The Neoconservative Influence on US Foreign Policy and the 2003 Iraq War

For the generation born after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror spearheaded by America's George W. Bush and Britain's Tony Blair have been undoubtedly the most controversial display of global power politics since the end of the Cold War. After a decade of almost unchallenged international hegemony, the United States suffered a devastating attack on its own soil, carried out by an underground terror network that spanned not just borders, but continents. How was it possible that such a dominant global power, both militarily and economically, could manage to control the international arena throughout the 1990's and yet be so vulnerable to attack from a stateless actors such as al-Qaida? What would America's response be, and who would be the driving force behind US foreign policy in the wake of this new threat?

The aim of this project is to investigate the links between the neoconservative movement within the United States and its effect on the course of American foreign policy after the September 11th terrorist attacks. In order to do this in a logical and structured manner, the project will be split into four chapters; firstly, an exploration of the roots of the neoconservative movement within the US, aiming to outline the core beliefs of this ideology and whom its most influential followers were; secondly, a detailed analysis of the policies enacted after the September 11th attacks, focussing on how these policies supported the neoconservative agenda and how the international context of American foreign policy changed after the attacks; the third chapter will be an analysis of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, aiming to prove the links between the neoconservative ideology and its implementation by the Bush administration and finally; a concluding chapter, aiming to provide a concise summary of the arguments outlined within the analysis provided in the first three chapters.

The source material studied within this project will comprise of academic books, journal articles, newspaper articles, policy papers and speech transcriptions. By utilising both primary sources (articles and books written by neocons) as well as secondary critiques, this project hopes to present a balanced critique of the neocon movement based on impartial analysis of the source materials. The prose will be interspersed with occasional quotations which I believe offer an interesting insight into the psychology behind the persuasion or critique it particularly well. The conclusion will consist of a summary of the arguments presented, some of my own reflections on the state of the persuasion as well as theorising what the future may have in store for American neoconservatism. The project will structure its argument to conclude that the neocon persuasion, as well as the War on Terror that it spawned, were inherently flawed, combining the two incompatible notions of using military supremacy to force a democratisation process onto a region that has a very different ontological perspective of the world.

Chapter 1 – Neoconservatism

> *"A neoconservative is a liberal who's been mugged by reality. A neoliberal is a liberal who's been mugged by reality but has refused to press charges."*
> Irving Kristol, 1983.

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A Brief History

Attempting to define exactly what neoconservatism is, or is not, could be a dissertation-worthy task in itself due to the lack of a specific doctrine or manifesto from which the ideology spawned. In fact, even attempting to label neoconservatism as an 'ideology' or 'movement' would prove controversial due to its wide-ranging beliefs about society, applicable in most contexts in some form or another. It is because of this lack of defined boundaries that neoconservatism has been described as a 'persuasion' by the accredited Godfather of neoconservatism, Irving Kristol (Kristol, 2003). The neoconservative (neocon) persuasion spawned as a result of great sociological change within 1950s & 1960s America, coupled with the international scepticism and paranoia produced by the Cold War. Neocons interpreted these changes (such as the granting of equal civil rights for black people and the removal of compulsory prayer in public schools) as signs of a growing 'anti-American' sentiment infecting American society under the Democrat party (Durham, 2004: 257) and hence felt the need, therefore, to preserve their conservative values in a contemporary manner.

This growing disillusionment with the changing character of domestic politics was coupled with increasing anger towards America's foreign policy, particularly the perceived softening of America's stance towards the Soviet Union. It was this "perfect storm" of alienation from both domestic and foreign policy matters that facilitated the need for neoconservatism within the United States, with most accounts pin-pointing its foundations to a select group of mostly Jewish intellectuals studying at City College of New York in the early 1940's, with Irving Kristol being one of the most influential (Dorman, 2000: 20). According to Francis Fukuyama, the most enduring characteristic of this group was their commitment to 'liberal anti-communism' and a staunch opposition to the 'utopian social engineering' of Soviet society (Fukuyama, 2006: 16), in-keeping with the deep-held scepticism of government expansion that had taken place in 1940's America. To properly understand how this group of politicised college students formulated an ideology that has gone on to have such a great influence on American foreign policy, it must be understood how their environment shaped their ontological position within politics.

Fukuyama argues that four common principles characterised neoconservatism up until the end of the Cold War: firstly, 'a concern with democracy, human rights and…the internal politics of (nation) states'. Politically, this was a significant shift from the traditional American 'isolationist' foreign policy stance and a move away from the Realist foreign policy perspective which largely marginalised the internal workings of the state as insignificant. The atrocities of World War II, and particularly those committed against European Jews at the hands of the Nazis fostered this change in belief and a concern for the internal workings of states became a cornerstone of neoconservatism. The Bush administration's commitment to regime change in Iraq, under the guise of protecting human rights, typifies neoconservatism's association with this principle. Secondly, the 'belief that US power can be used for moral purposes' also reflects a strong ethical core within neoconservatism. This sense of 'right and wrong' can also be attributed to Kristol's religious upbringing and is in stark contrast to the almost nihilistic direction that the Liberal movement was heading within America at that time (the removal of compulsory prayer from state schools and the rise of alternative, disenfranchised movements such as the hippies in the 1960's). This 'moral core' of neoconservatism was perhaps best demonstrated when President Bush openly discussed the fact that 'God' had told him to 'end tyranny in Iraq' and 'liberate their people' (MacAskill, 2005), a far cry from the ominous threat of WMD attacks that was presented as the initial case for the invasion.

Thirdly, 'a scepticism about the ability of international law and institutions to solve serious security problems', a notion as relevant to the arms race of the Cold War as to the by-passing (or undermining, if you will) of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) prior to the Iraq invasion. Though the actual extent of the threat posed by 'terrorists' to the United States is a highly debatable topic, one certainty of the situation is that the US is more than happy to act uni-laterally to 'defend' its interests if it feels the necessity to do so. Finally, Fukuyama argues that neoconservatives believe that 'ambitious social engineering often leads to unexpected consequences and often undermines its own ends' (Fukuyama, 2006: pp.4-5). This final point is perhaps the most telling difference between the original Cold War neocons and those prominent during the hegemonic period following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The CCNY group's deep-held anti-communist views stemmed from a hatred of the social, cultural and economic control of the communist regimes, who aimed to manufacture a utopian society and repressed dissent through force and intimidation, rather than a hatred for the communist idea itself. The Bush administration, of course,

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had different ideas and attempted to force the implementation of Western Democracy onto a region that has held very different values to these for thousands of years prior to the American invasion. Perhaps a decade of Iraqi militia resistance after George Bush's 2003 'victory' speech aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln is testament to the credibility of Fukuyama's final point.

