Platonic Elitism – Affirmation of Religious/Cultural Orthodoxy

The origins of neoconservatism are rooted in their perceived development of crisis during the 1960s and 1970s, but this is not where it ends. Neoconservatism was not interested in being a mere witness to history but wanted to change it. It was, after all, a movement itself. Neoconservatism emerged as a force to combat the effects of counter-culture. Podhoretz has stated:

“Neoconservatism came into the world to combat the dangerous lies that were being spread by the radicalism of the sixties and that were being accepted as truth by the established liberal institutions of the day.”¹⁴⁰

The neoconservative movement worked to combat the crisis in American culture and politics – but how? The answer lies in the nature of their crisis, the egalitarian imperatives and hostilities towards religious and nationalistic orthodoxy. This is illustrative, again, of Strauss's influence on their determination to revive a shared sense of origin and destiny through traditional religious and American values; the use Plato's noble lie. Kristol has stated:

“Countercultures are dangerous phenomena even as they are inevitable. Their destructive power always far exceeds their constructive power. The delicate task

¹³⁹ Irving Kristol “Countercultures,” *Neoconservatism: An Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press) 136-137.

¹⁴⁰ James Nuechterlein “The End of Neoconservatism,” *First Thing*, May 1996

that faces our civilization today is not to reform the secular rationalist orthodoxy, which has passed beyond the point of redemption. Rather, it is to breathe new life into the older, now largely comatose, religious orthodoxy – while resisting the counterculture as best we can, adapting to it and reshaping it where we can not simply resist.”¹⁴¹

This is where we can evidence the Platonic elitism in neoconservatism; to “breath new life” into the religious orthodoxy, to revive religious traditional myths. Michael Lind writes:

“For the neoconservatives, religion is an instrument of promoting morality. Religion becomes what Plato called a “noble lie.” It is a myth which is told to the majority of the society by the philosophical elite in order to ensure social order.”¹⁴²

However, this only provides us with the neoconservative’s mission, it does not answer what tools they would use or how they would “breath life” into the older orthodoxy. They would do so through various publication especially *The Public Interest*.

In 1965, Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan started *The Public Interest* with the intention of providing program and policy analysis. They originally voted for Lyndon Johnson and expected the Great Society to eliminate poverty and fix education. However, their disenchantment with the culture wars and the general direction of the country caused them to reflect on their previous political priorities, their original views of human nature and thus their mission at the *Public Interest*. As examined above the problem wasn’t policy, it was culture. David Brooks, in his article about the *Public Interest*, wrote:

¹⁴¹ Irving Kristol “Counter cultures,” *Neoconservatism: An Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press) 146

¹⁴² Michael Lind, *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of Politics of Fear*; available on <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/video1038.htm>; accessed December 10, 2008

“It occurred to several of the editors that they had accepted a simplistic view of human nature. They had thought of humans as economically motivated rational actors, who would response in relatively straightforward ways to incentives. In fact, what really matters, they decided, is culture, ethos, character and morality. By the 1970s, the *Public Interest* was publishing as many essays on these things as on quantitative social science”.¹⁴³

The Public Interest was concerned not only with political and economic matters but became committed to that which it thought was at the heart of politics and economics; the publication considered culture, our shared sense of morality and meaning, to be the most consequential and urgent matter. Thus the *Public Interest* was a return to myth.

“The *Public Interest* examined violence on campuses, the increasing numbers of unwed mothers, failures in education and the persistence of poverty, and saw not just economic or political phenomena, but cultural phenomena reflecting deeply ingrained beliefs or behaviors.”¹⁴⁴

Addressing social problems then was no longer limited to contributing political and economic policies but working to reinvigorate religious orthodoxy in society. Brooks recalled what James Q. Wilson, contributor to the *Public Interest*, wrote about the publication in 1985:

“At root in almost every area of public concern, we are seeking to induce persons to act virtuously, whether as schoolchildren, applicants for public assistants, would-be lawbreakers, or voters and public officials.”¹⁴⁵

The Public Interest evidences the neoconservatives’ Platonic elitism in the 1960s and 1970s by illustrating how the contributing social scientists constituted a Straussian elite whose agenda was to revive a traditional sense of virtue and religious orthodoxy. In

¹⁴³ David Brooks “40 Years of Character”, in *The New York Times*. March 5, 2005

¹⁴⁴ Edward Rothstein “Mission Accomplished, a Journal Folds”, in *The New York Times*. May 9, 2005

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

general, it was through these social scientists' writings that neoconservatives were transmitting noble myths to society.

The Cold War

“Yet what Straussians and neoconservatives were actually committed to doing during the Reagan administration was defending and reinvigorating democracy: first by altering the unsatisfactory status quo of détente with hostile ideologies”¹⁴⁶

This section will demonstrate the neoconservative fears of relativism through their role in politics during the Cold War. Straussian anxieties towards liberalism will be evidenced through the neoconservative fear of negating the political. Liberalism's tendency towards moral relativism would potentially negate the political, and thus blur distinctions between our particular metaphysical and existential identities. Such an erosion of particularism would usher in a new era of liberal cosmopolitanism, *weltanschauung*, and thus an erosion of existential and moral identity. Platonic elitism will be evidenced through neoconservatism's affirmation of the political. I argue that their affirmation of the political would ultimately bring Strauss's concept of the 'regime' back into foreign affairs as the core of the political rather than friend/enemy distinctions.

Hostilities towards Liberalism – Aversion to Détente

As stated previously by Podhoretz, anti-communism was the “ruling passion” for neoconservatives in foreign affairs. For them, the Soviet Union was the most urgent threat to the American way of life and one that could not be contained. They viewed Kissingerian détente as weakness; “it legitimized Soviet communism and allowed the Soviet Union to keep itself on a military par with the vastly more productive United States.”¹⁴⁷. Neoconservatives did not see détente as peace between nations but rather as

¹⁴⁶ Douglas Murray, *Neoconservatism: Why We Need It* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006) 62.

