

## Power and Democratic Weakness: Neoconservatism and Neoclassical Realism

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While realists and neoconservatives generally disagreed on the Iraq invasion of 2003, nothing inherent in either approach to foreign policy accounts for this. Neoconservatism's enthusiasm for democratisation would appear to distinguish the two but its rejection of all other liberal mechanisms in world politics suggests that the logic linking democracy and American security shares little with liberalism. Inspecting the range of neoconservative thought reveals a unifying theme: the enervating effects of democracy on state power and the will to wield it in a dangerous world. Consequently, the United States enjoys greater safety among other democracies due to a more favourable distribution of relative power. Viewing regime type through the prism of state power extraction in a competitive, anarchic world puts neoconservatism squarely in the neoclassical realist camp. The article concludes by suggesting why the rest of International Relations should care about this new 'neo-neo' debate.

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No shortage of analyses of neoconservatism in International Relations (IR) exists; realists in particular have weighed in upon (and inveighed against) its flaws. Brian Schmidt and Michael Williams argue that 'the core elements of the neoconservative Bush Doctrine stand in direct contrast to many of the fundamental tenets of realism'.<sup>1</sup> John Mearsheimer states that 'neo-conservatives and realists have fundamentally different views about how the world works and what American foreign policy should look like'. If anything, realists claim neoconservatism to be the

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1. Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, 'The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists', *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 191–220, 194.

stepchild of liberalism. Schmidt and Williams claim that 'neoconservatism embraces a liberal theory of international relations', while Mearsheimer claims that 'Neo-conservative theory – the Bush doctrine – is essentially Wilsonianism with teeth.'<sup>2</sup>

The difference between the relatively high consensus against the Iraq War by realists and its equally strong backing by neoconservatives surely contributes to this antagonistic relationship. Advocates and opponents of the war based their cases on 'fundamentally different views about the basic dynamics of interstate relations'.<sup>3</sup> Michael Desch links both liberalism and neoconservatism to the war, leaving realism as the only sensible foreign policy alternative.<sup>4</sup> This article maintains that such claims are not only wrong, but ironic.

To do this, the article first argues that while neoconservatives vary in their interpretations of international politics and recommendations for foreign policy, the core tenets of neoconservatism are sufficiently consistent and its policy influence sufficiently clear to merit treatment as an IR theory. Francis Fukuyama's 'realistic Wilsonianism' and Charles Krauthammer's 'democratic realism' – as well as the 'democratic globalists' they both attack – agree on fundamentals: power continues to be the fundamental currency of international relations in a dangerous world, and the spread of democracy is not simply its own reward, but improves American national security.

While spreading democracy has been a long-standing element of most schools of American foreign policy thought, neoconservatism's especially aggressive approach suggests that the neoconservative logic linking democracy and American security differs from its rivals. The reasoning behind the urge to spread democracy is apparent throughout neoconservative foreign and domestic policy writing: the enervating effects of democracy on the creation and use of state power. Consequently, the United States enjoys greater safety among other democracies because the resulting distribution of relative power is more favourable to American interests in a competitive, state-centric and anarchic world. To alter Krauthammer's formulation slightly, neoconservatism can best be described as democratic *neoclassical* realism. To say the least, this complicates realism's claim to be an alternative approach.<sup>5</sup>

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2. Ibid., 202. John J. Mearsheimer, 'Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism Versus Neo-Conservatism', *openDemocracy* (2005), [http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-americanpower/morgenthau\\_2522.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-americanpower/morgenthau_2522.jsp).

3. Stephen M. Walt, 'The Relationship between Theory and Policy in International Relations', *Annual Review of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (2005): 23–48, 28.

4. Michael C. Desch, 'America's Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in US Foreign Policy', *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007): 7–43.

5. In this article, 'realism' refers to the larger theoretical tradition that encompasses classical, structural, and neoclassical versions; united by shared assumptions about international relations described in the article.

The remainder of this article seeks to accomplish four tasks. Firstly, it argues for a serious appraisal of neoconservatism as a theory distinct from the policies of the George W. Bush administration, and systematically lays out the sources for distilling a neoconservative theory.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, it shows how neoconservatism and realism share identical starting assumptions and that neoconservatism rejects all but one of the liberal mechanisms that reduce international security competition. Having isolated attention to regime type as the only feature distinguishing neoconservatism from its realist colleagues, the next section explores the neoconservative mechanism of democratic weakness. Thirdly, the article explores the considerable overlap between this approach and the recent 'neoclassical' attempts to create a realist theory of foreign policy. The conclusion points out flaws jointly shared by neoconservatism and neoclassical realism, and suggests why the rest of IR should care.

### How IR Should Address Neoconservatism

Despite the claims from neoconservative's 'godfather' that 'there is no set of neoconservative beliefs concerning foreign policy, only a set of attitudes derived from historical experience', IR should treat this school of thought seriously for three reasons.<sup>7</sup> Firstly, as this article will show, neoconservatism is far from what Robert Keohane would describe as an 'unexamined jumble of prejudices, yielding conclusions that may not logically follow from the assumptions'.<sup>8</sup> Its core logic is quite consistent.

Keohane also argues that 'the more seriously the maxims are taken, the more important is the task of critical analysis', and by this standard, neoconservatism wins hands down over structural realism.<sup>9</sup> Few would suggest that this school of thought has not affected recent US foreign policy. Even if one regards neoconservatism, to borrow Richard Ashley's description of neorealism, as an 'orrery of errors', one should seek to rid oneself of these dangerous biases by 'knowing thy enemy'.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, like much of IR's foreign policy recommendations neoconservatism developed largely as a response to the failings of realism as a guide on the subject. Yet realists offer their foreign policy recommendations as the sane alternate to neoconservatism. It therefore behooves us to

6. 'Bush' refers heretofore to the 43rd President of the United States.

7. Irving Kristol, 'The Neoconservatism Persuasion', *The Weekly Standard* 8, no. 47 (2003).

8. Robert O. Keohane, 'Realism, Neorealism, and the Study of World Politics', in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 4.

9. *Ibid.*, 3. Walt, 'Relationship between Theory and Policy'.

10. Richard K. Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (1984): 225-86.

systematically specify the differences between these two approaches, and this requires treating the former as a theory.

