



The neoconservative paradigm: navigating power, democracy, and America's role in the world

المنظور المحافظ الجديد: استكشاف القوة والديمقراطية ودور أمريكا في العالم

Le paradigme néoconservateur : explorer le pouvoir, la démocratie et le rôle de l'Amérique dans le monde

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ملخص

المحافظة الجديدة، أو تيار المحافظين الجدد، هي أيديولوجية سياسية ظهرت في السياسة الأمريكية خلال منتصف القرن العشرين وأثرت بشكل كبير على الشؤون الداخلية والخارجية. ورغم أن المحافظة الجديدة متجذرة بعمق في الفكر المحافظ الكلاسيكي وفي الالتزام السياسي بالديمقراطية الليبرالية، فإنها تركز عمومًا على المبادئ التالية: تعزيز الديمقراطية، تبني موقف عسكري استباقي، القيادة الأخلاقية الأمريكية في العالم، ودعم الليبرالية الاقتصادية على الصعيد الداخلي. يستعرض هذا المقال المنظورات الاقتصادية، والأهداف السياسية الدولية، والأسس الفلسفية للمحافظة الجديدة، بالإضافة إلى أبرز مؤيديها ومنتقديها. كما يتناول المقال الحالة الراهنة لهذا التيار في سياق الديناميكيات السياسية المعاصرة، خاصة خلال إدارة الرئيس الأمريكي ترامب وبعدها، حيث تظل النقاشات حول مشاركة الولايات المتحدة في الشؤون العالمية وتعزيز القيم الديمقراطية مرتبطة ارتباطًا وثيقًا ببارث المحافظة الجديدة. يهدف هذا المقال إلى تقديم فهم أعمق للتأثير المستمر للمحافظة الجديدة في السياسة الأمريكية، إلى جانب تقديم رؤى حول الاتجاه المستقبلي لهذه الحركة في عالم متغير.

الكلمات الدالة: المحافظة الجديدة؛ السياسة الخارجية للولايات المتحدة؛ تعزيز الديمقراطية؛ التدخل العسكري؛ الاستثنائية الأمريكية؛ الحرب ضد الإرهاب.

Abstract

Neoconservatism, a political ideology that emerged in American politics during the mid-20th century, has significantly influenced both domestic and foreign affairs. While neoconservatism is deeply rooted in classical conservatism and a foundational commitment to liberal democracy, it generally emphasizes the following tenets: the promotion of democracy, a proactive military posture, American moral leadership in the world, and support for economic liberalism

domestically. This article explores the economic perspectives, international policy goals, and philosophical underpinnings of neoconservatism, along with its key proponents and critics. Additionally, it examines the current state of neoconservatism in relation to contemporary political dynamics, particularly during and following the Trump administration. Debates over the U.S. engagement in world affairs and the promotion of democratic values remain intimately intertwined with the legacy of neoconservatism. This article aims to provide the reader with a more comprehensive understanding of the continued influence of neoconservatism in US politics, while also providing insights into the movement's future direction in a changing world.

Keywords: neoconservatism; U.S. foreign policy; democracy promotion; military intervention; American exceptionalism; war on terror.

Résumé

Le néoconservatisme, une idéologie politique qui est apparue dans la politique américaine au milieu du XXe siècle, a eu une influence significative sur les affaires intérieures et extérieures. Bien que le néoconservatisme soit profondément enraciné dans le conservatisme classique et dans un engagement fondateur en faveur de la démocratie libérale, il met généralement l'accent sur les principes suivants : la promotion de la démocratie, une posture militaire proactive, le leadership moral américain dans le monde, et le soutien au libéralisme économique à l'intérieur du pays. Cet article explore les perspectives économiques, les objectifs politiques internationaux et les fondements philosophiques du néoconservatisme, ainsi que ses principaux partisans et critiques. De plus, il examine l'état actuel du néoconservatisme en relation avec les dynamiques politiques contemporaines, en particulier pendant et après l'administration Trump. Les débats concernant l'engagement des États-Unis dans les affaires mondiales et la promotion des valeurs démocratiques restent profondément liés à l'héritage du néoconservatisme. Cet article vise à offrir au lecteur une compréhension plus approfondie de l'influence continue du néoconservatisme dans la politique américaine, tout en offrant des perspectives sur la direction future du mouvement dans un monde en évolution.

Mots-clés: néoconservatisme; politique étrangère des États-Unis; promotion de la démocratie; intervention militaire; exceptionnalisme américain; guerre contre le terrorisme.

Introduction

The concept of neoconservatism entered into the liberal vocabulary during the mid-20th century, as a distinct intellectual movement, rooted in a combination of classical liberalism, anti-communism, and moral conservatism. Initially, it started as a reaction to perceived failings of the liberal Left (especially concerning welfare policies and foreign affairs), and it became prominent in the mid-1980s under the Reagan presidency, and

again under President George W Bush after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Neoconservatism is best known for its outward and assertive stance towards U.S. foreign policy – the argument that the United States should play an active role on the global stage, promoting democracy and defending other liberal causes abroad. While conceptually quite influential, its advocates have been subject to fierce criticism, especially due to of interventions in Iraq (among other operations), and then the broader outcomes concerning the effects of U.S. interventionism.

In this article, I aim to trace the evolution, essential principles, and the long-lasting importance of neoconservatism, by studying its philosophical origins, foreign policy goals, economic viewpoints, and the permanent criticism it has received throughout its existence. The present article also sheds light on the influence of the most prominent founders of the ideology, such as Irving Kristol, Paul Wolfowitz, and Robert Kagan, on the American political thought and policy-making. Furthermore, the article seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the response of neoconservatism to contemporary issues and challenges, particularly with the rise of populism and the emergence of voices criticizing U.S. military interventionist policies.