Developing the Persuasion

The above examples go some way to explaining how the neoconservative persuasion came to be and shows how factors such as religious upbringing can have a great baring on one's moral judgement, bringing a very personal perspective to political decision-making. Those observations are, of course, the carefully drawn analysis of Francis Fukuyama, explaining what neoconservatism stood for during its earliest incarnation. It was not until after Irving Kristol returned from military service in World War II that he began writing prolifically about his political beliefs, founding the neoconservative magazine, *The Public Interest*, which was orientated towards domestic policy and eventually *The National Interest* which primarily dealt with US foreign policy. Writing for *The Weekly Standard* in 2003, Kristol argued that 'there is no set of neoconservative beliefs concerning foreign policy', describing it instead as 'only a set of attitudes drawn from historical experience' (Kristol, 2003: 2). Historical experience, then, lead Kristol to make three claims about the nature and direction of US foreign policy, arguing; the need for patriotism and its active encouragement in both the private and public sectors; a deep held scepticism for global institutions, claiming they were one step away from 'global tyranny' and finally; that statesmen should have the ability (and presumably the desire) to distinguish 'friends from enemies' within the international political arena (Kristol, 2003: 2).

Kristol's claims about American foreign policy provide a powerful link between the neocon psyche, formulated in the domestic sphere and its implementation in the international context. The moral core of neoconservatism is apparent once again, particularly with Kristol's calls from statesmen to 'distinguish friends from enemies', based on what neocons believe would characterise that of a friend, or indeed an enemy. Neoconservatism's deep held scepticism of global institutions, fearing that they will lead to 'global tyranny' as Kristol argues, also characterises the conservative nature of the persuasion, with neocons wanting to protect their (America's) sovereignty and resources rather than integrate more closely with the international community through institutions such as the United Nations.

The views that Kristol expressed were not confined solely to academic debates amongst political scholars, but had wider support within American society also. On January 26th 1998, the Project for the New American Century, (a neoconservative think-tank founded by Dick Cheney and comprising of influential politicians, academics and businessmen) laid out its vision for a new course for American foreign policy within the Middle East. Three years before the September 11th attacks, before George W. Bush had ascended to power and before the phrase 'War on Terror' had entered the political lexicon, neoconservatives were already warning of the threat by Saddam's nuclear arsenal to America and its 'friends and allies around the world' (Halper, 2005: 33). The document goes on to argue that the current policy of 'containment' had been 'steadily eroding' over a period of months and the only way to prevent Saddam using Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD's) against the US was to 'remove Saddam and his regime from power' using military force (PNAC, 1998). The post-9/11 talk of regime change in Iraq to prevent potential WMD attacks was not a new concept, then, more the implementation of an existing ideology that had wide-ranging and influential support throughout America since the end of the Cold War. How this ideology came to be the most influential factor in American foreign policy after September 11th however, still warrants investigating.

Enter The Vulcans

> *"F*cking crazies!"*
> Colin Powell describing Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz to Jack Straw in 2002. Guardian, 2004

During his election campaign of 2000, George W. Bush promoted a traditional, realist American foreign policy, a move away from the Clinton administration's involvement in the Yugoslavian civil war and one that would go back to promoting, "America's National Interest" (Drezner, 2008). It is clear to see, however, that the foreign policy enacted by the Bush administration was far from the Realist school of protecting one's national interest and embodied the very neoconservative idea of using military force for "moral purposes". It is important to examine, then, why Bush's

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position changed and who influenced this ideological shift: six influential, neoconservative Presidential advisors who Bush himself described as "one of the finest Foreign Policy teams ever assembled" (Bruni, 2000), more infamously known as, 'The Vulcans'.

The Vulcans was the name given to six of George Bush's senior policy advisors, three of whom signed the neocon's open letter to President Clinton discussed previously. They consisted of Richard 'Dick' Cheney, a prominent neocon who served as Bush's Vice-President from 2001-2009; Donald Rumsfeld, Bush's Secretary of Defence from 2001-2006 who had also served under Nixon and Ford during the Cold War; Paul Wolfowitz, former president of the World Bank described as the Iraq invasion's "most passionate and compelling advocate" (Boyer, 2004); Richard Armitage, a former naval officer who served as Bush's first-term Deputy Secretary of State and; Condoleezza Rice, Bush's Secretary of State who had also worked as an advisor to George Bush Snr during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Though dubbed a Vulcan, Colin Powell is not generally labelled as a neoconservative, despite serving as George W. Bush's Secretary of State for the president's first term. Powell's illustrious military background had left him sceptical of using the armed forces for moral purposes. Whilst assisting Secretary of State Caspar Weisenberger in 1983, a US Marine barracks in Lebanon was attacked by explosive-filled trucks, killing 241 American Marines who were undertaking a peace-keeping operation at the time. Powell is said to have been the voice of caution throughout the debate for military intervention during the Bosnian civil war of 1991 (Mann, 2004: 252).

The Vulcans first amassed during the years preceding Bush's 2000 election campaign, with Bush's decision to appoint Dick Cheney as his Vice-Presidential candidate being described as '(going) further than any other single decision Bush made toward determining the nature and the policies of the administration he would head' (Mann, 2004: 252). Even before his tenure as Vice-President, Dick Cheney had been a formidable force in American politics, holding positions such as White House Chief of Staff under President Ford (1975-1977), representing Wyoming in the House of Representatives (1979-1989), and as Defence Secretary for George Bush Snr (1989-1993). It was Cheney who spearheaded the open letter to Clinton arguing the case for the invasion of Iraq three years before September 11th and the course of America's foreign policy was arguably inevitable from the moment he was appointed. Upon leaving office after the administration's second term, Cheney was asked if he had any advice for the incoming staff of President Obama: "Make sure you've got the Vice-President under control", he quipped (Economist, 2011). Whilst Cheney clearly intended his remark to arouse a wry smile, the importance of the subject matter cannot be overlooked. He, alongside the other Vulcans, managed to implement their neoconservative agenda into a previously realist President's foreign policy and succeeded in mobilising the American military to carry out the task they had openly talked about executing three years before George W. Bush was elected.

Of course, this collective of political and military veterans was not presented as a rogue group with their own agenda to the American electorate. Bush emphasised their experience in the fields of foreign policy and the American military as the answer to his own undeniable incompetence in the field of world affairs. He would be surrounded by 'good, strong, capable, smart people who understand the mission of the United States is to lead the world to peace' (Mann, 2004: 255). By openly displaying his incompetence in foreign affairs during a series of interview blunders ("Oh, the Taliban! I thought you said 'some band'…" November, 1999) Bush unintentionally managed to convince himself, and the electorate, of the necessity to surround himself with experienced diplomats to compensate for his own short-comings in the realm of international diplomacy. Of course The Vulcans, and their staunch neoconservative agenda, were more than happy to take the reins on the Bush administration's foreign policy and would get the chance to fulfil their vision for the Middle East just two years after taking office.