¹⁴⁷ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Design: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, New York) 49.

uneasy coexistence between antagonists. For them conflict was inevitable and even necessary. According to social scientist Gary Dorrien:

“To portray the Soviet Union as a competing superpower was to undermine America’s will and capacity to fight communism. It was the tragic legacy of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations to have undermined America’s life or death mission”.¹⁴⁸

Neoconservatives described the Cold War in terms of ‘us and them’ narratives. For them the Soviet Union was an existential ‘other’ understood as our direct opposite and therefore each mutually suspicious of the others intentions. Kirkpatrick wrote:

“We did not doubt that American Society could be improved but we believed it first had to be preserved. We believed moreover that there were important differences between democracy and dictatorship, and that the greatest differences of all were between democracy and totalitarianism. We could not therefore be indifferent to the spread of Soviet power or to the human consequences of seeing new tyrannies established.”¹⁴⁹

Here is where the case of the Cold War provides another link between Straussianism and neoconservatism. Both “understood politics as a conflict between mutually hostile groups”¹⁵⁰, but more importantly, both understood the reasons as to what makes groups different and thus hostile, each groups unique character. As Kirkpatrick points out, the threat posed by the Soviet Union did not arise from its mere ‘otherness’ but rather that which made it the other and essentially different from America, that being its ideological character, a totalitarian state. Kirkpatrick’s concern for this differing character correlates with Strauss’s warning that liberalism “assumed that social progress could be achieved through external or institutional means rather than through ‘the formation of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid 11-12

¹⁴⁹ Jean Kirkpatrick, “Neoconservatism as a Response to Counter-Culture” in *The Neocon Reader* ed. Irwin M. Stelzer (Routledge: Grove Press, 2004) 240.

¹⁵⁰ Shadia Drury “Noble lies and perpetual war: Leo Strauss, the neo-cons, and Iraq”; available on <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5010.htm>; accessed December 10, 2008.

character”¹⁵¹ Neoconservatives thus elevated the Cold War outside of balance-of-power-politics into an ideological war, where détente would surely fail in securing America’s character and sense of ‘rightness’. By forfeiting realpolitik strategies to engage the Soviets ideologically, neoconservatives would no longer depict the Cold War as between the U.S. and the Soviet Union but rather as a fight between democracy and totalitarianism, a cause “greater than ourselves”. Brigitte and Peter Berger wrote:

“We believe that the most important political and moral challenge of our time is the struggle for the survival of freedom. In the international context this struggle has its focus in the resistance to the spread of Soviet-style totalitarianism.”¹⁵²

Brigitte and Peter Berger illustrate the urgent threat that totalitarianism posed to the survival of democracy leaving the only option to aggressively engage the Soviets. Like Straus, the neoconservatives portrayed conflict between states as a result of conflict between their characters, and the political world was not simply bellicose but rather morally preoccupied where war was a struggle for a sense of rightness. A depolitical world meant that we were losing our convictions.

It is for this reason that neoconservatives were concerned with détente, because it was a negation of the political. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, cofounder of *The Public Interest* with Kristol, Bell, and Glazer, illustrates the neoconservative concerns with the Soviet Union and détente the best. Vehemently against the idea of anything positive in a totalitarian society he said “I will not split the difference between a totalitarian society and an open one, or suggest that there is good to be said on both sides”¹⁵³ For him it was this absolute and decisive attitude that was needed in foreign affairs that American diplomacy lacked. He told the *New York Times*: “I don’t think we’re very good at ideological argument.”¹⁵⁴ In 1978 after serving as U.S. ambassador to the UN, Moynihan

¹⁵¹ John Gunnell, “Political Theory and Politics: The Case of Leo Strauss and Liberal Democracy”, in *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective*, ed. Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Soffer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) 77.

¹⁵² Stefan A. Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) 76.

¹⁵³ John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 79.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid* 79

argued this point again saying that we could no longer act wholeheartedly upon our convictions. He would refer to this as a “failure of nerve”. John Ehrman recalls Moynihan diagnosing this “failure of nerve”:

“Yet more than ever, he argued, the West was failing to stand up to the Soviets; the failure of nerve, he told Ben Wattenberg in April 1978 was affecting foreign policy ‘more so now than a few years ago when I originally sensed it.’ Moynihan continued to be especially irritated with those ‘former cold warriors...who...have decided that the country really is hopeless, that it has no capacity to resist the advance of totalitarianism, and that the best thing to do is accommodate and appease.’”¹⁵⁵

The reason for this failure of nerve, again as neoconservatism picks up its queues from Strauss, is traced back to liberalism. According to Moynihan, liberal moral ambiguity had sapped America’s will to fight for that which was at one time virtuous. Edwin Warner of *Time Magazine* wrote:

“For all his scorn, Moynihan does not want to quit the U.N. or ignore it; on the contrary, he insists on taking it more seriously as a forum to advance U.S. values and interests. He faults the American liberal intelligentsia for its reluctance to do ideological battle, for what he calls its failure of nerve.”¹⁵⁶

Like Strauss’s concerns that liberalism leads to relativism which then leads to nihilism, so too did Moynihan fear that our liberal intelligentsia lacked the moral conviction and courage to defend and advance America’s interests. The effects of such diplomatic passivity would be disastrous. An excerpt from *Time Magazine* in 1976 read:

“As a result, Moynihan says, there are today no more than two dozen genuine democracies remaining in the world, and indeed he has suggested gloomily that

¹⁵⁵ Ibid 93

¹⁵⁶ Edwin Warner, “War of Words”, in *Time Magazine*. Dec. 18, 1978

liberal democracy in the 20th century may be the kind of vanishing phenomenon that monarchy was in the 19th. As a consequence, the U.N. has become ‘a locus of general assault’ by the majority of socialist nations ‘on the principles of liberal democracy.’¹⁵⁷

He feared that the world would perceive America’s diplomatic passivity and lack of moral courage, especially after the attacks on American values by counterculture coupled with its defeat in Vietnam, as losing an ideological war to totalitarianism and Soviet expansionism.

“The United States was the only power with the moral and military resources to guarantee freedom and security in the world. If the United States let the Vietnam experience sap her self-confidence and damage her will, the fragile forces of freedom would be vanquished.”¹⁵⁸

Neoconservatives were concerned that America was losing its moral convictions in a modern world where morality is relative, and that it was noticeable in foreign affairs. The next section will discuss the neoconservative solution. To combat relativism and passivity, they would affirm the political which would ultimately reaffirm our morality. By standing up for America’s interests and moral leadership in foreign affairs, neoconservatives were affirming democracy’s moral necessity in the world, thus affirming America’s moral rightness and national destiny.

Platonic Elitism – Affirmation of the Political

The Cold War would witness a major rise of the neoconservatism, especially under the Reagan administration. Jean Kirkpatrick was a member of Reagan’s cabinet and ambassador to the UN. Richard Pearle became Assistant secretary of defense for international security policy. Michael Novak became U.S. Ambassador of the UN

¹⁵⁷ “A Fighting Irishman at the U.N.”, Time Magazine, Jan. 26, 1976

¹⁵⁸ Mark Gerson, “Security and Freedom: Making the World Safe with Ronald Reagan”. ed in *The Essential Neoconservative Reader*. March Gerson (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc. 1996) 161.

Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Elliot Abrams served as an Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights. Paul Wolfowitz became assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs. Norman Podhoretz served as an adviser to the U.S. Information Agency. Robert Kagan was a speechwriter for Secretary of State George P. Shultz.

Reagan's White House served them well because they were attracted to his staunch anti-Sovietism. His aggressive foreign policy resembled that of the neoconservative's failed anti-communist presidential nominee Henry "Scoop" Jackson in 1972. Only this time they were on the winning side and, with Reagan, were now in a position to advance anti-Sovietism to the top of America's priorities. According to historian, John Ehrman:

"In Reagan, the neoconservative believed that they had a president who shared their view of the world and, especially, of the overriding importance of resisting Soviet Expansionism and Third World leftism...The neoconservatives, especially Norman Podhoretz, hoped to consolidate this success and build popular support for a foreign policy that would go beyond mere containment. Echoing the conservatives of the early 1950s, they called for actively working for the rollback and eventual defeat of Communism."¹⁵⁹

Reagan's foreign policy adopted the neoconservative's hard-lined and ideological stance towards the Soviet Union and challenged its place in the world unlike his realist predecessors who desired balance of power and mutual security.¹⁶⁰ Dorrien wrote: What was needed was a courageously ideological leader who recognized the implacable hostility of the Soviet state and faced up to the necessity of making life intolerable for it."¹⁶¹ Reagan was that ideological leader. In 1983 before the National Association of Evangelicals he dubbed the Soviet Union an 'evil empire':

¹⁵⁹ John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs 1945-1994* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995) 137.

¹⁶⁰ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Design: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (Routledge, New York, 2004) 11-12.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid* 11.

“So, I urge you to speak out against those who would place the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority...So, in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the temptation of pride - the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”¹⁶²

Reagan was that “ideological leader” which would provide neoconservatives the opportunity to affirm their moralism through foreign policy. Both Abrams and Wolfowitz were hostile towards the popular ‘liberal internationalism’ and pushed for “a foreign policy that made an ethical distinction between the USSR and the United States.”¹⁶³ Abrams wrote of the importance of an “ideological response” as well as a military response:

“We will never maintain wide public support for our foreign policy unless we can relate it to American ideals and to the defense of freedom...Our ability to resist the Soviets around the world depends in part on our ability to draw this distinction and to persuade others of it...Our struggle is for political liberty.”

Jeane Kirkpatrick wrote “Dictatorships and Double Standards”, an essay that some consider to be the “greatest neoconservative anticommunist essay”.¹⁶⁴ Her essay was very critical of Carter’s foreign policy and argued that by hastening liberalization in autocratic countries such as Iran and Nicaragua, Carter inadvertently lost those countries to groups even more anti-American before.¹⁶⁵ However, she was not attacking Carter’s

¹⁶² FreeRepublic.com: “President Reagan’s Speech before the National Association of Evangelicals”. Available on <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/859751/posts>

¹⁶³ Greg Grandin, “The Imperial Presidency, the Legacy of Reagan’s Central American Policy”, in *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America*, ed Michael J. Thompson. (New York University Press, 2007) 204.

¹⁶⁴ Mark Gerson, “Security and Freedom: Making the World Safe with Ronald Reagan”. ed Mark Gerson, *The Essential Neoconservative Reader* (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc, 1996) 162.

¹⁶⁵ Jeane Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards” in *The Essential Neoconservative Reader*, ed Mark Gerson (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc, 1996) 163-189.

idealism for she too “believed that a conviction in the righteousness of U.S. purpose and power was indispensable in the execution of effective diplomacy”.¹⁶⁶ What she was arguing against was Carter’s application of that idealism. Autocratic regimes are protective of their own power and resources but leave most of life untouched and perhaps even preserve institutions that democracy can be built upon. “Precisely the opposite is true of revolutionary Communist regimes” which “claim jurisdiction over the whole life of the society” thus infiltrating and destroying those institutions necessary for democratization. She accused the Carter administration of a double standard by not applying the same rhetoric of democratization to communist countries.¹⁶⁷ Kirkpatrick advised Reagan both morally and intellectually and “began the synthesis of the realist and idealist traditions of American diplomacy into a powerful synthesis.”¹⁶⁸

Despite their hopes with Reagan, many neoconservatives, especially Podhoretz, became disenchanted with him, and argued that his ideological and militant rhetoric was producing nothing more than a “throwback to the Basic principles of Détente of 1972”.¹⁶⁹ Despite their disenchantment, the end of the Cold War would lead many neoconservatives, especially William Kristol, son of Irving Kristol, to claim that it was not containment that defeated totalitarianism, but rather “unapologetic, aggressive militarism”.¹⁷⁰

Neoconservatives solidified their role in politics during the first term of the Reagan administration when they were able to assert their affirmation of the political. This is important because, as it is illustrated that the neoconservative philosophy is linked back to Strauss, they have based their affirmation on the “belief that the internal character

¹⁶⁶ Greg Grandin, “The Imperial Presidency, the Legacy of Reagan’s Central American Policy”, in *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America*, ed Michael J. Thompson. (New York: University Press, 2007) 204.

¹⁶⁷ Jeane Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards” in *The Essential Neoconservative Reader*, ed Mark Gerson (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc, 1996) 163-189.

¹⁶⁸ Greg Grandin, “The Imperial Presidency, the Legacy of Reagan’s Central American Policy”, in *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America*, ed Michael J. Thompson. (New York: University Press, 2007) 201.

¹⁶⁹ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Design: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, New York) 12.

¹⁷⁰ Greg Grandin, “The Imperial Presidency, the Legacy of Reagan’s Central American Policy”, in *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America*, ed Michael J. Thompson. (New York: University Press, 2007) 199.

of regimes matters and that foreign policy must reflect the deepest values of liberal democratic societies.”¹⁷¹ Fukuyama writes:

“The early neoconservative anti-Stalinists saw the Cold War as a struggle over ideology and values, a fight that continued into the Reagan years over how to deal with the Soviet Union. The Straussian current in neoconservatism also saw the regime as a central organizing principle of politics.”¹⁷²

Neoconservatives used their positions of power to affirm the political but for the reason that the regime should govern foreign affairs. This was “Strauss's restoration of a political science that places the regime in the forefront of analysis.”¹⁷³

However, with the end of the Cold War and with no ideological other, the regime would no longer be the center of our political science. Fukuyama brings this problem to light in his “End of History”. This is an important book as Nicholas Xenos points out that Fukuyama’s understanding of the regime and readings of Strauss “reveals more about Straussianism and its central place within neoconservatism than he realizes.”¹⁷⁴ Fukuyama wrote in the beginning of *America at the Crossroads* that he was a “student of Allan Bloom, himself a student of Leo Strauss and the author of *The Closing of the American Mind*”.