To effectively steer the present study, the following questions will be addressed: what is neoconservatism and what are its major philosophical foundations? In what ways has the U.S. foreign policy been impacted by the political objectives of neoconservatism and how has the American economy been influenced, especially with regard to free markets and globalization? How did the most prominent figures of neoconservatism shape the movement? What are the primary criticisms of neoconservatism? What is the legacy of neoconservatism today in the modern political world amid the ongoing rise of populism and calls for a noninterventionist policy?

The research methodology is based on a qualitative historical analysis, which will use a combination of primary and secondary sources to assess the evolution of neoconservatism as well as its impact. The primary sources used for studying neoconservatism are works by the prominent figures of this ideology, including Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz. Secondary sources include scholarly evaluations of the movement, criticisms from both within and outside conservatism, as well as recent political commentary examining neoconservatism in its contemporary context. I will also rely heavily on historical texts, political commentaries, and policy evaluations to



provide a comprehensive analysis of the movement's impact on U.S. domestic and foreign affairs.

1. Neoconservatism: definition and historical background

By definition, neoconservatism is a school of political thought in the United States that originated in the 1970s as a response to the excesses of liberalism. It diverges from other forms of conservatism in its approach to foreign policy making, embracing the notion that the U.S. can only ensure its security through spreading freedom and democracy internationally, even if the use of unilateral military power is necessary (Oxford). It is a complex political philosophy that supports U.S. military supremacy and holds that liberal democracies should be spread worldwide. It is frequently interpreted as a reaction to perceived threats to American interests and ideals, promoting higher defense budgets and more assertive foreign policy, especially in response to the War on Terror (Ahsan, 2023). Irving Kristol, one of the founding figures of the neoconservative ideology, defines a neoconservative as "a liberal who has been mugged by reality" (qtd. in Murray, 2005, 25). Kristol's definition reflects the ideology's main philosophy: a practical shift from liberal ideals to conservative ones, notably in the spheres of social policy, economics, and international relations.

In the 1970s and 1980s, neoconservatism became prevalent within political circles. This ascendancy was due in large part to the efforts of its supporters against what they saw as extreme foreign policy views within the Democratic Party regarding two primary concerns: the American "involvement" in Vietnam and the ongoing tension stemming from Cold War hostility. In his article entitled "Moral Anticommunism", Paul Podhoretz, another prominent figure of the neoconservative ideology, argued that America needed a more assertive stand against communism and criticized the perceived weakness of détente policies (qtd. in Kimball, 2005). His view highlights one of the ideology's most important principles: to prevent dangerous consequences both domestically and internationally, the United States had to adopt a more rigorous approach to global relations. Neoconservatives favored tougher national defense policies as well as more audacious methods of opposing the Soviet Union and advancing democracy globally. They believed that maintaining national security and advancing democratic values depended heavily on America's leadership position in the world (Ahsan, 2023).



Neoconservatism had a significant impact on U.S. foreign policy, most notably under the administration of Ronald Reagan, where an increased military spending, a support for anti-communist movements abroad, and continued support for renewed American leadership in promoting democracy and global hegemony (Salokhiddinovich, 2020). Reagan's strategic initiatives towards the Soviet Union, such as his Strategic Defense Initiative and particularly his frequent rhetoric about an 'Evil Empire', portrayed neoconservative ideology; the Cold War was not simply about politics, but rather a war between democracy and totalitarianism (Rowland & Jones, 2016). Neoconservatism had its largest influence on American politics between the mid-1980s and late 2008/early 2009, playing a leading role in policies opposing authoritarianism and promoting liberal democracy across the world.

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in particular changed neoconservative attitudes towards American foreign policy in general. Remarkably, there was a resurgence of the neoconservative movement after the September 11 attacks. Those events bolstered the neoconservative conviction that America should actively promote a new world order, especially in the Middle East, through preemptive war, if necessary, to prevent the rise of radicalism and terrorism. This view peaked with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was broadcasted by the Bush administration as an act of promoting democracy in the country and eliminating, according to them, weapons of mass destruction (Awale, 2022). The Iraq War was a significant event for neoconservatism, exemplifying its foreign policy objectives, as well as the subsequent criticisms stemming from the extended instability and unforeseen outcomes of the war.

The Republican Party saw a shift in its foreign policy stance with the election of Donald Trump in 2016, when his "America First" strategy emphasized an isolationist and transactional approach to foreign affairs over the interventionist views of neoconservatives (Gerstle, 2022). Nonetheless, neoconservative thinkers continue to dominate discussions on U.S. foreign policy, particularly regarding the rise of authoritarianism in countries like China and Russia and the importance of maintaining international alliances (Salokhiddinovich, 2020). The debate over the relevance of neoconservatism and its influence on determining the direction of U.S. foreign policy persists as the United States faces new challenges worldwide.



2. Philosophical foundations of neoconservatism and its key figures

Classical political philosophy, conservative values, and a critique of contemporary liberalism are the foundations of neoconservatism. Neoconservative views are based on morality, strong leadership, and the value of Western civilization. Neoconservative intellectuals are mainly influenced by the political philosopher Leo Strauss and use his ideas about moral character and leadership (Kristol, 1983). Other key figures who left their mark on the neoconservative ideology include Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Donald Kagan, and Francis Fukuyama, to name a few.

2.1 Philosophical foundations

2.1.1 Anti-communism and the cold war

Within the political landscape of the Cold War in the 1960s and 1970s, neoconservatism emerged as a product of disappointment among former liberals regarding the Democratic Party's position on communism and what they perceived as a waning of America's moral power. Neoconservatives contended that communism posed not just a political and economic threat, but also a moral one, and they firmly believed that the United States bore a responsibility to confront it with vigor (Hoffmann and Norton, 2004). Central to their ideology was the conviction of the supremacy of American leadership, viewing the U.S. as the moral compass of the world and as a defender of liberal democracy against authoritarian expansion, particularly by the Soviet Union. The Cold War was perceived as a moral battleground between good and evil, which led neoconservatives to advocate for a more assertive U.S. foreign policy that prioritized the propagation of democracy and the opposition to despotism.