Towards the War on Terror

> *"If your only tool is a hammer, all problems will look like nails."*
> Abraham Maslow, 1966.

Though neoconservatism was, and still is, a marginal position within American politics, the persuasion had an undoubted effect on the course of American foreign policy during George W. Bush's presidency. From its humble beginnings as a debated topic in the cafeteria of CCNY, through its wider exposure and academic acceptance during the Cold War years until eventually commanding the support of some of America's most influential figures, the

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persuasion managed to fundamentally change the widely held opinions of what America's role within global society should be. Though there are still wide-ranging debates about the principles, strengths and short-comings of neoconservatism, one conclusion that can be drawn from the persuasion's growth is that it is an incredibly powerful political ideology, thriving on the notion of moral superiority to justify action with or without multi-lateral support. For some, like Fukuyama (a signatory of the neocon letter to Clinton) the actions carried out by the Bush administration were enough to make him renounce his support for neoconservatism, feeling it over-emphasised the use of force and marginalised any notion of diplomatic, or soft-power to achieve America's aims (Fukuyama, 2004).

Though it is understandable that the Bush administration would react with swift, decisive action after the September 11th attacks, the neocon belief that fighting a 'War on Terror' would bring about peace and stability in the Middle East, as well as ensuring American domestic security is inherently flawed. The neocon persuasion blinkered the Bush administration, over-estimating their own military power and the viability of the democratisation process. Overall, the actions taken by Bush's administration in circumventing the United Nations Security Council to fight the War on Terror have caused a 'crisis of legitimacy' for American global power, with the USA's global actions now perceived as illegitimate by many (McGlinchey, 2010: 31). Far from bringing peace and democracy to Iraq, the actions undertaken during the War on Terror sufficed only to re-enforce the image of American as a uni-lateral, imperial power acting solely to pursue its own national interests at the expense of any state that doesn't share them. The actions taken after 9/11 would define the next decade of American foreign policy and thanks to the neocon influence on Bush's administration, the War on Terror had been lost before it had even begun.

Chapter 2 – September 11th Attacks & Policy Responses.

"America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world."
George W. Bush, 11/09/01

The terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Centre on September 11th, 2001 were undoubtedly one of the most divisive and polarising events of the 21st century. So monumental were the attacks, that amongst political and academic scholars 9/11 is widely perceived to have 'changed the world forever' (Emmott, 2005: 217). A large-scale attack on American soil by a small number of non-state actors presented the American government with a genuinely new security threat, a culmination of radical religious beliefs and WMD capabilities, a type of threat the USA had never faced before. However, the purpose of this project is not to analyse the events that facilitated the attacks, nor is it to explore the fundamentalist ideologies behind the attacks. This project aims to present the September 11th attacks (9/11) as the catalyst for the implementation of the neocon vision for Iraqi regime change, as a watershed moment between the rise of The Vulcans and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This chapter will explore how 9/11 changed the context of American 'homeland' security as well as analysing the role of the neocons in facilitating the War on Terror after the attacks. This chapter will help contextualise the analysis carried out regarding the Iraq invasion in chapter three, as well as establishing the links between the Bush administration's response and the neocon persuasion.

9/11 was not the first time that America had been attacked on its own soil, with comparisons quickly drawn between these attacks and those which claimed 2,403 American lives during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Broch, 2003: 854). Devastating as both attacks were, what sets 9/11 apart from Pearl Harbor were the actors which carried out the atrocities. The Hawaiian US Naval base was attacked by the military forces of the Empire of Japan, a preventative strike aimed at reducing America's naval capabilities prior to their involvement in World War II. Destructive as this attack was, it was still launched under the norms of conventional state-on-state warfare that had been commonplace since the concept of sovereign states was created at the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Crucially, however, 9/11 changed US threat perception, bringing together the threat of Radical Islam and WMD capability, carried out by non-state, underground terror networks which presented the United States with a type of threat it had never faced before (Fukuyama, 67: 2006).

The US had faced similar threats before, namely during the nuclear arms race of the Cold War as well as dealing with

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radical Islamic states in the Middle East since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. However, the combination of both factors manifesting through a single actor resulted in a post-9/11 policy-making environment that was without precedent, meaning the Bush administration had no historical guidance as to how to address the problem (Haar, 2010: 968). Haar argues that it was this lack of historical precedent which resulted in greater emphasis on the role of the individual (in this case George W. Bush) in accordance to Greenstein's four circumstances under which the role of the individual becomes of great importance. Greenstein argues that the individual becomes particularly important during ambiguous or unstable conditions (post 9/11 policy environment), when situations are laden with symbolic or emotional significance (WTO was the 'heart' of Western capitalism) and when spontaneous or extra-ordinary effort is required (American demand for action to be taken) (Haar, 2010: 968).

The Global Paradigm Shift

The post-9/11 policy-making environment, then, was one without precedent that put great influence onto the role of the individual within the decision making process. It was widely noted amongst political analysts that George W. Bush's skills as a politician were galvanised by 9/11, leaving him with a new-found self-assurance and vision which resulted in one Congressman commenting that Bush was 'as smart as he wanted to be' in December, 2001 (Greenstein, 2004: 209). This was a far-cry from the almost comical inadequacy that typified his earliest years in the political spotlight, with opinion polls showing a 'prodigious surge in presidential approval ratings' in the months immediately following 9/11 (Eichenberg et al, 2006: 787). The debate over the correct foreign policy path to take after 9/11 is said to have been the catalyst for a deep, ideological split developing within the Republican Party, pitting 'traditionalists against transformationalists', 'internationalists against unilateralists' and 'pragmatists against neocons' (Rothkopf, 2005: 31). It was at this point that Bush and the neocons intersected, with the former wishing to capitalise on the events of 9/11 to redefine American foreign policy for a new era and the latter more than happy to make it happen (Haar, 2010: 966).

The combination of high presidential approval ratings and the demand for action by the American people resulted in a proverbial "green light" for both George W. Bush and his neoconservative senior advisors to implement their vision for the future of the Middle East. The crucial question at this stage, then, was which path the Bush administration would take with regards to implementing their vision of a democratised Middle East, with particular importance placed on the question of removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Having charted the rise of the neocon persuasion in the first part of this project, the focus of the analysis will now shift to examining the policies implemented by the Bush administration, the neoconservative values pushing these policies as well as critiquing why these policies only enjoyed limited success. The neocon persuasion is said to be 'unique in its obsession with the past as a model…for the assertion of American power on a global scale', meaning that neocons often look back to the super-power politics of the Cold War as an example of how international politics should be conducted (Noon, 2007: 76).