### *Identifying Neoconservative Theory*

To this end, this article reverses the present convention when discussing neoconservatism, focusing on ideas primarily, policy recommendations secondarily and personalities not at all. People identified as neoconservative tend to write prolifically. Anyone who edits a weekly journal, contributes a regular column to the *Washington Post* or simply has written for 50 years is likely to produce pieces that contradict the central premises of a theory. Not every piece written by a 'neoconservative' should be given equal standing in deliberating over neoconservatism.

The article therefore focuses on a moderate number of published articles and books on foreign policy widely cited as intrinsic to neoconservative thought by both self-identified neoconservatives and other intellectual peers. Unlike many recent reviews this article incorporates literature from its origins in the Cold War through to the post-9/11 era.<sup>11</sup> To show the consistency of neoconservative logic I include the central works of contemporary neoconservatism, as well as many writings across Irving Kristol's and Norman Podhoretz's careers that self-consciously refer to neoconservatism and foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> This article

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11. Norman Podhoretz's (1999) survey is a valuable resource. It clearly states his interpretation of neoconservatism's principles, it identifies other 'neoconservatives' whose thinking has remained consistent before and after the Cold War, and yet it acknowledges that they disagree on policy while sharing a common logic. Norman Podhoretz, 'Strange Bedfellows: A Guide to the New Foreign-Policy Debates', *Commentary* 108, no. 5 (1999): 19–31. The cited works used here are Robert Kagan and William Kristol, 'Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 4 (1996): 18–32; Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, 'Dictatorships and Double Standards', *Commentary* 68, no. 5 (1979): 34–45; Joshua Muravchik, *The Imperative of American Leadership: A Challenge to Neo-Isolationism* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1996). Interestingly, Podhoretz excludes Krauthammer from the ranks.

12. Donald Kagan and Frederick W. Kagan, *While America Sleeps: Self-Delusion, Military Weakness, and the Threat to Peace Today* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000); Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York: Knopf, 2008); Robert Kagan and William Kristol, 'Introduction: National Interest and Global Responsibility', in *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunities in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, eds Robert Kagan and William Kristol (New York: Encounter Books, 2000); Charles Krauthammer, 'In Defense of Democratic Realism', *The National Interest* 77 (2004): 15–25; Charles Krauthammer, 'The Neoconservative Convergence', *Commentary*, 120, no. 1 (2005): 21–6; Joshua Muravchik, 'The Past, Present, and Future of Neoconservatism', *Commentary* 124, no. 3 (2007): 19–29.

pays special attention to the 'minority reports' of Fukuyama and Jeane Kirkpatrick, which other reviews only cite as the exceptions that prove the rule. Just as examining the writings of various strands of realism allows us to hone in on its central tenets, Fukuyama's explanation for why 'actually existing neoconservatism' has 'evolved into something that I can no longer support', is instructive for its own interpretation of neoconservatism's core.<sup>13</sup>

While a limited number of works have attempted to distil neoconservatism into a social scientific theory, a far larger number conflate neoconservatism with the Bush Doctrine. Some explicitly describe the Bush Doctrine as 'an operationalization of neoconservatism'. Others claim to examine neoconservatism while focusing almost exclusively on Bush administration speeches and policy documents.<sup>14</sup> Such an approach is not limited to critics; Charles Krauthammer claims that 'the Bush Doctrine is essentially a synonym for neoconservative foreign policy'.<sup>15</sup>

The Bush Doctrine certainly merits extensive analysis, but examining policy documents first and then linking these recommendations back to neoconservative writings is the wrong direction when considering the merits of a theory. Policy statements entail compromises among many camps and seek to communicate to a number of constituencies. The Bush administration should not be conflated with neoconservatism any more than the Nixon and Clinton administrations with realist and liberal theory.<sup>16</sup> Theory is necessarily prior to policy. Diverse theories can recommend the same policy. Conversely, Fukuyama based his apparent scepticism of the Iraq invasion on the same assumptions others used to support it. As in realism, these policy debates (rather than the policies themselves) are helpful in deriving neoconservatism's hard core.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006). Irving Kristol also evinced scepticism over promoting democracy by the sword.

14. Jonathan Monten, 'The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in US Strategy', *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 112–56, 141; Gerard Alexander, 'International Relations Theory Meets World Politics: The Neoconservative vs. Realism Debate', in *Understanding the Bush Doctrine*, eds Stanley Renshon and Peter Suedfeld (London: Routledge, 2007); Desch, 'Liberal Illiberalism'; Schmidt and Williams, 'Neoconservatives Versus Realists'.

15. Krauthammer, 'The Neoconservative Convergence'.

16. Focusing on policymakers who are not that interested in theoretic consistency to attack a theory compounds these two errors.

17. Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 26.

*Living in a Realist World*

Theory begins with ontology and assumptions, even when tacit. The ones underpinning neoconservatism are familiar to any realist.<sup>18</sup> Randall Schweller describes three fundamental assumptions that 'distinguish realism from all other IR perspectives' and are 'common to all realist theories': conflict groups (i.e. states) are the key actors in world politics, power is the fundamental feature of international relations and the essential nature of international relations is conflictual.<sup>19</sup> Neoconservatism shares all of these. The bottom line is, as Joshua Muravchik observes, 'Peace is hard to come by and hard to keep'.<sup>20</sup>

Neoconservatism recognises that 'in most places, the nation-state remains as strong as ever'.<sup>21</sup> These states are jealous of their sovereignty.<sup>22</sup> They interact in an anarchic world; Krauthammer approvingly cites realism's recognition of 'the fundamental fallacy in the whole idea of the international system being modeled on domestic society' and asks, 'If someone invades your house, you call the cops. Who do you call if someone invades your country?'<sup>23</sup> Kagan claims that outside of Europe the 'dangerous Hobbesian world still flourishes'.<sup>24</sup> Again, as with realism, uncertainty of intentions and the shadow of the future loom large, 'if history is any guide we are likely to face dangers even within the next decade that we cannot even imagine today'.<sup>25</sup>

Since they seek to survive in an uncertain world, states care deeply about their own power and that of other, potentially hostile states, with the possible exception of Europe, all large states, democratic or not, are

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18. Gerard Alexander argues that 'the Bush Doctrine shares core ontological assumptions with major streams of realist thought'. The Bush Doctrine shares much in common with Walt's balance-of-threat theory, as Alexander suggests, because it is not an exclusively neoconservative document. Alexander, 'International Relations Theory Meets World Politics', 39.