2.1.2 Moral clarity and leadership

One of the core tenets of neoconservatism is the significance of strong, decisive leadership. This concept is based on the belief that morally strong leaders who can handle challenging circumstances are just as important to free democracies as robust institutions. Neoconservatives contend that leaders should be ready to make difficult choices, particularly when it comes to foreign policy, and should not be swayed by public opinion or transient political concerns. The significance of leadership is especially emphasized in neoconservative critiques of U.S. foreign policy during the Vietnam War and the Cold War *détente* era. Neoconservatives contended that the United States' opposition to communism lacked moral clarity, which they saw as a



weakness in its leadership. They called for a more resolute and moral strategy, supporting laws policies that would restore America's moral authority on the global stage (Mukhammadsidiqov and Salokhiddinovich, 2020).

2.1.3 Defense of Western Civilization

Defending constantly Western civilization and its essential principles is the key foundation of neoconservatism. The neocons believe that the core ethics that preserve Western civilization such as liberal democracy, capitalism, and individual rights, are more important than other political and economic systems. Therefore, it is a duty, according to them, to protect those values at both the domestic and international levels against the threats presented by authoritarianism, terrorism, and moral relativism. Neoconservatives argue that it is the United States' duty to preserve and advance the values of Western civilization as the leading democracy in the world. One major outcome of this belief is the encouragement of interventionist foreign policies; the neocons fully support U.S. military intervention in regions where they believe democratic values are threatened (Salokhiddinovich, 2020).

2.2. Key figures

2.2.1 Leo Strauss

Leo Strauss is often hailed as a pivotal intellectual force behind the development of neoconservatism. He criticized the prevalent relativism and nihilism within modern liberal democracies, asserting that absolute moral truths are indispensable for upholding order and unity in societies. Strauss maintained that modern liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism and moral relativism, had weakened the bedrock of Western civilization. He contended that a reversion to classical virtues, particularly those espoused by philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, was imperative for the preservation of democratic governance. Strauss expressed particular apprehension about the perils of moral relativism, which he believed weakened societies by diminishing belief in absolute values (Legenhausen, 2020). He warned that liberal democracies that failed to assert robust moral leadership and permitted relativism to prevail would become susceptible to internal decay and external threats. This conviction resonated with numerous neoconservatives, who advocated for the United States to exhibit strength and moral conviction, particularly in the realm of foreign policy.

2.2.2. Irving Kristol

Often praised as the "godfather" of neoconservatism, Irving Kristol was instrumental in shaping the fundamental philosophy of the movement. He



characterized neoconservatism as a "belief system" rather than a rigid ideology, with a strong emphasis on American exceptionalism and the moral obligation of the United States to advance democracy and capitalism on a global scale. His ideas were influenced by a rejection of the radicalism of the New Left and a critical examination of the welfare state, which he perceived as eroding individual accountability and fostering reliance (Abrams, 2010). Much like Strauss, Kristol advocated for the governance of liberal democracies through clear moral principles, contending that the United States, with its liberal democratic values and capitalist economy, held a distinct role in international affairs. He maintained that America's prosperity was founded on its dedication to these principles and that the U.S. should actively champion them on the world stage. This commitment to moral leadership and the advancement of American values constitutes a fundamental aspect of neoconservative foreign policy (Awale, 2022).

2.2.3. Norman Podhoretz

Serving as an editor of *Commentary* magazine for many years, Norman Podhoretz, a key figure in the neoconservative movement, passionately promoted neoconservative views on both domestic and foreign policies through this forum. Podhoretz was a former leftist like Kristol, but eventually lost faith in the liberal elite, particularly during the Cold War. He was a strong opponent of détente and actively supported a more dynamic posture against the Soviet Union; he was particularly keen on emphasizing a more powerful U.S. foreign policy. He continued to promote the Iraq War and advocate for American involvement in the Middle East even after the Cold War ended. In the early 2000s, he became a strong advocate of the neoconservative agenda and had a significant influence on foreign policy. His book, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism*, demonstrates his unwavering conviction that the United States must maintain a strong and assertive foreign policy (Abrams, 2010).

2.2.4. Donald Kagan

Donald Kagan was a distinguished neoconservative thinker and a well-known historian, particularly in political history. His expertise in international affairs and military history was widely recognized. During his academic career, he mostly emphasized the critical role that conflict plays in shaping history, and the necessity for an active U.S. foreign policy. His impact on neoconservative foreign policy ideology was enduring, shaped by his examination of past conflicts and unwavering endorsement of military



readiness. As a staunch advocate for the Project for the New American Century and a dedicated proponent of the Iraq War, Kagan consistently stressed the fundamental importance of American military strength in advancing global stability and democratic principles (Kagan, 2008).

2.2.5. Francis Fukuyama

Francis Fukuyama was once closely aligned with the neoconservative movement, but he later distanced himself from its principles. In his influential essay, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), he argued that the neoconservatives shared his belief that the end of the Cold War symbolized the triumph of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism. Fukuyama had previously endorsed the neoconservative foreign policy tenet that democratic values are universally applicable. However, following the Iraq War, he criticized the neoconservative approach to foreign policy as excessively interventionist and simplistic, leading to a division within the movement. His subsequent writings, including *America at the Crossroads* (2006), offer a critical analysis of the neoconservative reliance on military force to achieve political objectives and a reassessment of his earlier stances.

To summarize, commitment to moral clarity, strong leadership, and the preservation of Western civilization are the elementary philosophical foundations of neoconservatism. Under the influence of prominent thinkers such as Leo Strauss and Irving Kristol, neoconservatives strongly hold that liberal democracies' most important duty is to affirm their values both domestically and internationally, and that the U.S. has a moral commitment to be the world's leader in democracy and capitalism.

3. Foreign policy goals of neoconservatism

The central tenets of neoconservative foreign policy are largely rooted in the movement's ideology of moral clarity, the defense of democratic values and a belief in American exceptionalism. Such goals include an aggressive, interventionist U.S. stance that seeks to advance democracy, protect U.S. interests, and combat authoritarianism. Neoconservatives believe that the United States has a moral obligation to take the leading role in the global structure, to stop the expansion of totalitarian regimes and to advocate Liberalism and human rights on a global scale. This is especially seen in their support for wars and aggressive interventions by America.