The Cold War context provided a simple framework in which to conduct foreign policy as it drew clear lines between East and West, between 'tyranny' and 'freedom' and essentially, from a neocon perspective, between 'good' and 'evil'. The international context at the time of 9/11 was extremely different; the Soviet Union had fallen more than a decade earlier and the US had enjoyed a period of un-rivalled hegemony throughout the 1990s; the fall of Communism had paved the way for globalised trade and markets, powered by American corporations and Western capitalism and super-power arms races had had been replaced by a deeply interconnected global society, based on the principles of free trade and movement between states. Noon argues that the neocon persuasion provides a revisionist account of the Cold War, emphasising 'self-evident' beginnings and conclusions, celebrating leaders of 'near-mythic status' and imposing historical clarity where others might find ambiguity (Noon, 2007: 76). It was this sense of moral superiority that guided the Bush administration in the months following 9/11: the neocons had their vision for a democratised, Saddam-free Middle East and George W. Bush (with the help of 'God' (Guardian, 2005)) had his political legacy to enshrine by making it happen.

The Ideological Blueprint

"Preventive War is like committing suicide for fear of death"

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Otto Von Bismarck addressing the Reichstag, 1876.

The Bush administration's ideological approach to foreign policy after 9/11 was most clearly portrayed in 2002's National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSS was the Bush administration's flag-ship doctrine, one which laid out the framework for dealing with 21st century security threats like nuclear terror as well as aiming to convince the American people, and the world, that these threats required action to combat. Amongst the expected political rhetoric about promoting freedom and justice around the world, the most notable inclusion of the NSS was the idea that non-state terror groups could not be dealt with through the ordinary mechanisms of containment and deterrence and that US power must be used to prevent these threats fully emerging. 'We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use WMD's against the United States' (NSS, 2002: 14), is typical of the tone of the NSS, repeatedly talking up the threat of 'nuclear terror' and legitimising the use of force to prevent it. That particular quote also highlights another central theme of the NSS, the grouping together of two separate threats; non-state terrorists acquiring nuclear weaponry and 'rogue states' attempting to proliferate nuclear capability, be it for weaponry or other usages. Another point of note within the NSS was Bush's commitment to acting uni-laterally, or amongst 'coalitions of the willing', if support from the UNSC was not forth-coming. The NSS stated that: 'While the US will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defence by acting pre-emptively against such terrorists' (NSS, 2002: 6).

In summary, the NSS brought three principles to the fore-front of the US security debate after 9/11, firstly: that the US was willing to prevent future terror attacks through pre-emptive use of force, secondly; that rogue states were as much a threat to the United States as stateless groups like al-Qaida and thirdly; that the US was happy to act uni-laterally, or amongst coalitions of the willing, if the United Nations was unwilling to support American military action. Perhaps the most crucial development the NSS brought about was the broadening of the concept of pre-emptive action to include fully-fledged preventive war to curtail a threat that would be perhaps years away from actually materialising (Gaddis, 2005: 3). Although pre-emptive strikes have been a part of American military strategy for years, they would traditionally consist of a short assault on a particular strategic region with the intention of removing a specific, military threat that had the potential to imminently attack. The Bush administration believed that the threat of nuclear-armed terrorists blurred the lines between pre-emptive and preventive action, rejecting notions of Westphalian sovereignty and legitimising regime change as a tool to prevent terrorist values spreading (Fukuyama, 2006: 83).

The Case for Invasion

The Bush administration presented three central arguments supporting the case for an invasion of Iraq : firstly, that Saddam Hussein possessed WMD's that could directly threaten US homeland security; secondly, that Iraq (and more poignantly, Saddam) had strong links to al-Qaida and might help them obtain WMD's and thirdly; that the Iraqi people deserved liberating from Hussein's tyrannical regime (Fukuyama, 2006: 78-79). The difference between the reasoning for invading Iraq, as opposed to the invasion of Afghanistan two years before, was that the US government specifically enforced the idea of attacking the state of Iraq (that being the ruling government and its infrastructure) founded on the supposed links between Saddam's government and al-Qaida terrorists. In the case of Afghanistan, the US had repeatedly demanded, and failed, to convince the ruling Taliban regime hand over the suspected masterminds of 9/11, leaving the UN little choice but to pass a Security Council resolution authorising the invasion (Misra, 2004: 108). In just two short years since 9/11, the UN-sanctioned war on terrorists in Afghanistan had paved the way for an unsanctioned invasion of a state that was *potentially* dangerous and *potentially* had connections with terrorist groups.

Although the gift of hindsight grants us the benefit of knowing the Iraqi WMD threat was greatly exaggerated (or, more cynically, never existed at all), the neocons knew that convincing the American people that the threat was real was absolutely paramount in garnering support for the invasion. Neoconservatism is synonymous with the concept of the 'noble lie', a notion widely discussed by philosopher Leo Strauss, in which constructed myths are seen not as a 'regrettable necessity' of political life, but as a viable tool used by politicians to achieve a stable and cohesive society (Owens, 2007: 266). Whether or not the Bush administration truly knew the full extent of the threat posed by Iraq is

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almost a moot point, as a political decision had been taken to ensure the threat of WMD's was placed as the highest agenda to ensure support for military action. Prior to the invasion, an opinion poll by USA today showed that up to 60% of the American people favoured the invasion, if it was to be supported by the UNSC (Benedetto, 2003). The same poll undertaken four years later resulted in much more negative feedback, with 60% of participants arguing that the invasion was a mistake to begin with (Sussman, 2007). The intermittent four years fundamentally changed public opinion of the invasion, perhaps because the swift regime change that had been envisioned looked unlikely to materialise, but the portrayal of the threat post 9/11 context did produce public support for the initial invasion of Iraq.

Kenneth Pollack wrote in favour of the invasion, possessing impressive credentials for commenting on Middle Eastern matters after serving two turns as director of Gulf Affairs in the National Security Council, as well as spending seven years working for the CIA as a Persian Gulf Military Analyst. Writing in support of the invasion in 2002, Pollack's argument centred around regime change as a tool to defuse Arab-American hostilities, rather than inflame them. Pollack argued that 'an invasion would offer the opportunity to build a new Iraq' and that 'If we (America) are willing to accept the challenge and pay the price, we could end up creating a much better future for ourselves and all the people of the Middle East' (Pollack, 2002: 338). This quote typifies the neoconservative sense of moral duty within foreign policy, believing that use of American military force could benefit not just the American people, but the Iraqi people as well as those in neighbouring states. The problem with moral guidance within the international political arena, is that it can blinker judgement and convince an actor that theirs is the only correct path, whilst insulating the actor from international condemnation, mass civil protests and sometimes, a lack of evidence to begin with.