“That lineage is important, because it links three books that are central to understanding the place that Straussianism has assumed within neoconservatism: Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*, Alan Bloom’s *Closing of the American Mind*, and Fukuyama’s own bestseller, *The End of History and the Last Man*”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Francis Fukuyama, “America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy (Yale: University Press, 2006) 48.

¹⁷² Ibid 48.

¹⁷³ Steven Lenzner and William Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?”. *The Public Interest*, No. 153 (Fall 2003) 19-39

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas Xenos, *Cloaked in Virtue: Unveiling Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 139.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid 139.

Fukuyama argued in *The End of History and the Last Man* that humankind's ideological evolution has reached its apex with the construction of liberal democracy. According to him:

“What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”¹⁷⁶

Though this is not necessarily bad news for Fukuyama, his Straussian influences are quick to remind us of the dangers of relativism inherent in liberalism.

“They [democratic societies] cultivate the culture of toleration, which becomes the chief virtue in democratic societies. And if men are unable to affirm that any particular way of life is superior to another, then they will fall back on the affirmation of life itself, that is the body, its needs, its fears.”¹⁷⁷

Fukuyama's affirmation of 'life itself' is referencing Nietzsche's "Last Man", he who "schooled by Hobbes and Locke, gave up prideful belief in his or her own superior worth in favor of comfortable self-preservation."¹⁷⁸ He explains this through the notion of the *thymos*, the prideful part of our "soul" that struggles for recognition by placing values and meanings to life. It is a necessary part of who we are; it is the "driving force of history".¹⁷⁹ However, the social contract demands equal recognition for all based on their mere "person-ness". By universalizing recognition, liberalism has made one's recognition indistinguishable from another, thus devaluing it. If history ends with liberalism, then there is no more struggle, leaving the thymotic part of our soul dissatisfied with life. Fukuyama writes:

¹⁷⁶ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History". *The National Interest*. Summer 1989

¹⁷⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press. 1992) 305.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid 301.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid 162-164.

“The end of history would mean the end of wars and bloody revolutions. Agreeing on ends, men would have no large causes for which to fight...Human life, then, involves a curious paradox; it seems to require injustice, for the struggle against injustice is what calls forth what is highest in man.”¹⁸⁰

Much like Schmitt’s concept of the political, where the affirmation of the political is the affirmation of the moral¹⁸¹, Fukuyama argues that liberalism, as the end of history, universalizes recognition, stripping man of his *megalothymia* and depoliticizing him into the Last Man.

Fukuyama and other neoconservatives would then question whether the defeat of the Soviets was actually a victory for America. The Cold War provided America with an ideological other and now, as Kristol noted, “the enemy is us, not them.”¹⁸² They feared that the triumph of liberalism over all others would usher in a new order of ethical universalism, cultivating relativism and sending us into crisis. Allan Bloom wrote in response to Fukuyama’s article:

“This fifty years of opposition to fascism and communism provided us with clear moral and political goals, but they were negative. We took our orientation from the evil we faced, and it brought out the best in us. The threat from outside disciplined us inside while protecting us from too much depressing reflection on ourselves. The global nature of the conflicts we were engaged in imposed an unprecedented uniformity on the world. It has been liberalism--or else.”¹⁸³

This lack of ideological struggle would follow the end of the Cold War in, what Charles Krauthammer would call, the Clinton Doctrine of “morality and universality”. His humanitarian efforts at their worst, reflected “hypocrisy; at best, extreme naiveté.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Ibid 311.

¹⁸¹ Tracy B. Strong, “Forward: Dimensions of the New Debate Around Carl Schmitt” in Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) xviii.

¹⁸² Douglas Murray, *Neoconservatism: Why We Need It* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006) 66.

¹⁸³ Allan Bloom, “Allan Bloom: Response to Fukuyama's ‘End of History and the Last Man’”. Internet Archive. <http://www.archive.org/index.php>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

¹⁸⁴ Charles Krauthammer, “The Clinton doctrine”. CNN.com, March 29, 1999. <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/time/1999/03/29/doctrine.html>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

This coupled with the preoccupation for economic growth lacked, for the neoconservatives, the moral clarity needed to guide America through the end of history. Corey Robin says it best:

“For neoconservatives, who had thrilled to the crusade against communism, all that was left of Ronald Reagan's legacy after the Cold War was a sunny entrepreneurialism and market joie de vivre, which found a welcome home in Bill Clinton's America. While neocons are not opposed to capitalism, they do not believe it is the highest achievement of civilization...today's conservatives prize mystery and vitality and are uncomfortable with rationalism and technology. Such romantic sensibilities are uneasy about the market but friendly to politics, particularly at moments when politics is consumed with questions of war.”¹⁸⁵

America's concerns needed to be refocused. New neoconservatives would emerge into power as evidenced by Kristol and Kagan calling for a “neo-Reaganite” agenda of American ‘benevolence’ and hegemony. The end of Bush senior's administration, witnessing the break up of the Soviet Union and the cease fire with Iraq, provided Wolfowitz with the opportunity to write a new Defense Planning Guidance of 1992. This ‘Wolfowitz Doctrine’ recognized the U.S. as the victor of the Cold War and the sole superpower; it argued in favor of military action, against multilateralism, and praised American exceptionalism.¹⁸⁶ Neoconservatives would work hard to replace the Clinton Doctrine with the Wolfowitz Doctrine. Most of them would focus their concerns on Iraq. The most obvious example of this is the PNAC's “Letter to President Clinton on Iraq”. It urged for military action as “containment of Saddam Hussein has been steadily eroding”. The Wolfowitz Doctrine is key, not only because it redirected our attention away from economic prosperity to foreign policy dangers, but because it was also the framework from which the Bush Doctrine would be designed.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Robin, Corey. *Endgame: Conservatives After the Cold War*. Boston Review, February/March 2004. <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR29.1/robin.html>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

¹⁸⁶ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 208-210.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid* 208-214.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to link neoconservatism to Straussianism through the culture wars and the Cold War. The culture wars link neoconservatism to Strauss's conception of culture. Strauss believed societies need to be founded on strong religious and nationalistic convictions that constitute a culture. Neoconservatives saw those convictions breaking down in the face of relativism which was all too suggestive of Strauss's crisis of modernity. They assumed the role of the educated elite which, through their writing, they would reaffirm and transmit traditional values ushering in a new confidence for American culture.