3.1 Promotion of democracy and liberal values

Neoconservatism has a key foreign policy objective of actively promoting democracy and liberal values abroad. Adherents believe that not only is

liberal democracy the most just political system, but it also creates stability and peace. They argue that democratic nations are less likely to engage in conflict and are more likely to uphold human rights and the rule of law (Dunn, 2015). Figures like Irving Kristol argue that the United States has a moral duty to support the spread of democracy globally, as it is in line with American values and strategic interests. This objective became especially important in the post-Cold War era, as neoconservatives believed that the fall of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for the U.S. to shape the global order by promoting democracy and capitalism (Gerstle, 2022).

Neoconservative foreign policy is based on the idea that democratic nations are more likely to align with U.S. interests, and that promoting democracy will contribute to a more peaceful and stable world (McGlinchey, 2009). This belief in democracy promotion guided neoconservative support for interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, which were presented as efforts to bring democratic governance to regions ruled by authoritarian regimes.

3.2 American Exceptionalism and Global Leadership

As a political philosophy, neoconservatism promotes the idea of American exceptionalism and calls for the U.S. to assume a leading position in international affairs. Neoconservatives contend that because the United States is a distinct country based on the values of liberty, democracy, and individual rights, it has an exceptional obligation to influence the world order. They argue that in addition to being a powerful nation, the United States is also the world's moral compass, with a duty to protect and promote freedom everywhere (Salokhiddinovich, 2020). A foreign policy that places a high value on aggressive leadership is one way that this notion of American exceptionalism is expressed.

Neoconservatives oppose isolationism and contend that, in order to maintain world peace and prevent the emergence of authoritarian governments, the United States must continue to be deeply involved in international affairs. According to Robert Kagan, the United States cannot afford to withdraw from the international scene since doing so would leave a void that hostile nations could take advantage of (Kagan, 2018). Rather, the United States must use its economic, diplomatic, and military might to influence world events in a way that advances liberal ideals and serves American interests.

3.3 Use of military intervention

It is well known that neoconservatives favour military engagement in international affairs. Although they do not support war as the first option,

they do think that in some circumstances, using military force is required to protect American interests, stop the rise of authoritarianism, and advance democracy. During the George W. Bush administration, this viewpoint became well-known, as leading neoconservatives advocated for American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

Neoconservatives contend that military actions can have both strategic and moral justifications. They contend that the United States has an ethical obligation to oppose repressive governments or those that pose a threat to international security. From a strategic standpoint, they assert that if such regimes are not challenged, they will eventually grow stronger and more dangerous. For instance, many neoconservatives backed the invasion of Iraq because they thought Saddam Hussein's government might obtain WMDs and threatened regional stability (Fukuyama, 2006). In addition to helping the Iraqi people, they thought that overthrowing Hussein and installing a democratic government in Iraq would improve American security by giving the United States a stable, democratic ally in the Middle East.

The belief in the transformative potential of American principles is also linked to the neoconservative approach to military intervention. Neoconservatives argue that a more peaceful and affluent world would result from the development of democracy and free-market capitalism, and that in order to establish the conditions for these ideals to take hold, military action may occasionally be required.

3.4 Preemptive action and unilateralism

Neoconservatism, characterized by its strong emphasis on preemptive action, advocates for the use of military force to eliminate potential threats before they materialize. This principle, central to the Bush Doctrine, justified the 2003 invasion of Iraq as a preventive measure to halt the development of WMDs by Saddam Hussein (Ahsan, 2023). In addition, neoconservatives are skeptical of international bodies like the United Nations, viewing them as ineffective or potentially obstructive to American interests. Consequently, they approach international cooperation with caution and argue that the United States must be prepared to act independently to safeguard its interests and promote democratic values, especially as a global superpower with clear strategic objectives, even while not being inherently opposed to working with other nations.



3.5 Confronting authoritarian regimes

As a political philosophy, neoconservatism is dedicated to both promoting democracy and opposing authoritarian governments, which it sees as the main danger to both international stability and American security. According to neoconservatives, authoritarian governments are essentially hostile and expansionist, and they present the United States and its allies with a moral and geopolitical dilemma. Neoconservatives strongly opposed détente during the Cold War and supported a more aggressive stance against the Soviet Union (Mukhammadsidiqov and Salokhiddinovich, 2020). Neoconservatives have recognized new authoritarian threats in the post-Cold War era, including authoritarian states like Iran and North Korea and extremist Islamic regimes. They support a firm stand against authoritarian governments, limiting their power and advancing democratic alternatives through economic sanctions, diplomacy, and, if necessary, military action. This strategy reflects the neoconservative view that the United States must take the lead in the struggle against injustice and tyranny for both strategic and moral reasons, as a defender of world freedom.

3.6 Commitment to Israel and Middle East Policy

Neoconservatives are well known for their unwavering support of Israel and their firm belief that maintaining a strong U.S.-Israeli partnership is essential. They see Israel as an essential democratic ally in the Middle East and a vital barrier against the spread of terrorism and radical Islamic regimes. Neoconservatives argue that, in order to safeguard Israel's security and offset the influence of hostile countries like Iran and Syria, the U.S. must continue to offer Israel military and diplomatic support (Fuller, 2019).

Similar to this, neoconservatives have supported a more assertive U.S. strategy in the Middle East, which includes using military action to overthrow governments that are hostile to Israel and the United States. For instance, many neoconservatives supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq as a strategy to counter the influence of Iran and other anti-Israel forces in the region, as well as a way to promote democracy (McGlinchey, 2009).