However, for those who bought into the line of reasoning there was to be no deterring from the path to a fully-fledged invasion. Some, like neocon foreign policy analyst Michael Ledeen, argued that invading Iraq was should be the first step in a number of Middle Eastern invasions, stating 'first and foremost, we must bring down the terror regimes, beginning with the big three: Iran, Iraq and Syria. And then we have to come to grips with the Saudis' (Ledeen, 2003: 159). This quote offers a fascinating insight into the neocon persuasion and re-enforces the notion of how strongly convinced the neocons were that their strategy of regime change and democratisation would work in the Middle East. In just two sentences, Ledeen makes the argument that the US should invade four separate states, seemingly glossing over the long and treacherous process of state-rebuilding that would need to take place for this process to be effective, let alone the wider implications for foreign relations if the US were to launch three new invasions in the Middle East.

The post-9/11 context allowed the Bush administration to implement the neoconservative vision for American foreign policy. But ultimately it was a vision built upon a false pretence of moral superiority, one which disregarded practical implication in favour of uni-lateral action and justified by rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War. The next chapter will proceed to analyse the trajectory of the American insurgency, comparing the pre-invasion assumptions about Iraq to the reality that met American troops upon their arrival, as well as exploring how such miscalculations could have possibly been made. Ultimately, the arguments pushed by those who supported the neocon agenda were inherently flawed and once applied in a real-life context succeeded only in undermining and discrediting the neocon persuasion in the political arena. The chapter will primarily analyse why these policies did not work, followed by exploring what happened to the most prominent neocons after it had become apparent that the Iraq invasion was to be no quick-fix for America's problems in the Middle East.

Chapter 3 – Invasion of Iraq

"Few things are more dangerous than empires pushing their own interest in the belief they are doing humanity a favour"
Eric Hobspawm, 2003.

The purpose of this chapter will be to analyse why the Iraq invasion did not proceed as the neocons had expected, highlighting the intelligence failures prior to the war and the dismissal of the geopolitical significance of the invasion

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as two primary reasons as to why Operation Iraqi Freedom did not succeed. In order to properly focus on the political aspect of the invasion, other important factors in the war's failure (namely shortcomings in military strategy and the complexities of Iraqi domestic politics) must be marginalised, allowing the project to focus on its original purpose of critiquing the neoconservative influence on American foreign policy during the 2003 Iraq invasion.

The National Security strategy of 2002 laid down the blue-print for the Bush administration's 'War on Terror' and dictated the course of American foreign policy at the start of the 21st century. A simplified overview of the objectives set out by the Bush administration after 9/11 could categorise the war into three distinct phases; firstly, to target the Taliban regime suspected masterminding the 9/11 attacks and harbouring Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan. Secondly, to overthrow Saddam Hussein and his regime, establishing a new, democratic Iraq that would no longer pose a threat to the United States. Finally, to expand the war to target the tyrannical regimes of the 'Axis of Evil', such as North Korea and Saudi Arabia, that the US perceived as threatening to global stability and peace (Yaphe, 2003: 24). In theory, by targeting the 'Axis of Evil', the United States could address the root causes of global terror by spreading Western democracy into previously dictatorial states which would, in theory, prevent future terrorist attacks on American soil (CNN, 2002). In reality however, the 'Axis of Evil' sound-bite served only to galvanise support for the War on Terror by condensing a long and tricky foreign policy challenge into a simple, moral issue, typical of the neoconservative approach to American foreign policy (Economist, 2002).

For the neocons, the perceived military success in Afghanistan was the catalyst for arguing to extend the War on Terror to overthrowing Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party in Iraq. Despite growing international concern about a political and security vacuum developing with the demise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Bush administration was determined to build on the momentum of the previous invasion and began to plan for regime change in Iraq (Rogers, 2008: 76). Although there was significant international opposition to a further American invasion, containment through economic sanctions was still the favoured alternative to military action, rather than simply leaving Iraq to its own devices (Emmott, 2005: 219). Consensus then, that Iraq could potentially threaten international stability through its alleged pursuit of WMD's, but the divide still remained over the best course of action to deal with this potential problem. For the neocons there was only one course of action and the lack of a United States Security Council (UNSC) resolution on Iraq was not going to alter their path.

The UNSC did not support unilateral action in Iraq due to the inconclusive evidence regarding Saddam's supposed development of WMD capabilities. Despite official UN reports describing Iraqi cooperation with weapons inspections as 'proactive', the United States and Britain demanded that Iraq fully disarm itself in just ten days, despite the UNSC demanding more time to properly carry out its task (Left, 2003). Ultimatums such as this drove a wedge between those demanding action (the US and its allies) and those calling for a careful, measured, multi-lateral approach to dealing with the Iraq problem. The certainty of the rhetoric pushed by the neocons within the Bush administration was so absolute in its nature that it seemed as if the United States had no choice but to act immediately. Just three months before the invasion, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld warned that 'Saddam Hussein possesses chemical and biological weapons… Iraq poses a threat to the security of our people and to the stability of the world' (CAP, 2004). When no WMD stockpiles were ever found, the debate began as to whether the CIA misled the Bush administration with faulty intelligence, or whether the Bush administration ordered the CIA to find evidence to subsequently support the war, regardless of how tenuous the links between Saddam and WMDs were (Pollack, 2004).

However, side-lining any potential failures within the American intelligence community prior to the war, a political decision had been made to invade Iraq without multi-lateral support from the UNSC, based upon intelligence provided by the CIA about a potential, but not imminent, threat. The integrity of said evidence has been widely targeted by critics of the invasion, particularly considering that no WMD stockpiles were found, primarily by UN weapons inspectors and latterly by coalition forces after Saddam's removal. The general consensus is that the threat of nuclear-terrorism was at best, misinterpreted by the CIA, and more cynically, fabricated to provide the *casus belli* (cause for war) required for public support of the invasion (Fukuyama, 2006: 5) (Ewing, 2004: 106). Whether or not the coalition governments were complicit in the misrepresentation of the potential threat stemming from Iraq is debatable. For the purpose of this project, the important factor regarding the *casus belli* was that the Bush administration relied solely on the evidence provided by the CIA which, alongside many other intelligence aspects of

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the invasion, proved to be completely inaccurate.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

"We had no idea we weren't wanted"
Lt. Col. Eric Nantz of the 82nd Airborne, 2004.

The invasion began with the United States amassing some 116,000 troops to the South-East of Iraq on the border of neighbouring Kuwait, with a view to moving northwards through Iraq to eventually capture the capital of Baghdad, Saddam Hussein's stronghold (Dodge, 2005: 10). Upon crossing the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border, US military officials were surprised to encounter hostile fire from Iraqi militia, after assuming that the largely Shi'ite population of Southern Iraq would welcome American troops as liberators after being widely persecuted by Saddam's Sunni regime (Rogers, 2008: 94). The assumption that coalition forces would be welcomed as liberators by the Iraqi people typifies the naïve and blinkered mind-set that provided the ideological basis for the invasion. The resistance that American troops initially encountered upon entering Iraq is of great symbolic significance in explaining why the neoconservative mind-set could have so grossly misjudged the situation. The very actions that were supposed to be 'liberating' the Iraqi people were interpreted entirely differently by the locals, who viewed the arrival of a Western military power as an 'imperial intrusion' of their sovereign land (Steele, 2008: 81).