19. Randall L. Schweller, 'The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism', in *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, eds Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 325.

20. Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 28.

21. Kagan, *Return of History*, 3. Fukuyama is more ambivalent, identifying 'a shift in the locus of action from nation-states toward non-state actors and other transnational forces'. Nonetheless, the state 'cannot be replaced by any transnational actor: it remains the only source of power that can enforce a rule of law'. Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, 8–10.

22. Kagan, *Return of History*, 64–6.

23. Charles Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment Revisited', *The National Interest* 70 (2003): 5–17, 12. This echoes John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), 33.

24. Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, 75.

25. Kagan and Kristol, 'National Interest and Global Responsibility'. See also Podhoretz, 'Bedfellows', 31. Kagan and Kagan, *While America Sleeps*, 8.

interested in competing for more power.<sup>26</sup> Like realism, neoconservatism distinguishes between the great and lesser powers, but anarchy has its effect regardless:

In an anarchic world small powers always fear they will be victims. Great powers on the other hand, often fear rules that may constrain them more than they do anarchy. In an anarchic world, they rely on their power to provide security and prosperity.<sup>27</sup>

Like their realist cousins, Muravchik's neoconservatives place their trust in military force and doubt that 'economic sanctions or UN intervention or diplomacy, per se, constitute meaningful alternatives'.<sup>28</sup> Kagan argues that 'true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might'.<sup>29</sup>

### *Neoconservatism ain't Wilsonianism*

Like realism, neoconservatism rejects the Wilsonian and contemporary liberal mechanisms that help to mitigate this competitive realist world. Krauthammer describes neoconservatism's vision of spreading liberal values to other states as 'expansive and perhaps utopian. But it ain't Wilsonian'.<sup>30</sup> This article suggests taking Krauthammer at his word. Few labels exist *less* appropriate for neoconservatism than Wilsonianism – realistic or hard, with boots or with teeth – or any other form of liberalism for that matter. This article does not deny that one element at Wilsonianism's core is American promotion of liberal values abroad, and that neoconservatism shares this tenet. Rather, it points out that this is the *only* concrete element shared by these two theories.

The differences grow starker still when one compares neoconservatism to contemporary liberal IR theory, which suggests several

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26. Kagan, *Return of History*; Krauthammer, 'In Defense of Democratic Realism'. Fukuyama does contrast realism and neoconservatism: 'the nature of the regime matters to external behavior is held much more consistently by neoconservatives than the alternative realist view that all states seek power regardless of regime type', but then acknowledges the 'realist dimension' that 'power is often necessary to achieve moral purposes'. Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, 61–2.

27. Robert Kagan, 'Power and Weakness', *Policy Review* 113 (2002): 3–28.

28. Muravchik, 'Past, Present, and Future', 135.

29. Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, 3.

30. Charles Krauthammer, 'Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World', 2004 Irving Kristol Lecture, Washington, DC, 12 February 2004. Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*. Many neoconservative works invoking Wilsonianism simply borrow amenable aspects. For Muravchik, Wilsonianism merely 'sets a much lower threshold for American involvement abroad, on the theory that early intervention on a small scale may forestall a much heavier commitment later on' (Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 21).

related mechanisms to undermine the perpetual state of insecurity and competition that typifies a realist world.<sup>31</sup> G. John Ikenberry identifies six 'big ideas' shared by Wilsonianism and modern liberalism. The first four cover various paths to peace: democracy, free trade, international law and international bodies, and collective security. The final two are a progressive optimism about modernity coupled with the need for American global leadership as a 'moral agent'.<sup>32</sup> Neoconservatism clearly accepts both the importance of democracy as an American national interest and of American moral global leadership, but *explicitly rejects the remaining four points of liberalism/Wilsonianism*.

For both realism and neoconservatism, transnational mechanisms have little independent effect on international relations. International institutions are epiphenomenal, reflecting the distribution of power, and thus 'American hegemony is the only reliable defense against a breakdown of peace and international order'.<sup>33</sup> States without a liberal hegemonic protector remain 'mired in history, exercising power in the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable'.<sup>34</sup> Fukuyama evinces 'skepticism about the legitimacy and effectiveness of international law and institutions to achieve either security or justice'.<sup>35</sup>

Neoconservatism also doubts the pacifying effects of inter-state commerce; some neoconservative writings support the spread of free markets, but have little to say on free trade except in the context of alliances and threats. Kagan and Kristol warn against the 'Armand Hammerism' of 'blindly "doing business" with every nation, no matter its regime'.<sup>36</sup> Norman Podhoretz castigates 1980s' businessmen for 'loving commerce' more than 'they loathed communism'.<sup>37</sup> Trade and security are inescapably linked not as a means of preserving peace between rivals but as a form of strengthening alliances; in the context of the American–Japanese trade disputes of the 1980s and 1990s, Muravchik characterises the view that 'security relations with Japan . . . could be sealed off from economic

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31. For an efficient review of a massive literature, see Dan Reiter and Alan C. Stam, 'Democracy, Peace, and War', in *Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, eds. Barry R. Weingast and Donald Wittman (London: Oxford University Press, 2006).

32. G. John Ikenberry, 'Introduction: Woodrow Wilson, the Bush Administration, and the Future of Liberal Internationalism', in *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century*. G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Tony Smith, eds. (New York: Princeton University Press, 2008), 11–13.

33. Kagan and Kristol, 'Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy', 23.

34. Kagan, *Paradise and Power*.

35. Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, 49.