In conclusion, neoconservatism's foreign policy goals center on advancing democracy, claiming American leadership in the world, using force to overthrow authoritarian governments, and committing to pre-emptive action and unilateralism when necessary. Neoconservatives are adamant that American power should be used proactively to influence the global order and that the U.S. has a moral duty to lead the global fight for freedom and



democracy. However, it is still debatable whether the justifications for using military power and intervention are based on recognized moral values or aimed at serving American interests.

4. Economic views of neoconservatism

Neoconservative economic doctrine underscores the moral and societal advantages of economic growth, a dedication to free-market capitalism, and a prudent approach to excessive government involvement in the economy. Though not entirely opposed to government intervention in the market, neoconservatives prioritize individual accountability, self-motivation, and minimal regulation. Their economic policy stance mirrors their broader political convictions, placing value on personal autonomy and asserting that economic freedom is essential for human welfare.

4.1 Support for free-market capitalism

Neoconservative economic theory revolves around a fervent advocacy for free-market capitalism. Proponents of this ideology argue that capitalism is crucial for personal freedom, is the most efficient economic system, and is most aligned with democratic principles. They assert that economic freedom, including the ability to own property, engage in trade, and accumulate wealth, forms the foundation of human liberty (Salokhiddinovich, 2020). Neoconservatives contend that an unrestrained market is the optimal way to allocate resources and stimulate innovation. Furthermore, they uphold the moral superiority of capitalism, arguing that it promotes virtues like hard work, self-discipline, and individual accountability (Gerstle, 2022). By valuing diligence and creativity, the market not only drives economic prosperity but also strengthens society's ethical framework. Due to their belief that socialism and collectivist economic models undermine personal freedom and cultivate dependence on the government, neoconservatives approach these alternatives with caution (Fukuyama, 1992).

4.2 Limited government intervention

Though it supports a limited role, neoconservative theory recognizes the necessity of government engagement in the economy. Neoconservatives criticize government initiatives that they believe lead to reliance, inefficiencies, or market distortion. Neoconservatives believe that excessive government regulation inhibits innovation, discourages entrepreneurship, and causes economic stagnation. They stress the importance of reducing regulatory restrictions and providing companies with more latitude. Neoconservatives argue that many welfare programs encourage people to

rely on government assistance rather than look for work or improve their abilities, which is why they oppose the welfare state's growth (Abrams, 2010).

Programs like housing subsidies and long-term unemployment benefits are especially criticized by neoconservatives because they are seen as having the potential to trap people in poverty by reducing their incentive to work. To address market failures and maintain a stable economic environment, they do, however, also recognize the need for some government action. As long as it does not impair the market's ability to function as effectively, they generally support measures that promote economic growth, like spending on infrastructure and education (Abrams, 2010). The neoconservative view that the government should assist the economy rather than control or regulate it is reflected in this pragmatic approach.

4.3 Focus on economic growth

The pursuit of economic expansion is emphasized as a fundamental goal in neoconservative economic theory. Neoconservatives contend that maintaining social stability, raising living standards, and lowering poverty all depend on steady economic growth. They contend that a thriving economy gives people the chance to better their lot in life and that economic success is intimately linked to national security and power. Thus, neoconservatives support policies that promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment, with a particular emphasis on taxation. As they believe that lowering the tax burden will boost economic activity and promote growth, they typically advocate lower taxes, especially for high-income individuals and firms (Abrams, 2010).

They also contend that high taxes can reduce the incentives for risk-taking and investment, two important factors that spur innovation and the creation of jobs. Additionally, neoconservatives worry that excessive government expenditure, particularly on social welfare programs, can result in deficits and obstruct long-term economic progress (Fukuyama, 1992). Moreover, they emphasize the role that globalization and international commerce play in propelling economic growth, contending that free trade increases efficiency, fosters competition, and drives down consumer costs (Gerstle, 2022). Neoconservatives, who believe that economic globalization benefits the U.S. and the world economy by promoting innovation and spreading prosperity, support policies that lower trade barriers and enable access to international markets.



4.4 Opposition to economic redistribution

Neoconservatives staunchly oppose progressive taxation and substantial income transfers, deeming them both economically inefficient and ethically objectionable. They assert that such measures erode meritocracy and personal responsibility by rewarding incompetence and penalizing achievement. Neoconservatives contend that if economic inequality arises from disparities in skill, effort, and innovation rather than unfair advantages or prejudice, it is not inherently unjust. They advocate for economic strategies that prioritize creating avenues for individuals to prosper through their own diligence, rather than fixating on reducing inequality. This entails fostering entrepreneurship, education, and job creation, as opposed to welfare programs or direct financial assistance. Neoconservatives argue that economic expansion and enhanced opportunities are the most potent means of elevating the living standards of the disadvantaged, as opposed to redistributive policies that, in their view, foster reliance and dampen work ethic.

4.5 Pragmatism and realism in economic policy

Even though neoconservatives advocate for a free economy, with minimal government interference in markets, they remain pragmatic in terms of economic policies. Unlike some libertarians, they do not advocate for the full abolition of the welfare state or all intervention by the government. They instead argue more practically as they are cognizant of the need for a government to exist in order to keep the economy stable and running. This practical approach bears out the neoconservative position that policy should be dictated by the functionalities, and not by the desired and rigid ideological doctrines. For example, they tend to favour tax cuts and spending cuts, but they are willing to support government spending programs in areas where they believe such spending stimulates economic growth, including defense, public infrastructure, and education (Drolet, 2007). The capacity to reconcile ideological principles with practical policy-making is a trademark of neoconservative economics, and it distinguishes them from more orthodox forms of conservatism or libertarianism.

In a nutshell, neoconservative economic principles are firmly rooted in an unwavering faith in unrestricted free-market capitalism, individual accountability, and limited government involvement. They assert that economic freedom is vital for human freedom and that the market, when permitted to operate with minimal intervention, is the most efficient means



of creating wealth and enhancing living standards. They critique extensive government programs that foster reliance and diminish economic efficacy, yet they also recognize the necessity of pragmatic government intervention to foster growth and stability. Their economic convictions mirror a broader dedication to the ideals of democracy, individualism, and American exceptionalism, which they contend are best bolstered by a vibrant, market-oriented economy.