For Strauss, culture would inform the type of regime to rule. The regime could only view foreign affairs, then, through the lens of its own virtues. Strauss's understanding of this would then change what was at the core of the political from Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction to the nature of the regime. Neoconservatives believed they were witnessing an erosion of the political because détente no longer placed the regime as a determining force in foreign affairs. Neoconservatives, then, diagnosed our indifference to regime as a result of the moral, cultural, and political relativism breeding in America's liberal intelligentsia. In the end, with their rise to power in the Reagan White House, they would bring the regime back into politics by engaging the Soviets ideologically.

The next chapter will explain how neoconservatism has been epitomized in the Bush Doctrine, especially in its fear of relativism and by extension the emphasis it places on the regime.

Chapter 4: The Bush Doctrine

Introduction

This chapter will assess of the basic themes of the Bush Doctrine and the themes make this doctrine distinctively neoconservative. Neoconservatism, as discussed in the previous chapter, promoted a sense of moral absolutism in American culture and stressed the character of the American regime as a guide for foreign policy principles. This chapter will demonstrate how the Bush Doctrine became the defining context of neoconservative politics by exposing its moral absolutism and the role it places on regime in foreign affairs.

While neoconservatism remained dormant during the Clinton years, it would reemerge under the Bush Doctrine. Many neoconservatives would enter the White House under the George W. Bush administration. Douglas Feith served as the Under Secretary of Defense. Zalmay Khalilzad served as U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. Elliot Abrams served as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director on the National Security Council for Near East and North African. Seth Cropsey served as the director of the International Broadcasting Bureau. Paul Wolfowitz served as deputy secretary of defense. Abram Shulsky served as the Senior Adviser to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Iranian Directorate and would direct the Office of Special Plans. Richard Pearle served as Chairman of the Board for the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee.

Both neoconservatives and Straussians, whether inside the White House or the media, would reorganize around a new existential threat. However, this next generation of neoconservative were somewhat different then their Cold War predecessors; neoconservatism became more volatile and more militant. Older neoconservatives, such as Irving Kristol and Jeane Kirkpatrick, were reluctant to endorse the idea of an Iraq invasion while the younger generation, led by William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Joshua Muravchik, Charles Krauthammer and others, were first to support the idea of using

American power to transform the world. Just like the older generation, they too were ‘culture warriors’ but the measures they took would be more extreme. For them, the outlook of the West in a modern era was more urgent than ever. They would view the Bush Doctrine as America’s salvation. This chapter will explain what makes the Bush Doctrine so distinctively neoconservative but first will provide a critique of the Bush Doctrine’s main themes.

The Pillars of the Bush Doctrine

George W. Bush would be elected in 2000, reveal his foreign policies at his commencement speech at West Point in 2002, and three months later, make public his National Security Strategy. The strategy would make use of the main points in Wolfowitz’s 1992 plan, especially in terms of preemption, hegemony, and Wilsonian idealism.¹⁸⁸ These would be the distinctive qualities of what would later be called the Bush Doctrine, and as Krauthammer put it: “the Bush Doctrine is, essentially, a synonym for neoconservative foreign policy.”¹⁸⁹

This section will critique the basic elements of the Bush Doctrine. What makes the Bush Doctrine so controversial are its underlying themes. There are four prominent themes synonymous with the Bush Doctrine that Robert Jervis has highlighted. These themes are democratization, militaristic primacy, preemption, and unilateralism. Below is an explanation of each of these.

Democratization

Probably the most important theme of the Bush doctrine is its emphasis on democracy. The introduction to *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS) began with the opening state:

¹⁸⁸ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 328-329.

¹⁸⁹ Charles Krauthammer, “The Neoconservative Convergence”. *The Wall Street Journal*. www.opinionjournal.com; accessed 1 December, 2008.

“The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.”¹⁹⁰

Democracy and freedom are justified, not only as the better way to govern, but because democracy emerged victorious in “the great struggles”, an ideological struggle between democracy and totalitarianism, deeming it as ideologically right. To further make this point the NSS claims that “the United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere.”¹⁹¹ This statement, claiming democracy’s ideological truth, transitions us to the next point, that it is true “for all people everywhere”. It is not enough to merely practice democracy, it must be promoted and exported. Written in the NSS is:

“Finally, the United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.”¹⁹²

The Bush Doctrine holds democracy to be ‘true’ but more importantly universally ‘true’ which justifies the promotion of democracy across the globe. The Bush Doctrine goes further, though, by translating this justification for the promotion of democracy into an obligation. Bush said in an interview “that we understand history has called us into action, and we’re not going to miss this opportunity to make the world more peaceful and more free.”¹⁹³ Promoting democracy abroad is necessary to counter competing ideologies in a world not yet completely receptive to democracy. The NSS writes:

¹⁹⁰ The White House. “The National Security Strategy of the United State of America”, September 20th 2002; available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss.pdf>>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Bush George. “President, Vice President Discuss the Middle East”. White House Press Release, March 21, 2002; available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss.pdf>>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

“Throughout history, freedom has been threatened by war and terror; it has been challenged by the clashing wills of powerful states and the evil designs of tyrants; and it has been tested by widespread poverty and disease. Today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom’s triumph over all these foes. The United States welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission.”¹⁹⁴

Attempts by the Bush Doctrine to put its democratic principles into practice can be evidenced through the administration’s efforts to conduct free elections in Iraq. The White House now claims that the objective of the Iraq war was to promote democracy in the region, expecting a domino effects and the eventual collapse of undemocratic regimes such as Iran and Syria. However, democratization can only take place through the use of power, which leads to the second theme.

Militaristic Primacy

The Bush Doctrine recognizes America’s unmatched military power. “Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence.”¹⁹⁵ Again, this primacy is necessary for the security of freedom and peace.