36. Kagan and Kristol, 'Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy'.

37. Norman Podhoretz, 'Neoconservatism: A Eulogy'. The phrase is originally George Will's.

issues' as 'either disingenuous or self-delusional'.<sup>38</sup> Kagan rejects the logic of the commercial peace as a 'comfortable doctrine of passivity', and suggests that economic interdependence is as likely to cause conflict as prevent it.<sup>39</sup>

As with trade, so with culture: perhaps a powerful force at the domestic level, but almost useless internationally. Neoconservatism evinces strong scepticism regarding the power of liberal, transnational norms posited by liberals; 'there is little sense of shared morality and common political principle among the great powers'.<sup>40</sup> Krauthammer bluntly observes that 'moral suasion is a farce', in his explicit rejection of Wilsonianism.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, neoconservatism contains little notion of ideas being used to co-opt potential adversaries in the form of 'soft power'.<sup>42</sup> So while neoconservatism understands that ideas matter on the domestic front, and that regime and individual identity are co-constituted, the claim that neoconservatism represents 'a systemic constructivist account of IR' is surely wrong.<sup>43</sup> Neoconservatism, like realism, claims that anarchy is always 'Hobbesian' unless a hegemon can enforce its preferred order; Europe's Kantian 'geopolitical fantasy' would not continue were the United States to withdraw its protection.<sup>44</sup>

Neoconservatism does support 'democracy at home and abroad', but given its scepticism of other liberal mechanisms, one suspects the means of causation differs from liberal IR theory.<sup>45</sup> Muravchik cites research claiming that democracies rarely fight each other, but rejects the empirical finding that democracies are as likely to start wars against non-democracies as any other regime because 'it flies in the face of common

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38. Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 202. For the (similar) realist take see Joanne S. Gowa, *Allies, Adversaries, and International Trade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

39. Kagan, *Return of History*. Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

40. Robert Kagan, 'End of Dreams, Return of History', *Policy Review* 144 (2007): 17–44.

41. Krauthammer, 'Democratic Realism'.

42. Kagan, 'Power and Weakness'.

43. Aaron Rapport, 'Unexpected Affinities? Neoconservatism's Place in IR Theory', *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 257–93. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

44. Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, 57; J.J. Mearsheimer, 'The Future of the American Pacifier', *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 5 (2001): 46–61.

45. Benjamin Miller, 'Democracy Promotion: Offensive Liberalism versus the Rest (of IR Theory)', *Millennium* 38, no. 3 (2010). For this reason, while Miller's 'offensive liberalism' may be a useful analytic category, it does not describe neoconservatism.

sense. . . . The cold war as a whole was a one-sided creation of the Soviet Union, while the United States all along wanted peace.' Muravchik lays out the democratic pacifist logic explicitly, 'Indeed, in this century, the democracies have several times helped to cause wars by being so pacific that dictators were tempted to overreach.'<sup>46</sup>

## Democratic Weakness

As Irving Kristol writes, 'In the end the fundamental problem for American democracy is that its foreign policy is democratic.'<sup>47</sup> Neoconservatism is a theory of democratic weakness in a realist world. The type of weakness that concerns neoconservatives is not a lack of economic power; the world's richest states are almost uniformly democratic. Nor is it a lack of military power; most of the world's largest military budgets belong to democratic states. Rather, neoconservatism seeks to point out the debilitating effects of democracy that prevent such a government from spending appropriate levels of its wealth on military power, and from employing any military power that it does possess.

Unlike their materialist counterparts, realists taking a constructivist approach avoid conflating liberalism and neoconservatism, and instead emphasise the latter's emergence as a *reaction* to American liberalism.<sup>48</sup> Neoconservatism's origins lie as much in an 'ambivalent attitude towards liberal modernization and the socio-cultural forces that the latter sets forth', as in an enthusiastic resistance to Soviet communism.<sup>49</sup> In linking the international and domestic spheres, neoconservatism advances an expansive conception of the 'national interest' as the domestic health of a society, finding a tendency towards self-destructive decadence inherent in liberalism. Unrestrained liberalism becomes, quite literally, an existential threat.<sup>50</sup> Because of this dangerous side effect, the democratic state must pursue a 'moral' foreign policy, which is 'an expression of [citizens'] values, and which they can identify with'.<sup>51</sup>

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46. Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 174.

47. Irving Kristol, 'A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy', *Wall Street Journal*, 2 August 1996.

48. Rapport, 'Unexpected Affinities?'; Schmidt and Williams, 'Neoconservatives Versus Realists'; Michael C. Williams, *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Michael C. Williams, 'What Is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory', *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 3 (2005): 307–37.

49. Jean-Francois Drolet, 'The Visible Hand of Neo-Conservative Capitalism', *Millennium* 35, no. 2 (2007): 245–78, 248.

50. Schmidt and Williams, 'Neoconservatives Versus Realists', 211.

51. *Ibid.*, 323.

However, it is not apparent that most neoconservatives, particularly in the contemporary generation, regard foreign policy primarily as a means of ameliorating liberal decadence at home, nor that culture is considered the 'defining element of politics' even within a state. According to Kagan, culture cannot explain recent changes in US foreign policy behaviour, 'Americans are no more or less idealistic than they were fifty years ago. It is objective reality that has changed, not the American character'.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, in comparing Europe and the United States, 'these differences in strategic culture do not spring naturally from the national characters of Americans and Europeans'.<sup>53</sup>

This article argues that neoconservative works are more concerned with the opposite direction of causality – how domestic politics affect a state's ability to compete in a self-help international system. Neoconservatism advocates a 'broad, sustaining policy vision', because without it, 'the American people will be inclined to withdraw from the world . . . they will seek deeper and deeper cuts in the defense and foreign affairs budgets and gradually decimate the tools of US hegemony'.<sup>54</sup> More succinctly put by Irving Kristol, 'in the modern world, a non-ideological politics is a politics disarmed'.<sup>55</sup> Decadence can only be an 'existential threat' if society faces an external peril. Like realism, neoconservative foreign policy regards *aussenpolitik* as paramount. Liberal democracy makes states less capable of surviving in the competitive realist world posited by neoconservatism.

### *A World Unsafe for Democracy*

Liberal publics are cost averse and inwardly focused; '[Americans] have continually searched for a way to reconcile their demand for a certain kind of world and their wish to avoid costs, including the moral costs, of imposing that world on others.'<sup>56</sup> 'Americans', opens Krauthammer, 'have a healthy aversion to foreign policy'.<sup>57</sup> Kagan and Kagan make the point more broadly, 'The record of liberal, democratic, commercial nations, no matter how great their strength, in keeping the peace over the long run is abysmal. The absence of an immediate threat permits democracies to focus on domestic comfort'.<sup>58</sup> A democracy's responsiveness to

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52. Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, 83.

53. Kagan, *Return of History*, 7–8.

54. Kagan and Kristol, 'Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy', 82; Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment Revisited'.