Nonetheless, coalition troops managed to reach Baghdad relatively unscathed besides the occasional skirmish with local militia forces. The arrival of American troops into Baghdad signalled the demise of Saddam's regime, but as the local's celebrations turned into mass looting of the capital's private property, a much greater problem for coalition forces was beginning to emerge. The Bush administration's decision to send the fewest number of ground troops possible, in favour of greater use of military technologies such as precision bombing, had left the invading forces with a severe shortage of manpower, leaving them unable to prevent the three weeks of wild looting that swept the capital (Burbach & Tarbell, 2004: 176). Though this incident could be accredited to the demise of a tyrannical power (and subsequently the fear and persecution that supports tyrannical regimes), the implications of the looting were damning for the coalition forces. The Iraqis perceived that the invading powers were not in full control of the country in the wake of Saddam's demise, leading to the much greater problem of a full blown insurgency developing against coalition troops in the years that followed (Dodge, 2005: 9).

This was in stark contrast to Donald Rumsfeld's pre-war assumptions that Iraq would be a swift, precise military operation in which the Iraqi's would play a central role in the re-building of the state after American forces had removed Saddam. The neocons had envisioned the creation of a new, free-market Iraq that would go on to become America's economic and political ally in the Middle East, assuming that the gratitude of removing Saddam would outweigh the animosity towards the foreign military presence within the state (Rogers, 2008: 91). The reality, however, was that the United States intelligence agencies had grossly misjudged the character of the Iraqi people and had all-but ignored the geopolitical significance of the invasion. The neocons had assumed that in order to liberate Iraq all they had to do was remove the tyrannical dictator in charge and that the Iraqis would inherently choose to implement Western-style democracy in the wake of Saddam's demise. What they could not envision, however, was how the locals could interpret the same 'liberating' actions as Western, imperial aggression, whose objective was to occupy and control the country for their own means, rather than 'liberate' it. Critics have argued that the United States had little or no plan for the rebuilding of the Iraqi state after Saddam and instead focussed entirely on planning the military's offensive strategy (Steele, 2008: 80). The negligence displayed towards the responsibility of rebuilding the state post-Saddam typifies the inherent hypocrisy of the neocon approach to foreign policy; willingness to use American military power for the 'moral good' of removing an oppressive dictator but unwilling to commit to the rebuilding of said state afterward. Whether this stems from the neocons' suspicion of social engineering and its unintended consequences, a pseudo-respect for state sovereignty and independence, or an ignorance towards the perception of the United States by the rest of the world, the power vacuum left behind in Iraq has posed a much greater and immediate threat to US than any potential WMD would have.

A case-study of state re-building in Iraq produced by the United States Institute of Peace (UNIP) in 2004, concluded that by disbanding all existing 'state agencies of violence' (Iraqi armed forces, police and the entire staff of the

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Interior ministry) coalition forces had reduced the number of security personnel per thousand people from an average of 43 per thousand under Saddam, to just 3 per thousand after his removal (Jabar, 2004: 6). In order to address this power vacuum, the report went on to recommend that coalition forces would need to increase the number to 20 per thousand to ensure security in the newly liberated Iraq. In reality, that would have meant increasing the numbers of coalition troops to between 400,000-500,000 to fill the gaping security vacuum in the country. Instead, the peak number of American troops within Iraq during the occupation was approximately 155,000 in January 2005 (Dodge, 2005: 10). The report's recommendation to increase the number of US troops within Iraq was ignored and as a result coalition forces never truly managed to secure Iraq after Saddam, meaning the task of state rebuilding was now an almost impossible one. The extent to which the post-Saddam rebuild of Iraq was marginalised during the preparations for the invasion has led some commentators to label the Bush administration's actions in 2003 as 'regime termination' rather than 'regime change' (Rogers, 2008: 91).

But 'regime termination' was never the intended outcome of the Iraq invasion. The neocons had wanted to rid Iraq of Saddam to ensure American homeland safety, but the same logic could only succeed if the government who replaced him were more sympathetic toward American interests in the Middle East. A cornerstone of the re-building plan rested on establishing free, democratic elections within Iraq to provide a legitimate, representative government for the newly freed Iraqi state. But the blinkered nature of the neocon persuasion left them blind to the geopolitical difference between their vision of a free-market, democratic Iraq and the strong secular leaders that sections of the Iraqi people wanted to see in power. Other sections of Iraqi society either boycotted the elections on principle (only 2% of Sunnis in Anbar Province voted) or avoided polling stations entirely out of fear of attack by insurgents (Cole, 2005). Be it because of fearing a lack of protection by coalition troops or through ideologically disagreeing with Western style elections, one of the cornerstones in the plan to rebuild Iraq had undoubtedly failed, leaving the neocons' vision for post-Saddam Iraq looking increasingly unlikely.

Unexpected enemies

The US are said to have misjudged three key aspects of Iraqi nationalism that have gone on to undermine the rebuilding process; firstly, underestimating the strength of nationalistic feelings amongst Shi'ite communities (it was largely assumed they would support US occupation during the re-building); secondly, Shi'ite communities did not want Western-style democracy, they instead intended to use elections to place secular, Islamist leaders into power; thirdly, Shi'ite community leaders tended to be judged as either pro or anti-American in their views, meaning that the occupation became a politicised agenda to be exploited rather than being interpreted as an inherently 'good' thing due to Saddam's removal (Steele, 2008: 87). By over-simplifying the political landscape in Iraq prior to the invasion, the US severely underestimated the turbulent, secular nature of the country. American intelligence completely mischaracterised how divided, yet fiercely nationalistic Iraq was, stemming from decades of super-power occupation, tyrannical dictatorships and deeply rooted religious conflicts.

One potential explanation as to why the United States intelligence services misjudged the socio-political make up of Iraq to such an extent was that during the years 1991-2003, the US had no embassy in the country. The states that lobbied hardest in the UN against the invasion (primarily France, Germany and Russia) all maintained diplomatic missions within Iraq during this period which arguably left them better informed about the complex nature of Iraqi society (Steele, 2008: 83). When the US finally opened their new $480 million embassy in 2009 (the largest and most expensive anywhere in the world), the unexpected consequence was to raise suspicion amongst Iraqis as to the true purpose of the invasion, which was now quickly beginning to look like a full-blown occupation of the country (Rogers, 2008: 98). The need to develop the world's most expensive embassy six years after the initial invasion (a streamlined, swift one at that) highlights how severely the United States misjudged the political makeup of Iraqi society and demonstrates how flawed the neocon approach to this incredibly complex foreign policy operation was. Although the Bush administration was not the first presidency to pursue regime change as a foreign policy tool (Kennedy during the Cold War, Clinton in Yugoslavia etc), the assumption that regime change could be enforced militarily, over such a short time-period and would be universally welcomed by the locals was a new, and inherently flawed concept in American politics.