“It is time to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength. We must build and maintain our defense beyond challenge. Our military’s highest priority is to defend the United States...The unparalleled strength of the United States armed forces, and their forward presence, have maintained the peace in some of the world’s most strategically vital regions.”¹⁹⁶

However, the Bush Doctrine is a departure from traditional foreign policies given its view of what the role of America’s military is in the world. That role is no longer one that acts as passive deterrence.

¹⁹⁴ The White House. “The National Security Strategy of the United State of America”, September 20th 2002; available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss.pdf>>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid

¹⁹⁶ Ibid

“We know from history that deterrence can fail; and we know from experience that some enemies cannot be deterred. The United States must and will maintain the capability to defeat any attempt by an enemy—whether a state or non-state actor.”¹⁹⁷

Rather, the Bush Doctrine would use military strength as an agent of change. This is best illustrated in the introduction to the National Security Strategy: “History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act. In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action.”¹⁹⁸ Here we witness the enterprising nature of the Bush Doctrine through its advocacy to reshape the world. In its ambitions and desires for transformation, the Bush Doctrine presents itself as a paradigm shift in foreign policy, a departure from our more realist approach to world affairs. Traditional foreign policy would promote democracy through trade or by example while the Bush Doctrine would engage the U.S in an active and aggressive exportation of it. The passivity of deterrence would be replaced with the employment of military might and the right to engage preemptively.

Preemption

As states previously, the Bush Doctrine assumes that deterrence is not a solution to all problems and may fail at times; “we know from experience that some enemies cannot be deterred.” The Bush Doctrine, therefore, is willing to “exercise our right of self defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country”. However, the Bush Doctrine’s notion of preemption border along the lines of preventative warfare. Where preemption is a response to an obvious threat to security and protected under international law, preventative warfare is an attempt to stop a potential threat before it turns into one. This flirtation with prevention is evidenced in this passage:

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

¹⁹⁸ The White House. “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America”, September 20th 2002; available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

“Legal scholars and international jurists often conditioned the legitimacy of preemption on the existence of an imminent threat – most often a visible mobilization of armies, navies, and air forces preparing to attack.”

We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today’s adversaries. Rogue states and terrorists do not seek to attack us using conventional means. They know such attacks would fail. Instead, they rely on acts of terror and, potentially, the use of weapons of mass destruction.”¹⁹⁹

Despite the problems associated with prevention, such as calculating actual threats and responding militarily to each one, the Bush Doctrine deems this to be necessary for its own survival. “The United States cannot remain idle while dangers gather.”²⁰⁰

Unilateralism

The Bush Doctrine is indeed action oriented. However, it is sometimes difficult or even impossible to move the rest of the international community to action. In such cases where action is deemed necessary for survival, the Bush Doctrine holds the right to act unilaterally. “While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone”.²⁰¹ This statement is clear about the U.S.’s intentions concerning unilateral action when it deems appropriate. It claims that unilateralism is effective when diplomatic efforts fail. This theme also works well with preemptive strategies because multilateral approval for preemption is difficult to reach.

Overall, the Bush Doctrine is incredibly Wilsonian, but as Mearsheimer put it, “Wilsonian with teeth”. To achieve its ends, it believes in the use of strength thus “it is time to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength” and to “build and

¹⁹⁹ Ibid

²⁰⁰ Ibid

²⁰¹ Ibid

maintain our defenses beyond challenge”.²⁰² Such militaristic primacy would allow the U.S. to address the threats of the 21st century, more specifically those who “hate the United States and everything for which it stands” and “harbor, support, and use terrorism to achieve their political goals”. Now the enemy looks and works differently, they are “shadowing networks of individuals that can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores”²⁰³, it is justified to use preemptive, even preventative, strikes. However, adjusting to these new threats may take time and other states may not agree with the use of preemption, in which case the U.S. “should not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against terrorists”.²⁰⁴ These measures provide the teeth for the Bush Doctrine, but at its core is its Wilsonianism, its idealism, and the assumption that these ideals are absolute and universal. It is the end of the Bush Doctrine to “extend the benefits of freedom across the globe.”²⁰⁵

Relating the Bush Doctrine to Neoconservatism

It is important to understand the Bush Doctrine as a departure from traditional more realist approaches to foreign policy. After the turn of the millennium we witnessed new realities and horrors of security outside any model’s predictive capacity with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the War on Terror. What was needed was a paradigm shift, a new approach to foreign policy that could address the threats of the 21st century by understanding the source of those threats as a clash of ideals. The NSS claims that, “For most of the twentieth century, the world was divided by a great struggle over ideas”, which paints conflict between nations as conflict between ideologies. This document’s view of history paints the current conflict the same way by saying “this is a struggle of ideas and this is an area where America must excel.”

Neoconservatives found that Bush was quite open about his ideals dictating his foreign policy. This was refreshing given their disenchantment with his father’s realpolitik inclinations. Thomas Donnelly, deputy director for the PNAC, was more than

²⁰² The White House. “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America”, September 20th 2002; available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

²⁰³ Ibid

²⁰⁴ Ibid

²⁰⁵ Ibid

happy to hear Bush speak of “American hegemony” and the “Victory of American ideals”. He said that “It is encouraging to hear a political leader who does not shy from the responsibilities of preeminence”²⁰⁶ This exposes what is at the heart of the Bush Doctrine, that which makes it different from previous more realist approaches, that which makes it neoconservative – that being its shifting focus away from reality and toward morality. Consistent with its previous hostility towards détente and realpolitik, the neoconservative architects would frame security struggles of the 21st century as ideological. The Bush Doctrine would shift politics from the reality of balance of power phenomena into the moral. Morality was no longer exogenous but rather central to policy decisions and self-legitimizing.

Such moral imperatives could be cited in Bush’s State of the Union Address, claiming that Iraq, Iran and North Korea “constitute an axis of evil”.²⁰⁷ Later that year with his commencement speech at West Point he stated:

“Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities.”

The rhetoric of the Bush Doctrine denotes not only a moral authority but an obligation to uphold its virtues. In sum, Robert Kaufman states it best in his *Defense of the Bush Doctrine* that conformity to ‘moral democratic realism’ is justified through the “cardinal virtue of prudence, as St. Thomas Aquinas defined it – “right reason about things to be done” – ought to serve as the standard for evaluating the best practicable American grand strategy.”²⁰⁸

Such moral guidance can be evidenced in U.S. foreign policy towards Iraq. Bush would engage Iraq outside of balance of power realities. The Bush Administration, and the neoconservatives outside of it, directed their hostility at Saddam in such a way that

²⁰⁶ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Design: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 73-74.