55. Irving Kristol, *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

56. Kagan, *Return of History*, 53.

57. Krauthammer, 'Democratic Realism'.

58. Kagan and Kagan, *While America Sleeps*, 4.

voters, neoconservative theory posits, produces unfortunate side effects that include: a perverse welfare state, an inattention to foreign policy and consequent military decline.

Neoconservatism acquired its name in part by eschewing mainstream conservatism's disavowal of the welfare state. While generally agnostic on its virtue, neoconservatism accepts that 'the welfare state is with us, for better or worse'.<sup>59</sup> This modern welfare state produces some undesirable consequences. Government redistribution erodes economic growth – itself a crucial element of national clout – but how wealth is redistributed also matters. Irving Kristol seeks a return to an 'older, masculine, paternalistic version of the welfare state' to help shore up an economically powerful, militarily strong state well suited for international competition.<sup>60</sup> While the first journal associated with neoconservatism specifically excluded foreign policy, Kristol describes the philosophy underpinning *The Public Interest* as 'linking its work in economic and social policy to our national destiny as a world power'.<sup>61</sup>

The liberal welfare state underinvests in military power; voters choose butter over guns and consumption over the death and taxes entailed by military competition. While not as dire as Europe, Kristol and Kagan fear that 'American civilians at home, preoccupied with the distribution of tax breaks and government benefits, will not come to [the military's] support when the going gets tough'.<sup>62</sup> Muravchik claims that 'public illusions' of wanting a 'balanced budget but resist[ing] increases in taxes or reductions in benefits' are likely to force politicians to cut spending on foreign policy.<sup>63</sup> Kagan and Kristol describe the American military as 'uncomfortable with some of the missions that the new American role requires'.<sup>64</sup> Democracy makes states both weaker militarily and less willing to use the remaining power they possess, preferring to use meeker foreign policy tools. 'Every [US] administration is attracted to economic sanctions as against military intervention, because although they are ineffectual . . . they do give the appearance of attentive action'.<sup>65</sup> In international security competition, democratic states play with a handicap.

Non-democratic states do not feel this redistributive, pacifying drag on their military power. Non-democracies are less shy about using the

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59. Irving Kristol, 'A Conservative Welfare State', *Wall Street Journal*, 14 June 1993.

60. Irving Kristol, 'The Two Welfare States', *Wall Street Journal*, 19 October 2000.

61. Irving Kristol, 'My Public Interest', *The Weekly Standard* 12, no. 14 (2006).

62. Kagan and Kristol, 'Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy'.

63. Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 39.

64. Kagan and Kristol, 'Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy'. On the timidity of democratic militaries, see also Kagan and Kagan, *While America Sleeps*; Kristol, 'The Neoconservatism Persuasion'.

65. Kristol, 'A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy'.

resources they have to advance their interests abroad. Irving Kristol clearly draws the link:

In world affairs the poorer nations that are not welfare states, not nearly as risk averse since they have so little to lose, will be (as they are already becoming) the activist countries, the ones that create the crises and set the international agenda.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, other regimes have domestic incentives to grow more powerful (rather than less). 'Strength and control at home allow Russia to be strong abroad. Strength abroad justifies strong rule at home.' In Kagan's description, states like China and Russia have the principal, realist goal of defending their sovereignty.<sup>67</sup>

Threats to the United States come in the form of ideologies coupled with material power.<sup>68</sup> Muravchik's citation of Napoleon's maxim, 'in warfare, moral factors are three times more important than material ones' shows neoconservatism's approach to ideology as a lens through which state power is focused.<sup>69</sup> Whereas fascism took German industry and focused it into a tight beam of military conquest, democracy takes American wealth and diffuses it or, worse still, reflects it back within in the form of destructive welfare policies.<sup>70</sup> By this reasoning, militant Islam could take materially feeble Middle Eastern states and magnify their impact through terror.<sup>71</sup> Far from a dissent, Kirkpatrick's famous denunciation of the Carter administration's focus on human rights promotion actually establishes the proposition that totalitarian regimes are inherently more threatening than authoritarian ones. Kagan uses this calculus to describe Russia, China, Iran and Syria as roughly equivalent threats.<sup>72</sup> This fundamental link between latent state power and regime type, which as we shall see is accepted by many self-described realists, leads to the very implications to which they object.

**The Pursuit of Pre-eminence, Military Power and the RMA:** Fighting with one arm tied behind their backs, democracies require a *lot* of power to compete in a dangerous world. Irving Kristol compares the United States to ancient Athens, 'where a democratic foreign policy

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66. Irving Kristol, 'The Lost Soul of the Welfare State', in *On the Issues* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1997).

67. Kagan, *Return of History*, 55. In a sense, Kagan's explanation is a liberal theoretic one – regime type instigates expansion. But Kagan argues that *all* regime types are primed for expansion and thus power is trumps.

68. Fukuyama shares this basic premise. Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, 29.

69. Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 34.

70. Kagan and Kagan, *While America Sleeps*.

71. Krauthammer, 'In Defense of Democratic Realism'; Muravchik, 'Past, Present, and Future'.

72. Kagan, 'End of Dreams, Return of History'.

led to one disaster after another', a pessimistic assessment to say the least. Fortunately, 'Athens was never the great power the United States is today.'<sup>73</sup> Krauthammer echoes this analysis when describing Arab-Islamic nihilism as a far greater threat than Soviet communism:

Were that the only difference between [the Cold War] and then, our situation would be hopeless. But there is a second difference between now and then: the uniqueness of our power, unrivaled, not just today but ever. *That evens the odds.*<sup>74</sup>

For a democratic state, only primacy will ensure its safety.