5. Criticism of neoconservatism

Neoconservatism has faced intense scrutiny from a wide array of political factions. It has drawn criticism for its foreign policy, economic principles, and domestic agendas. Critics have emerged from liberal, conservative, and even former neoconservative circles, particularly in the aftermath of U.S. military engagements in the Middle East. The primary points of contention center on its interventionist foreign policy, perceived overreliance on U.S. power, economic strategies, and the unintended consequences of neoconservative strategies both domestically and internationally.

5.1 Criticism of foreign policy

The neoconservative approach to foreign policy has often faced criticism for its perceived aggressiveness, interventionist nature, and lack of practicality. The support for military intervention to advance democracy and American interests overseas has been especially contentious. Critics argue that rather than promoting peace and democratic values, this strategy has resulted in instability and costly, unnecessary conflicts, with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 being a prime example. This event, strongly championed by neoconservatives, serves as a clear illustration of the shortcomings of their foreign policy. Many opponents point to the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, the emergence of groups like ISIS, and the human and financial toll of the war as proof of the deficiencies in the neoconservative approach (Gerstle, 2022).

Former neoconservatism supporter Francis Fukuyama has emerged as a leading critic of the movement's foreign policy. In his book *America at the Crossroads*, Fukuyama makes the case that neoconservatives have an unrealistic expectation of America's power to change other countries and that their reliance on military action is both impractical and ineffective. Additionally, he challenges the neoconservative idea that democracy can be readily imported into non-Western countries, arguing that this strategy ignores the complexity of regional political and cultural contexts (2006).

Neoconservatism's idealistic belief that the U.S. should shape the world in its own image is contested by many critics. They argue that neoconservative foreign policy overestimates American power and over-relies on the military to achieve long-term benefits. They also advocate for a more cautious approach to international relations that puts defending national interests ahead of bold nation-building initiatives.

5.2 Humanitarian and moral concerns

When criticizing the moral and humanitarian consequences of neoconservative beliefs, detractors have taken a unique stance. Their argument focuses on the aggressive foreign policy supported by neoconservatives, particularly during the Iraq War and the War on Terror, which has resulted in significant suffering and civilian deaths. Many criticize neoconservatives for prioritizing strategic goals over humanitarian considerations and ignoring the human cost of military actions (Salokhiddinovich, 2020). In addition, human rights advocates have strongly denounced the use of coercive interrogation techniques, drone strikes, and other controversial tactics in the fight against terrorism.

Furthermore, detractors argue that neoconservatism's foreign policy frequently conflicts with the democratic principles it purports to support. As an example, the neoconservatives have been accused of being inconsistent in their support of democracy and human rights due to their backing of despotic allies or strategically significant states like Saudi Arabia (Folensbee, 2012). As a result, doubts have been raised about the credibility of neoconservative assertions that the primary motivation behind U.S. foreign policy is a commitment to promoting democratic values.

5.3 Economic globalization and cultural backlash

The fervent support for free trade and economic globalization by neoconservatives has sparked debate due to its alleged impact on the decline of American manufacturing jobs and working-class communities. Proponents of neoconservatism assert that free trade fosters innovation and economic progress, while detractors argue that it has led to job outsourcing, wage stagnation, and the erosion of American industry. These economic shifts have bolstered populist and nationalist movements that oppose the globalist and interventionist principles of neoconservatism (Gerstle, 2022).

The effects of neoconservative policies on culture have been widely examined. According to critics, the emphasis on individualism and market-oriented solutions to societal problems has led to a loss of social cohesion

and a collapse of culture (Drolet, 2007). Critics contend that despite the neoconservative movement's support for traditional values, their economic policies have weakened the social institutions that uphold these values, including the family and the community. This criticism is especially common among traditional conservatives, who claim that the moral and cultural underpinnings of American society have been undermined by neoconservatism's focus on economic liberalism (Abrams, 2010). This criticism reflects a paradox within neoconservative ideology. On one hand, it promotes traditional values and moral foundations, while on the other, it strongly emphasizes individualism and market-driven policies that may unintentionally destroy the very societal institutions (such as families and communities) that support these values.

5.4 Internal critiques and the Iraq war legacy

Fukuyama and other prominent neoconservatism proponents have distanced themselves from the ideology and expressed serious concerns about it, especially in the wake of the Iraq War. Fukuyama's disenchantment with neoconservatism was mostly a result of his dissatisfaction with the war and the overly optimistic beliefs of neoconservatives about the effectiveness of military action in promoting democracy. He argued that the war led him to support a more cautious approach to international relations by highlighting the limitations of American strength and the dangers of ideological expansion (Fukuyama, 2006).

Since the Iraq War is often seen as the ultimate test of neoconservative beliefs, its significance in the long-lasting influence of neoconservatism cannot be underestimated. The idea that the fundamental flaws in the neoconservative approach to foreign policy have been exposed is further supported by the conflict's aftermath, which was characterized by sectarian strife, the emergence of ISIS, and continued instability in the region. Although some neoconservatives still maintain that the war's main goals were legitimate, even they admit that mistakes were made in its execution.

Scholars have examined neoconservatism from a variety of angles, exploring its foreign policy, economic tenets, and the unintended consequences of its initiatives. Regardless of its moral contradictions, its effect on inequality at home, or its idealism in international affairs, critics argue that neoconservatism has led to significant policy failures. Particularly, the Iraq War has been seen as a symbol of the shortcomings of neoconservative ideology, prompting questions about the movement's broader goals for

American leadership in the world. As neoconservatism develops, these critiques continue to be crucial to discussions over what American conservatism represents and the United States' place in the world.

6. Neoconservatism today

The enduring impact of neoconservatism on contemporary politics, particularly in relation to U.S. foreign policy, is evident. Though their popularity diminished following the Iraq War, neoconservative concepts remain important in discussions of American interventionism, international influence, and the expansion of democracy. Furthermore, the rise of new political movements, like populism has led to the incorporation of many neoconservative ideas into the broader conservative philosophy.

