

THE RECENT HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN NEOCONSERVATISM*

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ABSTRACT. *This article surveys the literature on American neoconservatism since 1979, emphasizing those monographs which include assessments of developments in neoconservatism since 1995. It analyses the origins of neoconservatism in the anti-Stalinist Left and in the ideological divisions of the Democratic party. It assesses the position of neoconservatism in the American conservative tradition and its influence on Republican party policy. It places neoconservatism within the broader context of American foreign and domestic policy. It examines the emergence of networks of support which have sustained neoconservatives as a group of policy intellectuals independent of universities. It concludes by asking whether neoconservatism can be productively viewed as an expression of American ethnic politics, in particular as a response to the varying guises which anti-Semitism has assumed in the United States. The article asserts that, although commentators on neoconservatism from varying ideological standpoints have avoided the question of the neoconservatives' ethnicity, it offers a plausible explanation for the protean nature and apparent inconsistency of neoconservatism over the last forty years.*

The standard explanation of the peculiar presidency of George W. Bush identifies a fusion of three elements in its political coalition: evangelical Christianity (Karl Rove calls the religious Right 'the base'), big business (but not high tech industry) especially big oil (Halliburton and Vice-President Cheney), and, thirdly, 'neo-conservatism' (think-tanks, William Kristol, Paul Wolfowitz et al.). Each strand of this unholy trinity has its literature, much of it powerful and persuasive. Neo-conservatives themselves hardly shrink from publicity: in the words of Gary Dorrien, they form 'the most prolifically in-your-face movement in American politics'. Accordingly, since the inception of neoconservatism as an intellectual and political movement (the socialist activist and writer Michael Harrington can lay claim to having coined the term in the early 1970s, although the origins lie several years before that) an extensive literature on the subject has accumulated. Neoconservatism's participants have been among the most vociferous historians of the movement. Studies of the movement have appeared since Peter Steinfels's *The neoconservatives* (1979) with various polemical axes to grind, and with varying

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degrees of scholarly intent.¹ Although these studies are coloured by neoconservatism being a matter of contemporary controversy as well as a historical phenomenon, taken together they provide a reliable and coherent narrative of its history. However, some dimensions which are essential to the analysis of neoconservatism, notably those that relate to the ethnic aspects of American politics and society, have been relatively unexplored. The movement's forty years of existence is long enough to gain a historical perspective and to draw some tentative conclusions about its political and sociological significance.

A question which arises from close acquaintance with the subject (although its implications are not fully discussed in the literature) is the extent to which one can speak of neoconservatism as one coherent movement, rather than a loose 'persuasion', as the contributors to the Stelzer anthology would have it,² without a strict party 'line'. It could be argued that it is possible to speak of *neoconservatism* from the beginning of the movement. Its ideological sources are diverse, and this has given neoconservatism its markedly protean character.

The neoconservative movement arose from two groups. The first group was made up almost entirely of ex-Marxist Jewish intellectuals whose parents had spoken Yiddish at home. Their first encounter with America was in the intensely Marxist environment of proletarian Jewish New York of the 1930s. This group came into being in Alcove No 1 of City College New York in the late 1930s, where some of the most influential intellectuals of the post-war era (Daniel Bell, Irving Howe, Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, and Seymour Martin Lipset) argued intensely. These figures comprised the younger generation of the much-fabled 'New York Intellectuals', who were the ideological successors to the so-called 'Young Intellectuals' of the early twentieth century (Max Eastman, John Reed, John Randolph Bourne). Like them, they embraced both avant-garde aesthetics

¹ Those works which are broadly favourable to neoconservatism include: J. David Hoeveler Jr, *Watch on the Right: conservative intellectuals in the Reagan era* (Madison, WI, 1991); John Ehrman, *The rise of neoconservatism: intellectuals and foreign affairs, 1947–1994* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1995); Murray Friedman, *The neoconservative revolution: Jewish intellectuals and the shaping of public policy* (Cambridge, 2005); and Mark Gerson, *The neoconservative vision* (Lanham, MD, 1996). Those which adopt a liberal perspective, critical of neoconservatism, are: Peter Steinfels, *The neoconservatives: the men who are changing America's politics* (New York, NY, 1979); Sidney Blumenthal, *The rise of the counterestablishment: from conservative ideology to political power* (New York, NY, 1986); Gary Dorrien, *The neoconservative mind: politics, culture and the war of ideology* (Philadelphia, PA, 1993); idem, *Imperial designs: neoconservatism and the new Pax Americana* (New York, NY, 2004). Two books written from the perspective of ex-neoconservatives are: Michael Lind, *Up from conservatism: why the Right is wrong for America* (New York, NY, 1996); Francis Fukuyama, *America at the crossroads: democracy, power and the neoconservative legacy* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2006). Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America alone: the neoconservatives and the global order* (Cambridge, 2004), is an analysis from the viewpoint of the 'realist' – Kissingerian and libertarian strands in Republican party thought. This article will focus on Friedman, Fukuyama, Dorrien, and Halper and Clarke, with reference, as appropriate, to the extensive scholarly and journalistic literature on the American Right in general and to the writings of neoconservatives themselves.