A patriotic culture of 'national greatness' is one means of mobilising state resources in a democracy, but neoconservatism does not take chances. Podhoretz writes of the need to exploit 'our superior technology to minimize American casualties while inflicting maximum damage on the enemy, even if innocent civilians might be harmed or killed in the process', in order to compete against 'the callous indifference to their own casualties of armies like the Russian and the Chinese'.<sup>75</sup> The 'revolution in military affairs' (RMA) allows the US to do more with less and – more importantly – not subject its constituents to undue physical risk.<sup>76</sup>

One can derive neoconservatism's particular zeal for missile defence from this conviction. Missile defence is not designed to counter a nuclear threat per se; Robert Kagan acknowledges that 'even the crazies are unlikely to fire a warhead at the United States'.<sup>77</sup> Preventing the homeland from being held hostage will give the United States the political will to use its military abroad. 'The sine qua non for a strategy of American global pre-eminence . . . is a missile defense system', write Kagan and Kristol, 'Only a well-protected America will be capable of deterring – and when necessary moving against – "rogue" regimes when they rise to challenge regional stability'.<sup>78</sup>

**Democratisation:** Fukuyama observes that the advocates of transforming Iraq into a Western-style democracy are the same people who question the 'dangers of ambitious social engineering'.<sup>79</sup> This apparent paradox becomes coherent given this idea of democratic enfeeblement. Kirkpatrick points out that because totalitarian states are inherently more

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73. Kristol, 'A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy'.

74. Krauthammer, 'Democratic Realism', emphasis added.

75. Podhoretz, 'Bedfellows'.

76. Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, 23.

77. Robert Kagan, 'A Real Case for Missile Defense', *The Washington Post*, 21 May 2000.

78. Kagan and Kristol, 'Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy'. This evokes Albert Wohlstetter's insistence that the United States must have the ability to fight a nuclear war, due to the Soviet Union's ideological willingness to accept casualties. Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, 33.

79. Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*.

threatening, the United States should focus its democratisation efforts there. Her famous essay does not criticise neoconservative enthusiasm for democratisation so much as connect it to a grand strategic logic. Because of the military advantage enjoyed by non-democracies, a United States interested in self-preservation should aggressively spread this cost aversion.<sup>80</sup> Muravchik succinctly states the core (and inherently power political) logic: 'The spread of democracy offers an important, peaceful way to weaken our foe.'<sup>81</sup>

But by this logic would not other regime types attempt to spread democracy, preferring to be the only autocrat in a world of Kantian peaceniks? Kagan and others address this question by claiming that the existence and success of democracies is inherently threatening to the stability of authoritarian regimes. This autocratic support (perhaps unlike democracy) is not based in ideological affinity but on self-preservation and the desire to maximise power. Moreover, autocrats:

see their comparative advantage over the West when it comes to gaining influence with African, Asian or Latin American governments that can provide access to oil and other vital natural resources or that, in the case of Burma, are strategically located.<sup>82</sup>

**Bandwagoning and Democratic Dominoes:** Mearsheimer argues that in a realist world, states balance against potential hegemons. In a neo-conservative world, states bandwagon, or at least fail to balance against, the powerful United States.<sup>83</sup> As with the democratic peace, neoconservatism can point to another important empirical finding unaccounted for by neorealism: the utter lack of balancing against the United States.<sup>84</sup> Neoconservatism views bandwagoning with the United States as likely for two reasons.

The first is not hard to understand. Weak states, as they have for time immemorial, 'suffer what they must'. Bandwagoning is their only option. But an additional neoconservative mechanism for bandwagoning exists given liberalism's inherent enervation of even strong powers. If

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80. Muravchik recommends not going to war to spread democracy, although 'exceptions may occur, especially where the issue of democracy combines with others to make a compelling interest, say, if Castroite guerillas overthrew the elected government of Mexico', *Imperative of American Leadership*, 164.

81. Muravchik, 'Past, Present, and Future'. Podhoretz describes a similar justification for Bosnian intervention. Podhoretz, 'Bedfellows'.

82. Kagan, 'End of Dreams, Return of History'.

83. Mearsheimer, 'Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War'.

84. Muravchik cites Paul Schroeder, 'Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory', *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 108–48. On lack of balancing in the post-Cold War world, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

democracy weakens states, a 'democratic domino' theory becomes logical. After all, 'a democratizing Russia, and even Gorbachev's democratizing Soviet Union, took a fairly benign view of NATO'.<sup>85</sup> Indeed it is the reluctance to use its vast power that makes American hegemony relatively attractive to other countries.<sup>86</sup>

**Preventative War:** Neoconservatism's theory of democratic weakness in a realist world creates 'closing windows of opportunity' that prime it for pre-emption.<sup>87</sup> If one believes that decline and disengagement are likely in democracies over time, then rising non-democratic great powers and radicalising weak states will catch up inevitably and perhaps quickly. Given the high likelihood of conflict on worse terms in the future, it makes sense to strike while power is sufficiently imbalanced to give democracies a chance. Plus, both neoconservatism and realism agree that early aggressiveness during a power transition is cheaper; 'early intervention on a small scale may forestall a much heavier commitment later on'.<sup>88</sup>

While Dale Copeland claims that such preventative wars occur only under exceptional circumstances, neoconservative logic opens the door to a whole host of justifications for intervention *if regime type accelerates these changes in power*.<sup>89</sup> This combination of focusing on the mere 'possibility of conflict', shared with offensive realism, coupled with a focus on the potentially enervating effects of regime type makes neoconservatism's foreign policy implications so volatile.<sup>90</sup>

## Neoconservatism Is Neoclassical Realism

Democratic enfeeblement is not normally associated with realism. However, the previous section makes clear that the many implications of neoconservatism require a realist world as a necessary condition. Moreover, if many of the current generation of realists are to be believed, examining democracy as a factor in international relations should not disqualify neoconservatism from the realist tradition, so long as it is done to study its effect on the generation of international political power. Ironically, even as Williams suggests that Hans Morgenthau 'provides

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85. Kagan, *Return of History*, 61; Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*.

86. Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 56.

87. Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

88. Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 21; Podhoretz, 'Bedfellows'.

89. Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

90. Stephen G. Brooks, 'Dueling Realisms', *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (1997): 445-77.

a remarkably prescient warning' of neoconservatism's dangerous interpretation of the national interest, the band of self-identified realists who seek to bring a new rigour to Morgenthau's classical realism quite clearly fail to distinguish themselves from neoconservatism.<sup>91</sup> Put simply, nothing in neoclassical realism precludes a neoconservative foreign policy.