6.1 Neoconservatism in U.S. foreign policy

Despite reaching its zenith under the leadership of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, neoconservatism maintains its impact on foreign policy. A fundamental tenet of this ideology is the conviction that the United States has a duty to advance democracy and open markets on a global scale. This concept retains significant influence within specific political spheres, particularly among proponents of continued U.S. engagement in global affairs.

Neoconservatism's continued influence may be seen in its support for a strong American strategy against authoritarian governments like China and Russia. Some modern foreign policy theorists use neoconservative ideas to argue for an assertive American approach to dealing with these international enemies. Proponents of U.S. interventionism, such as Robert Kagan and William Kristol, have emphasized the need for American leadership in defending liberal democratic norms globally. Some neoconservative voices have advocated for a strong U.S. response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which includes financial and military support for Ukraine. They have underlined the urgency of protecting Ukraine and halting the rise of authoritarian regimes (Floyd and Webber, 2024). In the shadow of China's expanding stature on the global stage, neoconservatives have found their voices raised in a call for a bolder stance in navigating the intricate web of contemporary geopolitics. The specter of concern regarding the authoritarian regime in China ignited a fervent discussion centered on military readiness, advancements in technology, and the ferocious nature of economic rivalry (Fewsmith, 1995).



There has been a lot of opposition to the idea of employing military action to promote democracy ever since the Iraq War began. Critics say the U.S. struggles in Iraq and Afghanistan highlight the shortcomings of neoconservative foreign policy, particularly in advancing democratic institutions in societies with diverse political and cultural views. Consequently, both the Obama and Trump administrations have shifted to more cautious stances about regarding military action.

6.2 The rise of populism and the challenge to neoconservatism

The core principles of neoconservatism have been directly challenged by the rise of populism in the U.S. This was especially true under former President Donald Trump, whose "America First" foreign policy aimed to reduce American involvement in international conflicts and cast doubt on the value of alliances like NATO. Furthermore, the neoconservative support of globalization and the benefits of an internationally networked economy were directly at odds with Trump's emphasis on immigration restrictions, domestic economic concerns, and skepticism toward free trade agreements (Gerstle, 2022).

Prominent neoconservatives, Max Boot and William Kristol, fiercely opposed the Trump administration, arguing that his policies violated the ideals of the liberal international system established after World War II and diminished America's global dominance. The conservative bloc has been shattered by the neoconservative opposition to Trumpism, leading some to side with moderate Democrats in the 2020 election (Feldmann, 2018).

6.3 Neoconservatism and humanitarian intervention

Scholars and practitioners have responded in a variety of ways to the debate over interventionist foreign policy, especially as it relates to neoconservatism. While some criticize the belligerent posture frequently linked to this ideology, a significant minority still supports the strategic application of American power in humanitarian emergencies, arguing that the U.S. has a deep moral duty to step in when human rights are in danger, regardless of the current geopolitical situation. This viewpoint has gained popularity in the context of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria, where notable figures, such as Robert Kagan, have argued that the United States ought to have taken more aggressive measures to lessen the suffering caused by the Assad government (Horowitz, 2014). It should be noted, though, that this perspective has lost some of its appeal in comparison to the enthusiasm of the early 2000s, as an increasing number of decision-makers now

demonstrate a notable reluctance to commit U.S. armed forces to the complex maze of Middle Eastern wars. This debate's development mirrors a larger re-evaluation of U.S. involvement in the world, raising important questions regarding the strategic considerations and moral obligations that guide foreign policy choices in a world growing more complex by the day.

6.4 The future of neoconservatism

The development of neoconservatism highlights an ambiguous terrain as the political landscape changes rapidly. Once a powerful force in American policy circles, this ideological movement has seen a significant decline in influence, especially in the wake of the Iraq War and the rise of populist emotions. Nonetheless, a particular group of politicians and thinkers still find resonance in the fundamental tenets of neoconservatism, which support forceful American leadership and the robust advancement of democratic ideals. The Biden administration's foreign policy, for example, reflects the core principles of neoconservatism and has a clear interventionist bent, particularly in its strong defense of Ukraine against Russian aggression (Heilbrunn, 2022).

However, the movement faces significant obstacles. There is a general pessimism about military involvement that permeates both public mood and the views of political elites because of the generally acknowledged failures of U.S. military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, the neoconservative influence has been further reduced by the populist realignment within the Republican Party, which is characterized by a focus on nationalism and a move away from interventionist policies. Despite these major obstacles, the call for American leadership in the world, the moral obligation to support democracy, and the importance of free-market economics continue to be prominent topics in today's political discourse, especially among those who support an assertive U.S. foreign policy framework.

To conclude, in the American political discourse, neoconservatism is at a turning point that requires academics' attention. Despite its decline in prominence during the height of the George W. Bush administration, the fundamental ideas of this intellectual movement are still crucial in important debates about U.S. foreign policy. American interventionism and the country's position as a world leader are more important than ever. We cannot, however, overlook the significant obstacles presented by the emergence of populist emotions, which have endangered the



neoconservative agenda, particularly with regard to its unwavering commitment to globalization and military action. The fundamental principles of neoconservatism, especially the steadfast confidence in American exceptionalism and the passionate support for the advancement of democracy, remain relevant in many areas of influence in spite of these obstacles. The tenets of neoconservatism are expected to change as the United States faces a variety of new geopolitical challenges, reflecting the evolving political environment. The purpose of this analysis is to clarify the enduring significance of neoconservative principles and their possible course in the face of the continuous changes reshaping the global order.