Mission accomplished?

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Although Saddam Hussein was captured by coalition forces on 13th December 2003, the American invasion of Iraq had become a full-blown occupation, fighting a war against an insurgency movement that had not existed before their arrival. The invasion was supposed to have been the first in a series of similar operations, each one going some way to defeating the global terror network, but in reality the Iraq invasion succeeded only in 'transforming an eventual and speculative threat into a concrete and immediate one' (Danner, 2003: 89). The threat of terrorism still poses a major concern to the United States, most recently proved by the Boston Marathon Bombings in 2013. The total number of American military personnel killed in Iraq currently stands at 4,423, 1427 more than those who died during the 9/11 attacks (US Defense Dept, 2014). Iraq has not embraced Western democracy in the manner that was expected and remains a violent, divided society to this day. After officially withdrawing its troops from formal combat operations in 2011, numerous reports have described how al-Qaeda militia groups have retaken control of the Western province of Anbar, forcing the Iraqi military to retreat from Fallujah, a city of great significance for coalition forces who launched the largest assault of the entire war to capture it from insurgent control (Sanchez, 2014).

The American hatred that fuelled the 9/11 attacks still remains, arguably intensifying over the decade-long occupation. 'Iraq' has become synonymous with the concept of imperial over-reach as stands alongside 'Vietnam' in demonstrating the pit-falls of superpower hubris (Holland, 2013: 135). From the very start of the war there were strong indications that the process of regime termination itself was inherently flawed, with 'the very idea that the United States could occupy and re-shape a significant Arab state… (being a) gross misreading of regional politics, culture and religion (Rogers, 2008: 91). The next chapter will explore how the fall-out from the Iraq invasion effected the neoconservative persuasion, particularly focussing on why such prominent neocons as Francis Fukuyama renounced their support for the ideology just three years after the start of the invasion. The project will then conclude with a summary of the arguments presented regarding the neoconservative persuasion and its application during Iraq in 2003.

Conclusions and Reflections

> *"Have you ever met a war you didn't love?"*
> Bill Maher addressing Bill Kristol, son of Irving Kristol, 2014.

Across the previous three chapters, this project has aimed to explain the rise of neoconservatism as a political persuasion, it's fundamental beliefs about domestic society and how that transpired into a niche, yet powerful foreign policy ideology during the Cold War. After exploring the roots and development of the persuasion, the project then analysed the main actors responsible for bringing neoconservative policy to the forefront of the formerly Realist President Bush's administration, paying particular attention to the neocon calls to remove Saddam years before the Vulcans took office. Once the links between neoconservatism and the Presidency of George W. Bush had been established it was time to explore how the 9/11 attacks fundamentally changed the global context of international politics and the reasons why the event provided the 'green light' for Bush and the neocons to enact their plan for the Middle East. The project then focussed on the Iraq invasion of 2003, highlighting the perceived failures of the military operation and analysing how the neocon influence over certain decisions (such as minimal troop numbers) contributed to the overall failure of the invasion. This chapter will provide a brief summary of the arguments proposed throughout the project and will then offer some personal reflections on the neocon persuasion, as well as exploring the potential future of the ideology.

Key Findings

One of the initial key findings of this project was the discovery of ideological splits within the neocon persuasion, particularly between the original, anti-communist neocons with a deep hatred of social engineering and those contemporary neocons such as the Vulcans to whom social engineering of other states was a cornerstone of their foreign policy vision. Once this division had been established it became apparent how malleable the neocon persuasion was, typified by the wide-range of arguments presented under the neocon banner, as well as prominent neocons such as Kristol distancing themselves from any set definition of what neoconservatism does or does not

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epitomise. It is the ambiguous nature of the persuasion that allows those with an agenda (in the case of this project, people such as Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz) to manipulate the ideology to fit their own needs, whilst claiming to be, or labelled by others as, neoconservative. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the implementation of a long-standing plan, pushed by those who either stood to gain personally, either in a political or financial sense. The awarding of non-competitive, billion-dollar contracts to favoured companies for the re-building of Iraq after Saddam's demise is testament to the links between big business and neoconservative politics during the Bush administration.

The War on Terror, as a concept and in practice, was inherently flawed as it ignored the geopolitical significance of the invasion and was oblivious to the perception of American military action by the rest of international society. The fact that Iraq became a magnet for potential jihadists after the US invasion is testament to just how inaccurately neocon perceptions of global society, and particularly the volatile Middle East, were. The belief that one could militarily enforce democracy onto a secular, divided society such as Iraq and achieve it almost instantaneously with only minimal troop numbers is bordering on ludicrous. Yet, the plan was enacted regardless and has resulted in an American military presence in Iraq for almost eleven years since the initial invasion. As was argued in the previous chapter, the Boston Marathon Bombings of 2013 were testament to the fact that 'terror' had certainly not been defeated during George W. Bush's presidency, with the invasion of Iraq providing legitimacy (from a jihadist perspective) for terror attacks against the US, rather than preventing them. It is because of the actions carried out by the Bush administration, under the guise of neoconservatism, that led many former supporters of the ideology to renounce their support for the persuasion before the end of Bush's second term.

The State of the Persuasion

In just three years after the initial invasion of Iraq, former key supporters of the neocon persuasion were renouncing their ties to the political ideology, feeling as though the word 'neocon' had become synonymous with the imperial over-reach as typified by the Bush administration. In 2006, Francis Fukuyama, often considered a prominent neocon during the latter stages of the Cold War and one of the signators of the PNAC's open letter to President Clinton, declared that neoconservatism 'had evolved into something…(he could) no longer support' (Fukuyama, 2006: *ix*). By 2003, the persuasion had moved away from the 'sensibilities' of the Cold War (as Fukuyama describes) and had evolved into a grandiose, utopian vision, placing American military power as the central actor for spreading Western democracy across the globe, regardless of geopolitical significance. This was, of course, in stark contrast to the scepticism toward social engineering that the original neocons displayed, with the 'unexpected consequences' of the Bush administration's invasion manifesting themselves as a fully-fledged insurgency against coalition troops within Iraq.

There is an argument to be made, particularly in Fukuyama's case, that the actions carried out by the Bush administration were not those of 'true' neoconservatives and were instead the actions of a small minority who interpreted the persuasion in a specific way and used it as a vehicle to pursue their own means once in power. It is this image, of the Iraq invasion, of Vulcans, of the War on Terror, that Fukuyama argues does not properly represent the persuasion, but admits that 'any effort to reclaim the label at this point is likely to be futile' (Fukuyama, 2006: *ix*). Ironically, Fukuyama's argument that neoconservatism could be interpreted in different ways, sensationalised and manipulated by those pushing an albeit different agenda is strikingly similar to the way that jihadists can manipulate passages of the Quran to legitimise violence, without representing all followers of the Muslim faith. Nonetheless, the term 'neoconservatism' has come to represent a war-hungry, blinkered foreign policy conduct that shunned diplomatic, or 'soft' power, in favour of uni-lateral military action across the globe under the guise of promoting international liberty.