² Irwin Stelzer, ed., *The neocon reader* (London, 2004). Stelzer's somewhat eccentric choice of contributors (the inclusion of Condoleezza Rice, John Bolton, and Tony Blair gives a seriously misleading impression of what neoconservatism is) makes it much less useful than Mark Gerson's *The essential neoconservative reader* (New York, NY, 1996).

and Marxist politics. Although political argument and activism (in tiny groups on the anti-Stalinist Marxist Left) was as important as their academic work for them, culture could not be dictated by politics. They were self-consciously highbrow in their cultural attitudes. They opposed what they saw as the crude social realism of much 'Popular Front' culture. They combined a respect for the life of the intellect with often savage attacks on intellectuals for serving the wrong politics.³

Throughout their careers, the relationship between class and ideology would continue to preoccupy them. Their compulsory reading was *Partisan Review*, which (implicitly) proclaimed its disaffection from both Judaism and the United States. When *Commentary* displaced *Partisan Review* as their journal of choice, it assumed that an intellectual should not be exiled from either a Jewish or an American identity, but should accept and, indeed, proclaim both.⁴ Until the early 1970s, these assumptions led to liberal conclusions.

Several were to become active as liberal anti-communists. They worked for the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom, and edited and contributed polemics to its journal *Encounter*.⁵ At the same time, several established themselves as social scientists who could speak to a large audience of non-social scientists. The tightrope which they walked between McCarthyism and 'anti-anti-communism' exacerbated their self-image of embattled righteousness. However, the more academic members of the group (Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Richard Hofstadter) distinguished their liberal anti-communism from McCarthyism. They saw McCarthyism's origins in the 'status anxieties' of Catholic ethnic groups and in the demagogic qualities of late nineteenth-century agrarian Populism. In other words, it was an irrational response. For Hofstadter and Bell, the anti-Semitism of leading Populists (Tom Watson, Ignatius Donnelly) was a phenomenon that could not be ignored. Other historians more sympathetic to Populism (such as C. Vann Woodward in *The strange career of Jim Crow*) were showing that Populists had often become the most hard-line segregationists. For Hofstadter et al., this was no accident. Anti-Semitism, utopianism, and a rejection of capitalism, urban

³ The literature on the New York Intellectuals is extensive, and is essential background for the history of neoconservatism: John Patrick Diggins, *The rise and fall of the American Left* (New York, NY, 1992); Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal sons: the New York Intellectuals and their world* (Oxford, 1986); Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: the rise and decline of the anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1987); Terry A. Cooney, *The rise of the New York Intellectuals: 'Partisan Review' and its circle* (Madison, WI, 1986); Neil Jumonville, *Critical crossings: the New York Intellectuals in postwar America* (Berkeley, CA, 1991); Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: from vanguard to institution* (Manchester, 1995); Joseph Dorman, *Arguing the world: the New York Intellectuals in their own words* (New York, NY, 2001).

⁴ For an account of *Commentary's* intellectual formation and its complex relationship to Judaism, see Nathan Abrams, *Commentary magazine, 1945–1959: 'a journal of significant thought and opinion'* (London, Portland, OR, 2007).

⁵ For detailed accounts see Mary Sperling McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left: cold war politics and American liberals, 1947–1954* (Amherst, MA, 1978); Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who paid the piper? The CIA and the cultural cold war* (London, 1999); Peter Coleman, *The liberal conspiracy: the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the struggle for the mind of postwar Europe* (New York, NY, 1989); Hugh Wilford, *The mighty wurltizer: how the CIA played America* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).

life, and modernity were aspects of the same political phenomenon in Europe: why should this ugly political force not arise in the United States? Their experience of Stalinists in the 1930s had convinced them of the danger to them of totalitarianism as *intellectuals*; the covert anti-Semitism of the House Un-American Activities Committee and Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign had demonstrated to them that both democracy and totalitarianism could be dangerous to them as *Jews*. Although much recent scholarship has strongly rejected the validity of the parallel which they drew between the popular sources of McCarthyism and those of Populism, this was an important moment in the pre-history of neoconservatism. Those fears and anxieties which many assume to have been caused by the experiences of the 1960s had their origins much earlier.⁶

Irving Kristol, on the other hand, seemed to want to blur the distinction between liberal anti-communism and McCarthyism. In an article which he wrote for the March 1952 issue of *Commentary*, entitled 'Civil liberties 1925 – a study in confusion: do we defend our rights by protecting communists?', he said 'For there is one thing that the American people know about Senator McCarthy: he, like them, is unequivocally anti-communist. About the spokesmen for American liberalism, they feel they know no such thing. And with some justification.' In 1993 Kristol affirmed that liberalism, not communism, had always been his principal enemy.⁷ However, Kristol's importance in both the institutional and intellectual history of neoconservatism should not make us overlook the fact of his ideological precocity. The majority of those intellectuals who were to become neoconservatives would have called themselves liberals until at least the early 1970s.

This first group (the 'New York Intellectuals') contributed something new to American conservatism, when they joined this movement from the late 1960s. They were not Anglo-Saxon Protestants. They knew both liberalism and Marxism from the inside. They were an important part of the Democratic coalition. They could produce empirical support for ideological polemics. They could claim that, although their hearts were still liberal, their heads were now conservative. They did not reject every change in American society since FDR's inauguration, as many traditional American conservatives had. As Jews and scholars, they had experienced anti-Semitism and quotas against Jews at Ivy League universities in the pre-war era and the accusation that they were imperialist lackeys by the New Left in the 1960s. Very few traditional conservatives could claim any of these things, although Milton Friedman, a libertarian, had

⁶ David S. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: an intellectual biography* (Chicago, IL, 2006), pp. 71–120; Peter Novick, *That noble dream: the 'objectivity question' and the American historical profession* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 337; Daniel Bell, ed., *The radical Right* (New York, NY, 1963); Richard Hofstadter, *The age of reform: from Bryan to FDR* (New York, NY, 1955). For a modern assessment of *The radical Right*, see Michael Kazin, *The populist persuasion: an American history* (New York, NY, 1994), p. 190.