Neoclassical realism seeks to correct the flaws of neorealism to the point that Randall Schweller claims it to be 'the only game in town for the current and next generation of realists', because the alternatives are 'highly abstract, purely structural-systemic theories'.<sup>92</sup> Like neoconservatism, neoclassical realism focuses on foreign policy as much as system-level phenomena.<sup>93</sup> Like neoconservatism, neoclassical realism generally assumes that as a state's international political power waxes and wanes, so too does its efforts to influence other states.<sup>94</sup> Like neoconservatism, neoclassical realism incorporates the role of ideas while continuing to give materialist causes their due.

Since the publication of the piece that coined the term, the number of scholars identifying themselves as neoclassical realists has increased.<sup>95</sup> Additionally and crucially, these thinkers have sought to answer Stephen Walt's criticism that neoclassical realism 'tends to incorporate domestic variables in an ad hoc manner', and 'has yet to offer a distinct set of explanatory hypotheses of its own'.<sup>96</sup> The more recent generation has focused largely on a single factor: 'whether state leaders have the power to convert the nation's economic power into military power or to translate the nation's economic and military power into foreign policy actions'.<sup>97</sup> Brian Rathbun puts it most succinctly: 'Power can be used only if it can be mobilized. Two variables are particularly important for this: the state's extractive ability

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91. Williams, 'What Is the National Interest?'

92. Schweller, 'The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism', 347.

93. *Ibid.*, 317.

94. Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 43; Kagan, *Paradise and Power*; Kagan, *Return of History*.

95. Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy', *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72.

96. Stephen M. Walt, 'The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition', in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, eds Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 211.

97. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, 'Introduction', in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, eds Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44. See also Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, 'State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State', *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 464–95, 486.

and inspirational capacity.<sup>98</sup> Neoclassical realism does not limit itself to material variables, but even so, 'identity and ideology are used primarily as part of self-help'.<sup>99</sup> Neoconservatism could not agree more.<sup>100</sup>

Oddly, despite considering a wide range of domestic-level variables, neoclassical realism has devoted remarkably little attention to regime type. The few exceptions are suggestive, however. Aaron Friedberg argues that strong, centralised states are better equipped to react to adverse shifts in relative power and that, 'it would not be surprising, therefore, if liberal democracies failed to do particularly well in this regard'.<sup>101</sup> Norrin Ripsman posits that the ballot box can be a drag on the generation of military power and Colin Dueck argues that the prospect of elections forces American presidents to fight wars in ways they would prefer not to.<sup>102</sup> Thomas Christensen describes government threat inflation to rouse an American public into mobilising to counter the Soviet threat.<sup>103</sup>

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98. Brian Rathbun, 'A Rose by any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism', *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 294–321, 302. Several self-identified neoclassical realists argue that ideology directly affects foreign policy behaviour rather than power mobilisation. Colin Dueck argues that American strategic culture filters out *realpolitik* policy options. Christopher Layne argues that liberal economic ideology led to American *over*-expansion. William Wohlforth focuses on the perception of power. Of course, neoconservatives also argue that liberal culture inhibits consideration of realist policy alternatives as well as threat perception. This article focuses on power mobilisation because this is what most distinguishes neoclassical realists from liberal theorists. Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

99. Rathbun, 'A Rose by any Other Name', 303.

100. Lobell et al., 'Introduction', 38.

101. Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 290; Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*. Whereas Mearsheimer and Walt characterise Friedberg as a neoconservative, Schweller describes Friedberg as a 'neoclassical realist'. This article claims they are both correct. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 129; Schweller, 'The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism', 318.

102. Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*; Norrin M. Ripsman, 'Neoclassical Realism and Domestic Interest Groups', in Lobell et al., *Neoclassical Realism*. Also see Jonathan D. Caverley, 'The Myth of Military Myopia: Democracy, Small Wars, and Vietnam', *International Security* 34, no. 3 (2010): 119–57.

103. Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). On neoconservative/Bush administration threat inflation, see Chaim D. Kaufmann, 'Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War', *International Security* 29, no. 1 (2004): 5–48.

Schweller, one of the first to embrace the neoclassical label, has derived many of the same conclusions as neoconservatism. In early work, Schweller argues that democracies avoid preventative wars against rising major powers.<sup>104</sup> Although he does not specifically mention democracy, he later finds, like Friedberg, that 'the behavior of weak and incoherent states does not conform to the logic of balance of power theory; they do not systematically balance against external threats or take advantage of opportunities to expand when they can'.<sup>105</sup> Schweller's most recent work explains ideology as a prerequisite of international power and conquest in the 'age of mass politics'. In this argument, fascism is the ultimate source of military power, whereas realism and liberalism are insufficient ideological motivators.<sup>106</sup> What separates these theories from neoconservatism is not easy to discern.

### Spreading Liberalism Does Not a Liberal Make

Desch's 'indictment of liberalism' uses support of individuals identified as 'liberals' for Bush administration policies as its principal evidence that neoconservatism and liberalism are not only essentially the same, but are directly responsible for 'illiberal' US policies. This article has shown, however, that neoconservative and liberal first principles share little in common. The spread of democracy abroad is best described as a solitary liberal policy thrust among many illiberal ones stemming from neoconservatism's profoundly realist assumptions.<sup>107</sup>

Neoconservatism posits states mired in a dangerous and anarchic environment. Unlike most forms of realism, neoconservatism believes it is especially dangerous to be a liberal state in such a system. Democracy may be a normatively superior system of government, but it suffers from profound constraints in this international competition due to its inability to convert its resources to power. Primacy, pre-emption, the revolution in military affairs and worldwide democratisation provide the means to manoeuvre around this power political handicap. Desch focuses on the ironic pursuit of illiberal policies by liberals. This article has sought to show that one can take a realist starting point and justify foreign policy that profoundly differs from the realist tradition. It concludes by discussing ways that neoconservatism shows the disturbing but logical extension of neoclassical realism's approach to foreign policy. It also conveys the stakes of the debate for those in IR outside this squabble.

104. Randall L. Schweller, 'Domestic Structure and Preventive War – Are Democracies More Pacific?', *World Politics* 44, no. 2 (1992): 235–69.

105. Taliaferro, 'State Building for Future Wars', 345.

106. Randall L. Schweller, 'Neoclassical Realism and State Mobilization: Expansionist Ideology in the Age of Mass Politics', in Lobell et al., *Neoclassical Realism*.