Whilst some like Fukuyama have publically tried to distance themselves from the neocon tag since the Iraq invasion, more supportive factions of the American right have attempted to place a positive spin on George Bush's foreign policy. Neocon David Frum, Bush's former speech writer, highlighted 'closer ties to India', 'a pragmatic relationship with China' and pressure applied to Iran 'that will pay dividends for years to come' as three successes of the Bush's administration's foreign policy, whilst simultaneously describing his former boss as 'a reckless, unilateralist cowboy' (Frum, 2008: 32). The juxtaposition between highlighting the supposed successes of Bush's foreign policy whilst simultaneously branding the President a 'reckless cowboy' typifies the hypocritical nature of the persuasion and

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invokes Noon's critique from chapter 2 that neocons will often find 'historical clarity' where others find only ambiguity. When Frum describes Bush as a 'reckless cowboy' he is no doubt describing the contemporary caricature that most critics of Bush's foreign policy perceive, but in highlighting the three successes described above Frum is already beginning to impose the 'historical clarity' that Noon spoke of, glossing over the almost universally criticised Iraq war to portray Bush as a bridge-builder in Asia and the Middle East.

Then again, even the Godfather of neoconservatism himself, Irving Kristol, described neoconservatism as 'something whose meaning we clearly glimpse only in retrospect' (Kristol, 2003), meaning that historical revisionism is not only typical of neocon supporters, but is a fundamental cornerstone of the persuasion itself. Whether or not the passage of time will improve the public's perception of the Iraq war remains to be seen, but if the same revisionist agenda is applied to the Iraq war by future neocons as it was to the Cold War previously, I have no doubt that future neocons will be highlighting Bush's success in removing Saddam, whilst marginalising the lack of WMD evidence and the ten year insurgency that followed it. How was it, then, that a persuasion 'whose meaning we clearly only glimpse in retrospect' and that requires a historical context by which to be judged, could offer such instantaneous policy solutions in the wake of the devastating 9/11 attacks? As conservative commentator Michael Dougherty argues, for neoconservatism 'every crisis…is just a new opportunity' (Dougherty, 2009).

By that phrase, Dougherty means that the blinkered world-view of the neoconservatives leaves them perfectly positioned to offer clear guidance in times of crisis, even if what they are proposing proves to be inherently flawed, like the invasion and democratisation of Iraq in 2003. The neocons were only able to implement their vision to remove Saddam so swiftly after 9/11 because it was a plan that had been years in the making. By that logic, when the next great crisis threatens to challenge American political power, the neocons will be back, peddling their solution to whichever problem may arise, and it will no doubt rely heavily on the use of American military power to solve it. Although the credibility of most neocons has been widely tarnished in the wake of the Iraq disaster, younger neocons such as Robert Kagan have been writing prolifically about the next great threat to American hegemony. This particular threat, however, is a far cry from the Iraqi WMD's that supposedly threatened American political power after 9/11 and presents a much greater challenge to American hegemony going into the twenty-first century, that being the economic rise of China.

Kagan's interpretation of Obama's "strategic reassurance" policy towards the Chinese (whereby American assurances not to try and contain China's economic development were made) typifies that of the neoconservative persuasion, with him arguing that 'China…has not moved into the postmodern world in which interests are shared and ambitions are tempered' and that 'for the Chinese – true realists – the competition with the United States in East Asia is very much a zero-sum game' (Kagan, 2009). The tone of this quote is in-keeping with the absolute nature of the rhetoric that was displayed by neocons before the invasion of Iraq. Kagan cannot envision a global international arena whereby the rise of an economic power like China would not pose a direct threat to US hegemony, particularly re-enforced by his 'zero-sum game' description of proceedings. This neoconservative threat perception is in-keeping with that of the USSR during the Cold War, where the proxy-war in Vietnam became a zero-sum game that the US simply *had* to win, and during the Iraq war, whereby Saddam *had* to be removed in order to ensure American homeland safety.

The absolutist nature of the neocon persuasion is perfectly summarised by Kagan whilst describing the causes of 9/11, stating that 'the failure of the United States to take risks, and to take responsibility, in the 1990s paved the way to September 11' (Cooper, 2010: 164). For the neocons, it was a *failure* to act in the 1990's that facilitated the 9/11 attacks; to the rest of the world the 9/11 attacks were a direct response to US interventionism around the globe, particularly in the Middle East. The introduction to this project highlighted the lack of a specific definition of the neocon persuasion as one reason for the ambiguous nature of the ideology, but this project has found neoconservatism to be a niche, yet powerful political ideology whose greatest fear seems to be a loss of American political power through a lack of military action. It is because of this fear that neocons are willing to take risks in international politics, for example bypassing the UNSC in favour of a uni-lateral war, to ensure the preservation of American hegemony in spite of international condemnation of their actions.

The future of the persuasion seems fixated on the rise of China as the next great challenge to the United States and

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there are already arguments being made within neocon circles to 'contain' China before it reaches its true economic and military potential (Kagan, 2009). Much like it was deemed a necessity to 'contain' the USSR during the Cold War (in order to protect the American way of life), neocons are applying the same arguments to the Chinese challenge to American hegemony. The real danger would lie however, as it did in the case of Saddam's Iraq, if the policy of containment towards China was deemed as not going far enough to curtail their challenge to American power. As was proved during the War on Terror, a neoconservative influence on American foreign policy can spell disastrous consequences for innocent people on the other side of the globe and for the concept of state sovereignty as a whole, when American hegemonic power is challenged.

To conclude with Cooper's critique of American actions in Iraq, will the invasion 'be remembered as a war that was poorly prosecuted but fundamentally sound in the ideas that led America there? Or will it be considered a war fought on questionable ideas and doctrines, conceived and justified in the think-tanks, offices, and in the minds of those who dedicate themselves to living a life in which ideas are everything?' (Cooper, 2010: 164). In answer to Cooper's question, this project believes that the latter view will summarise the world's dominant interpretation of the American military action in Iraq in 2003. As Cooper argues, for the neocons ideas are everything, meaning questions of pragmatism are shunned in favour of a utopian vision of American benevolent hegemony. Unfortunately for the neocons, as proven by the insurgency which rose against them in Iraq, the rest of the world has very different ideas about global society.

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Written by: Patrick Corscadden
Written at: University of the West of England, Bristol
Supervised by: Dr Stephen McGlinchey
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