⁷ Irving Kristol, 'My cold war', *The National Interest*, 31 (1993), p. 143; idem, *Neoconservatism: the autobiography of an idea* (New York, NY, 1995).

been brought up as an Orthodox Jew.⁸ From the earliest days of the movement, there had been Catholic neoconservatives. The sociologist James Q. Wilson, showing that de Tocqueville is one of the many influences on neoconservatism, has drawn attention to the role of intermediate institutions and communitarian solidarity in establishing conditions which are unpropitious for the growth of crime.⁹ The polemicist Michael Novak, at odds with papal edicts on this subject, has attempted to provide a Christian justification for capitalism. However, the New York Intellectuals were crucial in giving the movement its rhetorical and ideological flavour: their cocktail of social science and polemic; and their understanding of the relationship between ideology and class.¹⁰

However, even at this early stage in the movement, there were differences between the major participants. Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (with Irving Kristol they helped found the social science periodical *The Public Interest* in 1965) could be described as 'right-wing liberals', who had specific concerns about the direction of American universities after the student revolt, affirmative action, or welfare policy, and who, at various stages, departed from neoconservatism.¹¹ They lacked the critique of liberalism which Irving Kristol articulated, together with his overt desire to defend corporate capitalism against what he saw as the regulatory impulses of Great Society agencies and of consumer power advocates such as Ralph Nader. Kristol understood instinctively that, just as Marx had said that the proletariat could not exist as a class *for* itself if it lacked consciousness of its historic purpose as a class, the same strictures could also apply to corporate executives. If Kristol has given neoconservatism not only its ideological attack, but also its institutional expressions (the American Enterprise Institute and other think-tanks, and the journals *The Public Interest*, *The National Interest*, and *First Things*), Norman Podhoretz, as editor of *Commentary* from 1960 to 1995, gave neoconservatism its characteristic

⁸ For the transformative impact of neoconservatism on the diverse and conflicting strands of American conservatism, see George H. Nash, *The conservative intellectual movement in America since 1945* (New York, NY, 1976); Godfrey Hodgson, *The world turned Rightside up: a history of the conservative ascendancy in America* (Boston, MA, 1996); John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The right nation: why America is different* (London, 2004); Jerome Himmelstein, *To the Right: the transformation of American conservatism* (Berkeley, CA, 1990); and Blumenthal, *The rise of the counterestablishment*. For the early history of neoconservatism, see Halper and Clarke, *America alone*, pp. 40–74; Fukuyama, *America at the crossroads*, pp. 12–66; Friedman, *The neoconservative revolution*, pp. 116–37. These accounts tend to portray early neoconservatism as more ideologically coherent than it was, and not to discuss the differences between neoconservatives that were always present.

⁹ See James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, 'Broken windows', in Stelzer, ed., *The neocon reader*.

¹⁰ James Q. Wilson: Contribution to symposium, 'Neoconservatism: pro and con', *Partisan Review*, 48 (1980), p. 567. Wilson doubts the value of his contribution, because he was not present at the creation of neoconservatism: 'I was not given the benefits of being raised in New York or in other places where one is a participant from early childhood in the struggles and factional quarrels of the left.'

¹¹ For the growing antipathy of Moynihan and Bell after the 1970s to neoconservatism, see Godfrey Hodgson, *The gentleman from New York: Daniel Patrick Moynihan: a biography* (Boston, MA, 2000), and Nathan Liebowitz, *Daniel Bell and the agony of modern liberalism* (Westport, CT, and London, 1985).

rhetoric and familiar expressions (e.g. ‘the culture of appeasement’), and its strident and scornful antipathy to liberalism in all its manifestations.¹²

Irving Kristol has openly acknowledged his debt to the political philosopher Leo Strauss. Although, as the defenders of Strauss have been at pains to point out, many neoconservatives were not taught by Strauss or by Straussians, and the Straussian influence on American conservatism has been primarily a scholarly contribution to the debate on the ‘original intent’ of the American Constitution, such a candid confession of influence cannot be ignored. Strauss insisted that liberalism had taken a wrong turn in the late seventeenth century. It had embraced a contractarian, individualist view of social relationships and a moral relativism, which maintained that judgements of political value depended on historical contingency.¹³ The neoconservatives went back to the moral theories of Adam Smith, in particular that the pre-capitalist virtue of altruism inheres in human nature, and that this underpins any successful capitalist society. Libertarians, such as Milton Friedman, tended to assume that the market enforced its own morality. Neoconservatives were not so sure: if capitalism sells pornography, discourages thrift, and cashes in on the counterculture, it cannot produce ‘virtue’ as well. Hence Irving Kristol justified Reagan’s economic policies because they produced a ‘conservative deficit’. In this, the neoconservatives’ aims were broadly congruent with those of the Reagan administration. Although, as the economic historian Robert M. Collins asserts, Reagan ‘wanted the intimidation of potential deficits, not the reality of actual ones’, he did not lose any sleep over the deficits’ eventual political consequence. No future Democratic administration could increase welfare expenditure, because Wall Street would not tolerate it. This would encourage social virtue by reducing welfare dependency. Neoconservatives, like monetarists, had favoured a balanced budget. When monetary targets were abandoned in 1982, with the threat of the Mexican debt default, the neoconservatives felt that they could not, like Friedman, disown Reaganomics. To Milton Friedman, Reagan was a disobedient pupil; to the neoconservatives, he was a munificent patron who had tantalized them with power.¹⁴

¹² For the flavour of Podhoretz’s rhetoric, see his *Breaking ranks: a political memoir* (London, 1979), and his *My love affair with America: the cautionary tale of a cheerful conservative* (New York, NY, 2004).