107. Desch, 'Liberal Illiberalism', 33–4.

Neoclassical realism insists that the competitive international system remains the prime mover of foreign policy. In order to distinguish itself from liberal approaches, neoclassical realism tends to choose a privileged actor to represent the 'state' by assuming that 'The national security executive . . . is best equipped to perceive systemic constraints and deduce the national interest.'<sup>108</sup> This is, to say the least, a heroic assumption on a par with the traditional state-as-unitary-actor, but with far more dangerous consequences. The latter assumption merely implies that regime type does not matter, the former suggests that executive autonomy determines 'whether states respond to international pressures in a timely and efficient fashion' and is thus the recipe for success in international politics. The Kagans strike a similar theme, 'It is not enough, however, to say of a democracy that it could not follow a particular policy because the people did not wish to do so. For the necessary and proper role of leaders is to lead.'<sup>109</sup> Whereas Richard Ashley and others have criticised neorealism (and neoliberalism) for its dangerous reification of the state, neoclassical realism reifies a very specific *embodiment* of the state (i.e. the executive).<sup>110</sup>

The illiberal implications of such a move are clear from extending neoconservative logic; mitigating one's own democratic mechanisms in order to advance them elsewhere becomes reasonable.<sup>111</sup> While many have focused on threats to civil liberties in the Global War on Terror, a more troubling consequence could be attempts to decouple the decision to use force from the voter.<sup>112</sup> An RMA military insulated from the pacifist pressures of a democratic electorate would undermine the democratic pacifism that allows the United States to be viewed as a Kantian peacemaker, triggering the balance of power politics that contrary to structural realist predictions have not yet developed.

Neoclassical realists may defend themselves against this article's claims by observing that no one in their ranks has argued for spreading democracy. This article asks, 'why not?' While both neoconservatism and neoclassical realism focus on domestic aspects of power generation, to date the latter has generally taken a strikingly unstrategic approach to it. Neoconservatism acknowledges that if domestic factors affect a state's ability to balance against threat or power, a strategic actor should incorporate *other states'* domestic factors into its geopolitical calculus. Intervening in other states' internal affairs becomes a form of balancing.

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108. Lobell et al., 'Introduction', 25.

109. Kagan and Kagan, *While America Sleeps*, 43.

110. Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism'.

111. Irving Kristol compares American prospects favourably to Athens' fate because 'the Athenian version of democracy had far fewer ways of shaping, refining, and even sometimes thwarting popular opinion' than the American one. Kristol, 'A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy'.

112. Drolet, 'Neo-Conservative Capitalism', 262.

This more than any other aspect of neoconservatism appears to be a clear violation of the realist tradition, and yet neoclassical realism cannot reject such an implication in its current state.<sup>113</sup> Incorporating what one author has called ‘as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations’ is no less reasonable than many of the ad hoc additions of neoclassical realism to its structural antecedent, and considerably more parsimonious than some versions.<sup>114</sup> Lack of enthusiasm for democratisation is not really a logical proposition for neoclassical realists so much as a taboo left over from their ancestors.

Structural realism has long been criticised for being largely incapable of creating a theory of foreign policy. This article shows that neoclassical efforts to correct this are not an unalloyed improvement. Once one assumes the existence of a neorealist world – a conflict-prone, anarchic world of sovereign states – and attempts to bring the domestic ‘in’, little prevents a neoconservative approach to the world. Realists can justifiably claim that by and large they rejected the Iraq War. But the arguments against the war, best made by structural realists, were largely empirical: the limitations of military power, the history of Saddam Hussein’s containment and deterability, the lack of a connection to Al-Qaeda, the power of nationalism, and Iraqi societal divisions.<sup>115</sup> If realism of any sort is to offer itself as a better guide to foreign policy than neoconservatism, it needs to better specify its theoretical differences.

Readers of *Millennium* may wonder why they should care about internecine bickering within a corner of American IR. To be sure, neoconservatism is fundamentally American-centric, but, like its cousins, neoconservatism’s focus on the role of regime type in international politics goes beyond the United States. The Kagans provide a neoconservative explanation for the decline of the British Empire (and to a lesser degree of France).<sup>116</sup> Neoconservatives see Israel as an important policy realm that can profit from their theories.<sup>117</sup> While William Kristol states that, ‘the only successful American foreign policy is a neoconservative one’, he

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113. Of course, doing so would lead to an increasing inability to distinguish itself from liberal forms of IR theory, but since there is no theoretical barrier, the horse is already out of the barn. I thank David Edelstein for this important point.

114. Jack S. Levy, ‘Domestic Politics of War’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 653–73.

115. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, ‘An Unnecessary War’, *Foreign Policy* 134 (2003): 50–9.

116. Kagan and Kagan, *While America Sleeps*. Neoconservatives rarely address why the two most hegemonic states in modern history have been democracies.

117. Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and others influenced by neoconservative contributed to a famous conference report blaming Israel’s ‘socialist institutions’ for its ‘strategic paralysis’ and ‘A Clean Break: a New Strategy for Securing the Realm,’ report of the Study Group on a New Israeli Strategy toward 2000. The Institute for Advanced Strategy and Political Studies, Jerusalem, 1996.

also suspects that 'the only successful European foreign policy would be a neoconservative one'.<sup>118</sup>

In essence, this article identifies a new 'neo-neo' debate, in which the disagreements are even more limited than those between neoliberal institutionalism and neorealism. Ole Wæver describes the earlier debate as veering beyond the 'boundary of boredom'. A world in which neoclassical realism and neoconservatism are the two salient policy options for the state that remains by far the world's most powerful will be plenty interesting, even if the science is not.<sup>119</sup> Ultimately, we must care because the policy implications are great. If the parameters of the debate are so limited, we are unlikely to see real change any time soon, which explains why Robert Kagan could confidently predict that, 'in 2008, as in almost every election of the past century, American voters will choose between two variations of the same worldview'.<sup>120</sup>

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118. William Kristol, 'Neoconservatism Remains the Bedrock of US Foreign Policy', in *The Neocon Reader*, ed. Irwin Stelzer (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

119. Ole Wæver, 'The Rise and Fall of the Inter-Paradigm Debate', in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, eds Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). It also reflects the failure of the decades-long attempt to broaden the debate beyond such theories; Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (1981): 126–55.

120. Robert Kagan, 'Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, c. 1776', *World Affairs* 170, no. 4 (2008): 13–35.