²⁰⁷ The White House. “President Delivers State of the Union Address”. available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>>; accessed 1 December, 2008.

²⁰⁸ Robert Gordon Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2007) 3.

undermined traditional assumptions of heads-of-state as rational actors and engaged him on moral grounds. Bush's radio address on March 15th 2003 would state: "We know from recent history that Saddam Hussein is a reckless dictator who has twice invaded his neighbors without provocation -- wars that led to death and suffering on a massive scale."²⁰⁹ Later on March 17th Bush would state: "Peaceful efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime have failed again and again -- because we are not dealing with peaceful men."²¹⁰ Many neoconservatives, such as William Kristol, Joshua Muravchek, Charles Krauthammer, Robert Kagan, etc, were vocal about their support for an invasion, describing Saddam as suicidal, irrational, and evil. As Mearsheimer, a critic of neoconservatism, describes it: "[Neoconservatives] believe that the world divides into good states and bad states, and that the democracies are the white hats."²¹¹ By painting the world into good and bad the neoconservatives leave it void of rationality and calculation, making it possible to describe Saddam as a "reckless dictator" or as thwarting "peaceful efforts." This leads to the Bush Doctrines prescription – that being its Wilsonianism.

On March 16th, Bush stated that after the removal of Saddam that we would be: "committed to the goal of a unified Iraq, with democratic institutions of which members of all ethnic and religious groups are treated with dignity and respect."²¹² On March 22nd Bush stated on a radio address to the nation that the mission of Operation Iraqi Freedom is: "to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people."²¹³ Democratization, for the Bush Doctrine, as well as neoconservatives, works as a panacea. More importantly, democratization allowed for neoconservative, as it did in the Cold War, to frame the Iraq war into an ideological one. According to Norman Podhoretz, the Iraq War is World War IV (the Cold War was three) and just how WW III was ideological, so too is this war. The Iraq

²⁰⁹ The White House. "President Discusses Iraq in Radio Address". March 15, 2003.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030315.html>; accessed 1 December, 2008

²¹⁰ The White House. "President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours". March 17, 2003. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html>

²¹¹ John Mearsheimer, "Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism Versus Neo-conservatism". 21-04-2005. www.openDemocracy.net; accessed 1 December, 2008

²¹² White House. "President Bush: Monday "Moment of Truth" for World on Iraq". March 16, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030316-3.html>; accessed 1 December, 2008

²¹³ White House. "President Discusses Beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom". March 22, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030322.html>; accessed 1 December, 2008

war, for neoconservatives, is not America versus Iraq but rather democracy versus Islamofascism. The neoconservatism in the Bush Doctrine inclined to frame the war morally and ideologically. Neoconservatism's militant valorization of American traditions would materialize through the Bush Doctrine's ideological and political nature as well as its inclination towards democratization.

Here we understand that at the core of, not just the Bush Doctrine, but neoconservative foreign policy in general, is a fusion of idealism and realism. The policy celebrates the American tradition where its moral authority is derived from its juxtaposition from the "other". The ideological world that Strauss has illustrated from Schmitt demands this celebration of traditions unless we are to welcome relativism. Thus we understand why a security strategy would be "based on the distinctively American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests", which nonetheless, exemplifies how regime guides foreign policy. However, the fear of relativism translates these Wilsonian values as absolute and therefore non-negotiable. This point is important in noting why the neoconservatism resists modern notions of legitimacy.

Why Neoconservatism Resists Legitimation

The U.S. legal argument for military action demonstrates instrumental action, most obvious through its assault on 'truthfulness'. This is because the Bush Doctrine does not see international legitimation as necessary but rather governs according to its own moral absolutism which is self-legitimizing. The Bush Doctrine, organized ideologically and around moral imperatives, when informing the administration's decision-making, would thus filter ideology and morality into their policies. Frank Gaffney wrote:

"The reality is that the same moral principles that underpinned the Bush appeal on 'values' issues like gay marriage, stem-cell research, and the right to life were central to his vision of U.S. war aims and foreign policy."²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Jim Lobe, "Neocon Agenda: Iran, China, Russia, Latin America..." November 8, 2004. www.antiwar.com; accessed 1 December, 2008

This is an important statement that “moral principles” were central to “U.S. war aims and foreign policy”? It is thus important to reiterate what the “moral principles” (or idealism) of the Bush Doctrine are, those being its Wilsonian nature and its emphasis on democratization. In other words, The Bush Doctrine assumed the universality of democracy for all. Under such assumptions of the Bush Doctrine, democracy should then be exported to where it is absent, which would entail regime change.

The idea of regime change in Iraq was not a new idea to neoconservatives. William Kristol and Robert Kagan wrote a letter representing the interests of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) to Bill Clinton in 1998. This letter outlined the case for preemptively attack Iraq by warning Clinton that the “policy of ‘containment’ of Saddam Hussein has been steadily eroding over the past several months” and proposed the “removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime from power.”²¹⁵ This letter was signed by many neoconservatives among who many would serve in George W. Bush’s administration including, Elliot Abrams, Richard Armitage, John Bolton, Zalmay Khalizad, Richard Pearle, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld. All of these individuals, once appointed to serve under the president would turn regime change into a very real possibility. These foreign policy advisors “played right into his [Bush’s] thinking” according to McClellan.²¹⁶

“That was certainly the case with Iraq. Bush was ready to bring about regime change, and that in all likelihood meant war. The question now was not whether, but merely when and how.

Although I didn’t realize it at the time we launched our campaign to sell the war, what drove Bush toward military confrontation more than anything else was an ambition and idealistic post-9/11 vision of transforming the Middle East through the spread of freedom”²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Project for a New American Century. “Letter to the President on Iraq”., January 26, 1998. www.newamericancentury.org; accessed 1 December, 2008

²¹⁶ Scott McClellan,. *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington’s Culture of Deception*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2008) 128-129.

²¹⁷ Ibid 128-129.

James Mann's account of the Bush administration's decision-making wrote that even if Saddam Hussein "handed over large amounts of chemical and biological weapons stocks, this would not have been sufficient" to stop an invasion. Mann also reported Khalilzad answering what the conditions for refraining from an invasion would be, Khalilzad answered: "it was literally that Saddam Hussein would have to leave the country."²¹⁸ What is important to note is that regime change was a major ambition driving the decision to invade, but what is more important is the reason for regime change; the most obvious choices for the American regime to translate its sense of morality into foreign policy was through Wilsonian idealism and democratization.