¹³ For Strauss’s and the Straussians’ inherent antipathy to liberalism and pragmatism, and the ways in which they have emphasized the American Constitution’s links with classical republicanism rather than with liberalism, see Allan Bloom, *The closing of the American mind* (New York, NY, 1987), pp. 25–46; Thomas L. Pangle, *Leo Strauss: an introduction to his thought and intellectual legacy* (Baltimore, MD, 2006); Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert, *The truth about Leo Strauss: political philosophy and American democracy* (Chicago, IL, 2006), inter alia. For Strauss’s influence on Irving Kristol, see Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (Basingstoke, 1997), and Robert Devigne, *Recasting conservatism: Oakeshott, Strauss and the response to postmodernism* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1994). Paul Wolfowitz (fictionalized in Saul Bellow’s novel *Ravelstein*, the hero of which is based on Allan Bloom) is a former student of both Strauss and Bloom.

¹⁴ Irving Kristol, ‘A conservative welfare state’, in Gerson, ed., *The essential neoconservative reader*; Richard M. Abrams, *America transformed: sixty years of revolutionary change, 1941–2001* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 299; Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: politics and culture in the Reagan years* (New York, NY, 2007), pp. 79–81.

The second group of neoconservatives were originally apparatchiks of the Democratic party and in this group too Jews were unusually prominent. The historian Richard Abrams has described their defection during the 1970s to the Republicans as 'a staggering blow' to the Democrats. Figures such as Richard Perle and Elliott Abrams were part of the Hubert Humphrey/Henry Jackson cold war liberal wing of the Democratic party.¹⁵ They were fighters in a battle which they waged on two fronts. They struggled within their own party against the tendency represented by the party's candidate in the 1972 presidential election campaign, the hapless George McGovern, and the Vietnam-induced reaction against militarism and interventionism which he represented. Many of them were Jews whose commitment to Zionism had been awakened after 1967. In contrast to the New York Intellectuals, they were primarily concerned with foreign and defence policy. Like their mentors, Senators Jackson and Moynihan, they favoured the continuation of Great Society policies at home and a hardline anti-communist foreign policy. Their position in the Democratic party was weakened by the growing influence of radical middle class activists after 1968 at the expense of the labour unions.

They saw Kissinger's policy of détente as an equal menace to the United States' position in the world. They thought that this conceded too much to the Soviet Union, which, they feared, was gaining advantage over the United States both in its military capability and in its support of anti-colonial struggles. Their polemics made very clear their differences with their own party and with Kissinger. They distrusted the United Nations: it posed an intolerable restriction on the sovereignty of the United States. It was also anti-Israel (and anti-Semitic) as in the notorious 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism. They asserted that the internal political system of a state would determine its foreign policy. The United States could not assume that it and the Soviet Union might have interests in common.

An adviser to Senator Jackson in the 1970s was the historian of the Soviet Union, Richard Pipes, whose son Daniel has become a prominent defender of the Israeli Right. Pipes argued that the Soviet Union had never accepted the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction and that winning a nuclear war was an essential part of their military doctrine. The Soviets viewed détente and the Strategic Arms Limitation and Anti-Ballistic Missile treaties as a means of consolidating a strategic advantage. The USA viewed détente in a commercially minded way, as a bargain, whereas the Russian peasant view of life always assumed that foreign policy was a zero-sum game. Pipes's arguments provided a rationale for the

¹⁵ Abrams, *America transformed*, p. 211; Robert G. Kaufman, *Henry M. Jackson: a life in politics* (Seattle, WA, and London, 2000); Jay Winik, *On the brink: the behind-the-scenes saga of the Reagan era and the men and women who won the Cold War* (New York, NY, and London, 1996); Ehrman, *The rise of neoconservatism*, pp. 33–62.

Reagan administration's Strategic Defence Initiative (or 'Star Wars'), and he served on Reagan's National Security Council.¹⁶

Pipes's work reveals an anxiety which has been a perennial neoconservative theme. At the same time as they emphasize threats to America's national security, they fear that American society will not be able to meet the challenge, whether because it is too materialistic or too democratic or too permissive. This McCarthyite obsession, that internal forces are subverting America as much as external ones, recalls the views of the ex-Trotskyist philosopher and polemicist James Burnham in the 1950s. His *The managerial revolution* (1944) had earlier attracted George Orwell's ire when he claimed that the Soviet Union and advanced capitalist societies were converging due to the predominance of an elite based on the management, rather than the ownership, of economic resources. He had advocated 'rollback' instead of containment and an exclusive reliance on military power. Unlike neoconservatism, Burnham's view of the world had no room in it for moralistic concepts of human rights exerting influence on American foreign policy. But, in his view that domestic liberalism threatened the position of America abroad, there is a clear line of descent from Burnham to neoconservatism. Allied to the 'Wilsonianism-on-steroids' neoconservative strand, it has become an agonizing contradiction. How can a society whose moral fibre has been so adversely affected by both democracy and liberalism be in a position to spread either of them to the furthest corners of the Middle East? In part, one can answer this question by asserting that the views of a 'democratic revolutionary' such as Ben Wattenberg, who asserts that the United States should take advantage of unipolarity to proselytize for its economic and political model, are different from the more restricted concept of national interest held by Irving Kristol. However, this answer merely poses another question: where is the ideological coherence of neoconservatism to be found?¹⁷