Discussion

Since its inception in the 1960s as a reaction against the perceived excesses of liberalism, neoconservatism has undergone significant changes. In addition to advocating for a strong American presence in international affairs, neoconservative philosophy places a strong emphasis on advancing democracy and free-market capitalism. Because of its roots in liberal philosophy, especially among disillusioned former Democrats, this movement holds a unique place within the larger conservative framework. Its greatest influence has been seen in the field of foreign policy, particularly under George W. Bush's administration. The Iraq War is a prominent example of the implementation of neoconservative principles, illustrating the goals of the movement as well as its inherent difficulties.

The war's supporters argued that the United States could use military intervention to promote democratic change, which is a fundamental tenet of neoconservatism. However, the strategy's long-term effects, such as regional instability and the rise of ISIS, have called into question its effectiveness. Francis Fukuyama, a former neoconservative, claimed that the war demonstrated how military action could not promote democracy in regions with complex political and cultural environments.

Critically speaking, neoconservatism's ideological dedication to unchecked capitalism and its contempt for social welfare programs have generated a lot of discussion, especially in light of the growing economic divide observed in modern-day America. Critics contend that the budgetary policies supported by neoconservatives primarily benefit the rich elite while ignoring the pressing demands of the working and middle classes. Furthermore, the movement's ardent support for globalization has been seriously challenged by the rise of populist sentiments in the twenty-first century. A noticeable

shift is that many conservatives now express their disapproval of the free-trade agreements and international economic systems that have traditionally been promoted by neoconservative ideology. Essentially, this analysis aimed to shed light on how economic ideology within neoconservatism is changing as it wrestles with the realities of a changing political paradigm and the ramifications of its guiding principles in a society that is becoming more and more divided.

Neoconservatism continues to be a pertinent ideological framework, even amid substantial challenges presented by the evolving political landscape. This ideology underscores the United States' role as a prominent global force and its supposed responsibility to disseminate democratic principles around the world. Many politicians uphold these beliefs, particularly in light of the significant threats posed by authoritarian regimes in countries such as China and Russia. Furthermore, neoconservatives maintain considerable influence in discussions regarding humanitarian intervention, advocating for robust American engagement to prevent humanitarian disasters and safeguard human rights internationally. Prominent figures like Robert Kagan and other notable proponents advocate for a proactive American stance as a means to mitigate crises and foster a more just global order. This article sought to elucidate the ongoing relevance of the neoconservative movement by examining its implications for contemporary geopolitical strategies and the complex interplay between ideology and realpolitik in today's international context.

If we examine neoconservatism from another perspective, it becomes clear that the policies promoted by this ideology very often align with a Western-centric worldview. According to this view, liberal democracy and capitalism are unquestionable, while non-Western cultures, especially Middle Eastern societies, are perceived as incapable of self-governance without Western intervention. Interventions in regions like the Middle East are often presented in neoconservative discourse as necessary attempts to "liberate" or "civilize" oppressed peoples, suggesting the same colonial discourse that once concealed imperial ambitions. Critics, even from the Western perspective, contend that this strategy ignores the intricacies of regional political and social structures, frequently leading to retaliation, hostility, and unintended consequences including prolonged conflicts and increased instability in the region (Again, Afghanistan and Iraq are clear examples of the case). The goal of this analysis is to shed light on the long-lasting effects



of neoconservative ideas in connection to the larger discussion of international relations and the difficulties of global governance.

The "America First" vision exemplifies a pivotal change in our political landscape, particularly within the Republican Party, moving decisively away from globalization and interventionist strategies. The once-prevalent neoconservative doctrine, which advocated for a more forceful stance on global matters, now finds itself overshadowed by this emerging trend. It is crucial that we undertake a thorough reassessment of these fundamental principles, as the repercussions of the Iraq War have fostered widespread skepticism about the efficacy of neoconservative approaches. The future of neoconservatism hinges on its capacity to evolve in response to an ever-changing political landscape. While foundational ideals such as promoting democracy and endorsing economic liberalization remain significant, they now require a fresh examination in light of the increasing assertion of nationalism and the multitude of nations with which the U.S. engages. Although the trajectory of neoconservatism may appear uncertain in the face of these new challenges, its historical importance ensures that it will continue to influence political dialogue and American foreign policy for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the interplay between neoconservative principles and contemporary political realities will undoubtedly have a profound effect on the broader dynamics within both domestic and international political arenas. Embracing this evolution is not just necessary; it is imperative for a robust future in American politics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has explained how neoconservative ideology prevailed the American political landscape since its rise in the second half of the 20th century. Rooted in traditional conservatism and a strong belief in liberal democracy, this ideology promotes various crucial ideas, such as advancing democracy globally, an inclination to use military force when needed, and a strong affirmation of American moral leadership in the world. However, as stated in the article, neoconservatism has received a wide range of criticism despite its significant influence, predominantly in the wake of military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan that were largely lobbied for by a neoconservative agenda. These interventions have generated a great deal of discussion on the effectiveness and morality of the ideology's strategies. Critics have argued that these engagements have often resulted in more chaos rather than the democratic development that the movement's



supporters had hoped or planned for. This article has shed light on the nuances of neoconservatism by considering its prior successes as well as the current discussions that influence its direction in the political sphere.

In the realm of international relations, neoconservatism remains highly relevant within the global contemporary challenges. Its fundamental principles have been heavily called into question by the emergence of populist groups and a noticeable shift towards non-interventionist approaches. Nevertheless, the core ideas of neoconservatism still have an impact on political discussions, especially when it comes to the promotion of democratic values and America's ties with authoritarian governments. In order to address its historical flaws and conform to the prevailing geopolitical realities of the present day, this political philosophy must change and adapt in the face of the increasingly unstable global environment. This adaptation becomes mandatory in order to guarantee the continuity of neoconservative ideology as a significant part of the American political sphere that would determine the nation's future.

The ongoing impact of neoconservatism offers an intriguing study opportunity for academics who are interested in U.S. foreign policy in particular and global politics in general. The ideology's future remains uncertain, whether it regains prominence or rather be absorbed into the competing political ideologies. Nevertheless, its impact on American policymaking and its repercussions on international relations, especially with the Middle East, remain an everlasting topic of scholarly and political interest.

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