This can be evidenced when Bush compared the Iraq war as modern "moral equivalent" to the war against the Japanese imperialism during WWII. Bush compared the success of Japan's democracy to the possible success of Iraq's democracy but does so through the lens of morality. He argues it was not only the pragmatic thing to do but the moral thing to do.²¹⁹ In general Bush has stated several times, when asked about the Iraq war he said that "it was the right thing to do" and that "I didn't sacrifice my core beliefs to satisfy critics or satisfy pundits."²²⁰

However, the Bush Doctrine's sense of moral rightness is based on such an absolutism that it trumps legality. Ari Fleischer said, in response to Kofi Annan warning the U.S. to abide by the UN charter, that "from a moral point of view" the UN should support the United States. Richard Pearle first stated when Baghdad fell that "a general recognition that high moral purpose has been achieved here."²²¹ He would later acknowledge that the war in Iraq was in fact illegal but this did not change his attitude. He said, "I think in this case international law stood in the way of doing the right thing."²²²

²¹⁸ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 348.

²¹⁹ Peter Baker and Josh White. "Bush Calls Iraq War Moral Equivalent Of Allies' WWII Fight Against the Axis", available on <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/30/AR2005083001078.html>; accessed 1 December, 2008

²²⁰ Mark Silva, "Bush Regrets Rhetoric, Not Iraq War". June 17, 2008. available at www.swamppolitics.com; accessed 1 December, 2008

²²¹ Maureen Dowd, "Perle's Plunder Blunder". March 23, 2003. www.nytimes.com; accessed 1 December, 2008

²²² Oliver Burkeman and Julian Borger. "War critics astonished as US hawk admits invasion was illegal". November 20 2003. www.guardian.co.uk/; accessed 1 December, 2008

What Perle has illustrated in the previous statement is the reason why neoconservatism is incompatible with the legitimation process. For him 'law' stood in the way of 'right'. As the previous chapters have illustrated, neoconservatism has inherited a Straussian fear of relativism and as a result has affirmed time and again a moral absolutism through culture to counter relativism. However, the international legitimation of law requires democratic deliberation to take place where participants bargain and compromise on a sense of right. For neoconservatism however, consensus is not necessary to determine a sense of right. Krauthammer has said:

“But when some nations are not with you on your enterprise, including them in your coalition is not a way to broaden it; it’s a way to abolish it.

At which point, liberal internationalists switch gears and appeal to legitimacy--on the grounds that multilateral action has a higher moral standing. I have always found this line of argument incomprehensible. By what possible moral calculus does an American intervention to liberate 25 million people forfeit moral legitimacy.”²²³

Rather for neoconservatism such a process exposes the absence of absolutism, or that if any does exist it does so only within a human capacity and carry no universal or transcendent weight, which means no weight at all. John Bolton demonstrated this when he said that, “There is no such thing as the United Nations. There is only the international community, which can only be led by the only remaining superpower, which is the United States.”²²⁴ For Bolton, the UN is nothing but a “mindless creation”. This further illustrates the suspicions of liberalism through hostility towards egalitarianism. Not only does neoconservatism argue virtue to be independent of human creation but also that the U.S. is the only nation invested with such virtue, which explains American exceptionalism and the right of the U.S. to act according to its virtues without consent of the international community. This exceptionalism parallels the cultural elitism necessary

²²³ Charles Krauthammer, “Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World”. February 12, 2004; available at www.aei.org; accessed 1 December, 2008

²²⁴ Roland Watson, “Bush deploys hawk as new UN envoy”. March 8, 2005. www.timesonline.co.uk; accessed 1 December, 2008

for transmitting myths to the masses, except this is projected on the international stage. Muravchik argues for such elites in the world otherwise egalitarian imperatives allow the extreme and radical to influence the world. He claims that the UN will never take a stand on terrorism because the Organization of the Islamic Conference constitutes 30% of UN membership.²²⁵

²²⁵ Josuha Muravchik, "The U.N.'s terrorism gap". Sept. 20, 2005. available at www.jewishworldview.com; accessed 1 December, 2008

Conclusion

The main argument of the paper was to explain how and why the Bush Doctrine undermined the UN in the decision to invade Iraq. The 'how' was explained by demonstrating that the U.S. legal argument for war could not satisfy validity dimensions required to reach understanding and consensus. Furthermore, the U.S. was in outright breach of the charter when it decided to invade Iraq without a second resolution. The 'why' demonstrated that the Bush Doctrine, as a neoconservative document, has inherited philosophical anxieties concerning moral relativism, and by extension, projects a war on modernity that casts doubts on liberalism and attempts to reestablish ancient modes of power and control.

To summarize, chapter one introduced the concept of legitimacy and demonstrated how the Bush Doctrine has resisted against modern legitimation processes. Chapter two introduced Strauss's modern problem and his prescription to empower educated elites so that they may bring order to the masses through particular notions of truth. Chapter three linked these Straussian philosophies to the neoconservative movement by exposing neoconservative fears of relativism. Chapter four then evidenced how this neoconservative movement climbed to power in the White House and provided the basic principles for the Bush Doctrine. This chapter then concluded by demonstrating how a foreign policy that harbors anxieties of relativism, outright resists collective efforts in the legitimation of international rules and action. Resistance takes place through the inability of neoconservatism to meet validity requirements due to its efforts to reestablish its moral particularism as universal.

The prospect of a future neoconservative doctrine having the ability to engage properly in a legitimation process is weak. What makes a doctrine distinctively neoconservative is that it projects a war on modernity on the international level which comprehends legitimacy in pre-modern terms, thus it works to reestablish ancient structures of power and control. However, a good amount of the world has seemed to embrace our modern project and doesn't desire history to reverse itself.

The election of President Obama marks America's petition for change, and while this new initiative is a departure from the Bush era, the foreign policy community can expect a reconstitution of the neoconservative movement. Robert Kagan's and William Kristol's new Foreign Policy Initiative is a new and ambitious foreign policy organization ready to assert its agenda on the world stage which demonstrates persistence in the neoconservative movement.

Neoconservatism is not dead and Podhoretz's eulogy is premature. Neoconservatism, at the apex of its power in the Bush White House, transformed America and worked to reshape the world in its image. The country must then reflect on the consequences of this intellectual persuasion. An American foreign policy that assumes exceptionalism, acts unilaterally, and exacerbates hostilities between nations, not only undermines its own mission to share democracy abroad, but it isolates itself from the modern world it hopelessly tried to undo.