Kissinger believed that détente would restrain domestic anti-militarism from weakening the United States. He believed that attempts to antagonize the Soviet Union over what he saw as internal issues (mostly the persecution and emigration of Soviet Jews) would provoke the Soviet Union to interfere in America's sphere of influence. As Grandin shows, the neoconservatives believed that the only response to 'isolationism' was to devise a moralistic rationale for a foreign policy which would robustly support American national interests while clothing them in the rhetoric of revolutionary liberalism. Kissinger could not present his policies as an idealistic appeal to the American people, although they robustly defended American interests in its self-designated 'sphere of influence'. The popular reaction to Vietnam had revealed both idealism and patriotism, which the neoconservatives wanted to exploit. So, contrary to Kissinger, all was not lost.

¹⁶ Richard Pipes, *U.S.–Soviet relations in the era of détente* (Boulder, CO, 1981).

¹⁷ For Burnham's relationship to neoconservatism, see Dorrien, *The neoconservative mind*. For the distinctions between the Krauthammer ('assertive nationalist') and the Wattenberg/Robert Kagan ('democratic imperialist') views of American foreign policy, see idem, *Imperial designs*, pp. 75–180.

American power could arise again, with new vigour and purpose, untainted by guilt. But idealism and American interests always had to walk hand in hand. They despised Carter's prioritizing human rights, as this would alienate dictatorships which were America's friends. A regime could be dumped (as Marcos's was) when it was obviously too corrupt, decadent, and incompetent to be of any further use. As James Mann documents, Paul Wolfowitz, who had earlier admired Henry Jackson, was instrumental in persuading other officials in the Reagan administration to drop Marcos.¹⁸

For the academic Jeane Kirkpatrick, one of the few non-Jewish intellectuals in this group, a non-Marxist authoritarian regime could provide space for civil society to develop, which would, in time, promote democratic change, because such a regime, however oppressive, was in keeping with the traditions of its society and polity, whereas such changes would be impossible in a Marxist, totalitarian regime. Straussians and neoconservatives seem not to have noticed that Kirkpatrick was defending an extreme form of cultural relativism against the Carter administration's universalist human rights policy. On these grounds the Reagan administration financed the Contras against the Sandinistas and supported Pinochet until the end of the cold war. Kirkpatrick was important as the intellectual architect of this strategy in her role as Reagan's ambassador to the United Nations.¹⁹ Other neoconservatives, such as Elliott Abrams and Michael Ledeen, also played important parts. Abrams collaborated with the sultan of Brunei in ensuring that money bound for the Contras was stored in the sultan's bank account, in order to elude Congressional probing, in the same way that he has been responsible for covertly supplying arms to Fatah. Ledeen had contacts with the Iranian arms dealer, Manucher Ghorbanifar, in order to exchange Lebanese hostages for arms to Iran. Along with the CIA director, William Casey, part of the Reagan administration 'tilted' towards Iran in the mid-1980s, as they viewed Iran as a potential ally against the Soviet Union. Although neoconservatives played important roles in the Iran–Contra affair, they were (with the exception of Kirkpatrick) concentrated below the first level of Reagan administration appointees (as they have been in that of the younger Bush). They had to take their place alongside Republican party stalwarts, long-time Reagan associates, Christian evangelicals, and libertarians in the uneasy Republican coalition. During the Iraq War, the neoconservatives have found themselves in the position of impotent critics of what they see as the Bush administration's lack of boldness in failing to use Iraq as a base from which to re-shape the Middle East. Cheney

¹⁸ Greg Grandin, *Empire's workshop: Latin America, the United States and the new imperialism* (New York, NY, 2006), pp. 52–86; James Mann, *Rise of the vulcans: the history of Bush's war cabinet* (New York, NY, 2004), pp. 130–7.

¹⁹ Jeane M. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and double standards: rationalism and reason in politics* (New York, NY, 1983).

and Rumsfeld are best classified as ‘assertive nationalists’ rather than neo-conservatives.²⁰

The neoconservatives could never have sustained political careers without developing a network of pressure groups and think-tanks. In this, neoconservatism was scarcely unique. Ever since the Progressive era, intellectuals have been a significant part of what the political scientist, Benjamin Ginsberg, terms the ‘public economy’ of research institutes, foundations, and pressure groups. As Ginsberg also claims, Jews have played a significant part in this ‘public economy’, which from the late 1960s onwards sought to displace local activists (e.g. machine politicians) as the motive force of the Democratic party. The noteworthy development of the 1970s was that this ‘public economy’ became an integral part of the Republican coalition.²¹ In so doing, the neoconservatives (along with other groups with different objectives) not only forced the Republicans to engage in ideological warfare, but also became the first sizeable group in the history of the Republican party to have a vested interest in the production of ideas, as opposed to making money or soldiering.

In order to become a respected part of the new Republican coalition (of Christian fundamentalists, Sunbelt capitalists, and embittered ex-Vietnam soldiers) which formed during the 1970s, they had to build an independent power base. The phenomenon of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) is a case in point.²² This was a cross-party group whose aim was to discredit the ‘Vietnam syndrome’ in American foreign and defence policy, as exemplified by what they saw as the hopelessly confused policies of the Ford and Carter administrations. They were careful to present the CPD not as a Republican crusade, but as a meeting of eminent and concerned citizens who were in the American tradition of anti-communism. When Paul Nitze and Eugene Rostow decided to resurrect the CPD in 1976 (dormant since the Korean War), they were conscious of the diplomat George Kennan’s admonition that all sectors of American society had to be mobilized if containment were to secure eventual victory. In order to convince the American people that the Soviet Union aimed for military superiority, not only retired generals and arms contractors had to be included in the committee: intellectuals and American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations stalwarts also had to be invited. If they were liberals or ex-liberals, so much the better.

By the mid-1970s, the neoconservatives were not just becoming members of other people’s committees, they were forming their own permanent think-tanks. They were fortunate. At precisely the moment when the neoconservatives wanted

²⁰ Grandin, *Empire’s workshop*; Mann, *Rise of the vulcans*. For Reagan’s Iran policy see Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil’s game: how the United States helped unleash fundamentalist Islam* (New York, NY, 2005), pp. 292–302.

²¹ Benjamin Ginsberg, *The fatal embrace: Jews and the state* (Chicago, IL, 1993), pp. 97–144.

²² Richard Gid Powers, *Not without honor: the history of American anticommunism* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1995), pp. 360–95; Jerry W. Sanders, *Peddlers of crisis: the Committee on the Present Danger and the politics of containment* (Boston, MA, 1983).

to set up in business as a permanent ideas taskforce, along came individuals and corporations who were more than ready to fund them. It is not suggested that there is a causal relationship between funding of neoconservative think-tanks by corporations or by wealthy individuals and neoconservative ideology. They have a history of sustaining a variety of research projects, both political and apolitical. However, the unprecedented incursions of regulatory agencies in the Great Society era into what corporate leaders saw as their prerogatives, combined with the strong bargaining position of labour and the challenge from Germany and Japan, stirred them to collective action and the formation of such fora as the Business Roundtable. Kristol's message to business was either uncannily prescient or an extremely fortunate accident. Although much attention has often been drawn to the activities of colourful and very wealthy personalities such as the Californian bingo entrepreneur, Irving Moskowitz, and the heir to the Mellon industrial fortune, Richard Mellon Scaife, in sustaining conservative organizations, the political awakening of corporate executives was more important for the fortunes of neoconservatism.²³

Irving Kristol's message to corporate America, with his talk of an anti-business 'New Class' of bureaucrats, journalists, and intellectuals and an 'adversary culture', found many receptive ears. He identified an enemy, analysed its motivations, and offered a robust defence of existing American society. Unlike Milton Friedman, he was not asking American capitalists to be consistent. That took a weight off their minds. Oligopoly and government subsidy were as American as apple pie. Big business did not want to be told that it had to conform to free-market purity. Kristol and Robert Baroody (the director of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI)) were thus pushing at an open door when they solicited funds. In recent years, the AEI (for thirty years the premier neoconservative think-tank) has enjoyed the support of banks (Chase Manhattan), oil (Mobil), retail (WalMart), and criminal elements of American capitalism (Kenneth Lay of Enron was on the board of AEI). The established corporate sector, as a rule, tends to fund the AEI, whereas, in general, the more activist and less staid Heritage Foundation has been financed by Sunbelt entrepreneurs and individuals on direct mail lists.²⁴ It has sometimes been asserted that, as 'liberal' organizations (the Brookings Institution is often cited as one) also enjoy the support of business, it is dubious to attach significance to corporate funding of neoconservative institutes. However, this argument overlooks the way in which Brookings, for example, has shared personnel with the AEI, has worked on joint projects, and has moved towards a 'centre' increasingly defined by conservative think-tanks. Organizations which stand to the left of the 'Washington consensus' in economics, for example, such as the Economic Policy Institute (which relies on trades union funding) are at a significant disadvantage. Although other organizations

²³ Abrams, *America transformed*, pp. 252–5; Hodgson, *The world turned Rightside up*, pp. 207–14.

²⁴ Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *The right nation*, pp. 160–2; Halper and Clarke, *America alone*, pp. 40–74.

serve other tendencies on the Right (the Cato Institute, for example is markedly libertarian), the lavish and unconditional funding which neoconservative and conservative think-tanks have enjoyed has led to a dense network of institutes covering many areas of policy, with the Middle East being particularly prominent (the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs).²⁵

At the end of the 1980s, the struggles which had sustained neoconservatism since the late 1960s were suddenly concluded. The unexpected end of the cold war had (with more than a hint of an unwelcome surprise) slain the monster of communism. Many of the older generation of neoconservatives (Kristol, Glazer, Kirkpatrick) insisted that the United States' global mission had finished, and it now had to look after its own interests. The younger generation of neoconservatives (Robert Kagan, Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol, Elliott Abrams) still carried the history of their identification with the Democratic party with them. They believed in a modified version of Woodrow Wilson's mission to export democracy, shorn of multilateralism. The end of the cold war abolished the necessity for Kirkpatrick's intellectual contortions.²⁶ With no conceivable ideological rival, the United States had a new purpose: to export its model to the rest of the world. To do this, it had to ensure that no military rival could come close to outspending it, that US power could not be constrained by supranational agreements and institutions, and that it could wage pre-emptive war on a global scale, which was the conclusion of a leaked Pentagon paper by Wolfowitz in 1992.

As both Halper and Clarke and Dorrien remark, neoconservatism seemed to have changed fundamentally in the early 1990s. At its outset, in the late 1960s, neoconservatism had been, to many, a salutary caution against social engineering and the over-ambitious reach of the welfare state. The state could not remake society: it had to respect society as it had evolved over time. The neoconservatives also paid much attention to the details of economic and social policy. After the Reagan era, these battles were regarded as won, and it was assumed that prominent neoconservatives would now view foreign policy as the most appropriate area for debate. The new generation of neoconservatives were, however, so committed to a globalized economy and to an America open to immigration that they wanted to export this revolutionary capitalist model, at the point of a gun, to the Middle East. For them (unlike Clinton, whose policies of 'humanitarian' interventionism Krauthammer decried as 'hand-holding') the 'soft power' of American economic and cultural dominance had to be dominated by the 'hard power' of American military might: hence the unconcealed rejoicing of many neoconservatives when the Iraq War was declared. For them, the United States is

²⁵ James Allen Smith, *The idea brokers: think tanks and the rise of the new policy elite* (New York, NY, 1991), gives details of the disparity in resources available to research institutes of different persuasions.

²⁶ Halper and Clarke, *America alone*, pp. 74–122; Dorrien, *Imperial designs*, pp. 75–180; William Kristol and Robert Kagan, eds., *Present dangers: crisis and opportunity in American foreign and defence policy* (San Francisco, CA, 2000).

a 'uniquely benign imperium' (Krauthammer), which is 'the most revolutionary power on Earth ... with an inescapable mission to spread democracy' (Ledeen), and whose intervention in Iraq would have 'a benevolent domino effect' (Podhoretz). For Andrew J. Bacevich, such bellicose attitudes are symptomatic of the increasing number of defence policymakers and intellectuals who lack any military experience. In this group, the neoconservatives feature prominently.²⁷

Neoconservative enthusiasm for military power goes back a long way: Senator Henry Jackson was known as 'Scoop' because of his ability to secure arms contracts for Boeing in his home state of Washington. Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and Kenneth Adelman have had lucrative careers as consultants to Northrop Grumman, the manufacturer of the Bush administration's ABM system. The neoconservatives have also had a fascination with intelligence work: they seem to be convinced that they can do it better than the professionals, but their efforts have not been attended with markedly greater success. (As can be seen in the case of the Iraq War, this scorn for established, non-political bureaucracy extended to the State Department.) In 1976, Wolfowitz was a member, along with Donald Rumsfeld, then Ford's defence secretary, of 'Team B', which was established by Ford to second-guess the CIA's intelligence on Soviet military strength, which he thought the CIA had underestimated.²⁸ During the Bush administration, several neoconservatives, including Feith, William Luti, and Abram Shulsky (a former student of Allan Bloom, the author of *The closing of the American mind*), set up the Terrorism Intelligence Evaluation Group, which was intended to prove a military connection between Saddam Hussein and al-Qa'ida. Daniel Pipes heads an organization called CampusWatch, whose 'cells' in American universities monitor academics with dissenting opinions on the Middle East.

Although neoconservatism has apparently vanquished its rivals (Kissingerian realism, Buchananite nativist isolationism) in the battle for the foreign policy soul of the Republican party, a question arises: how could a movement whose allegiance to the Republican party has always been conditional and uneasy have achieved such dominance? Only part of the answer lies in the gift to neo-conservatives of the events of 11 September 2001, although they were far from backward in making the spurious connection between the Ba'ath party and al-Qa'ida, and, in doing so, to erase the inconvenient fact that they had overlooked al-Qa'ida previously. Neoconservatism re-invented itself both organizationally and ideologically from the mid-1990s. In 1995, when Norman Podhoretz retired as editor of *Commentary* after thirty-five years, Irving Kristol's son William started *The Weekly Standard*. After a short spell in academia as a professor of political philosophy, William Kristol worked for Reagan's education secretary William J. Bennett, and then became an adviser to Bush senior's vice-president (where he became known as 'Quayle's brains'). He has remained in the world of

²⁷ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The new American militarism: how Americans are seduced by war* (New York, NY, 2005).

²⁸ Anne Hessing Cahn, *Killing détente: the Right attacks the CIA* (University Park, PA, 1998).

polemical journalism and of think-tanks, in which he played a key role in stiffening the Republicans' resolve to defeat Clinton's health plan in 1994 without any compromise. He has become part of what Bacevich has called the 'foreign-policy *nomenklatura*'. From the 1980s, service in a Republican administration has become an accepted part of a neoconservative's career. These experiences have affected the way neoconservatives express their views and whom they seek to influence.

Although *The Weekly Standard* has been called the 'conservative "fun" magazine' it did not aspire to appeal primarily to intellectuals, as *Commentary* had. It aims to influence politicians directly – and does. The Bush White House may not always have liked what it read there (especially before September 2001, when it supported John McCain as the Republican presidential candidate and abused Bush for 'appeasing' China and North Korea) but Bush ordered thirty copies every week. Although it aspires to be popular (it comprises brief articles and includes cartoons), it has survived only through the largesse of Rupert Murdoch. (Its circulation, according to Halper and Clarke, has remained around 60,000, and many of these copies are free mailings.) William Kristol and other neo-conservatives pontificate on Fox News.²⁹

Neoconservatives have remained organizationally adept. The creation of The Project for a New American Century (PNAC) in 1997 (in the same building as *The Weekly Standard* and the American Enterprise Institute), is an example of the way in which neoconservatism has always created small ad hoc organizations to influence opinion on specific topics. The PNAC had a staff of only five. That did not matter: its purpose was to write embarrassing letters to important people. Its letter to President Clinton in February 1998 (signed by Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, and Fukuyama), calling for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, helped to bring about the Iraq Liberation Act, which Clinton signed in November 1998. It was irrelevant that Clinton did nothing about it: the PNAC had helped to create a climate of opinion in which what was previously thought insanely reckless was now entirely permissible. Ten years later, it is now a 'letterhead' organization, and functionally dead.

Neoconservatives have also marginalized their opponents within the Republican coalition by allying themselves with a group which they could not ignore: the Christian Right. Early neoconservatives did not consider issues such as school prayer or abortion were as urgent as other economic or foreign policy goals. Irving Kristol has written that he respected religious observance, because he regarded it as socially useful. Since the end of the cold war, however, the foreign policies of the Christian Right overlap remarkably with those of neoconservatives. Concerns about persecuted Christians, slavery, and AIDS have dovetailed with the neoconservatives' expansionist view of America's role. Although the Christian Right proclaims Jews as the chosen people, they have made it clear that Jews' pre-ordained role is to convert to Christianity.

²⁹ William Kristol, ed., *'The Weekly Standard': a reader* (New York, NY, 2005); Halper and Clarke, *America alone*, pp. 182–201.

Congressman Tom DeLay has claimed that Christianity is the only true religion. However, William Kristol has signed letters to the White House on cloning and abortion with leading evangelicals, and other neoconservatives have defended the fundamentalist position on school prayer. Both Abrams and Bennett have promoted relationships between the Christian Right and neoconservatives. One cannot explain this phenomenon by neoconservatives' need to keep on good terms with the Bush White House, as the alliance was forming some years before 2001. Nor can it be explained by the neoconservatives' revulsion at the Left's anti-Zionism, as Christian fundamentalists' attitude to Zionism is as problematic. Although both Halper and Clarke and Friedman devote space to this curious relationship, neither of them explores the theological or sociological reasons for it. As Grandin points out, such an alliance of convenience existed in relation to neoconservatives' and fundamentalists' involvement in Reagan's support for the Contras, but this now seems to be a closer convergence of views.³⁰

What are we to make of a movement which appears to have changed so much over forty years? What holds it together? What is the secret of its success? It combines elements of Marxism, liberalism, and conservatism, in varying proportions, at different times, yet it cannot be reduced to any of these things. The existing literature on neoconservatism provides a reliable account of the development of neoconservative ideology, its relationship to pre-existing conservatism, the ideological journeys of its leading protagonists, the turning points in its history, and its significant institutions. Although it is aware of the ethnic characteristics of neoconservatives, it does not probe their historical or sociological significance, but only to draw attention to the anti-Semitic taunts of paleo-conservatives such as Pat Buchanan and Russell Kirk. A surprise to several historians and political scientists has been neoconservatism's survival as a distinct tendency within Republicanism: two respected commentators have predicted neoconservatism's demise and its absorption into the wider American Right.³¹ Neoconservatism's revival cannot be explained wholly as a fortuitous outcome of the events of 11 September 2001, which have ensured that, in foreign policy, if no longer in domestic policy, the neoconservatives still have distinct purposes. It would not have been in a position to take advantage of those events had a vibrant movement not already existed. Although neither historians nor political scientists should be criticized for the failure of their prophecies, perhaps this does tell us

³⁰ Halper and Clarke, *America alone*, pp. 182–201; Friedman, *The neoconservative revolution*, pp. 205–23; Grandin, *Empire's workshop*, pp. 140–50; Ginsberg, *The fatal embrace*, pp. 211–12.

³¹ Both Dorrien, *The neoconservative mind*, and Gillian Peele, *Revival and reaction: the Right in contemporary America* (Oxford, 1984), forecast the eventual absorption of neoconservatism by the wider New Right on the very reasonable grounds that neoconservatives had altered their earlier liberal positions on abortion and school prayer inter alia in order to minimize antagonism between themselves and other groups on the Right. Only if one assumes, as Michael Lind does, that the goal of neoconservatism was to take over the Democrats (in the 1970s) and the Republicans (in the 1980s) does absorption count as a failure. See Lind, *Up from conservatism*, pp. 56–62.

something about their failure to investigate the reasons for neoconservatism's success.

This failure involves a squeamishness about drawing attention to the predominantly Jewish origins of the movement and of most (though by no means all) of its past and contemporary participants, and has resulted in a lack of engagement with the literature on the political sociology, culture, and history of American Jews. Monographs on neoconservatism never refer to this considerable body of scholarship, even when, as in the case of the work of Benjamin Ginsberg, it discusses neoconservatism at some length in the context of American Jews' political attitudes and their relationship to other ethnic groups. Ginsberg and Dollinger show that assumptions concerning American Jews' relationship to liberalism have to be modified.³² The political attitude which distinguishes them from American ethnic groups of similar education and income is *not* their greater attachment to liberalism, but their stronger allegiance to the Democratic party (even though, as Dollinger shows, an increasingly significant minority of American Jews has identified with the Republican party as the Democratic party's support for affirmative action has seemed to pose a threat to them). The two things are not the same. Their attitude to the death penalty or to welfare claimants might not be much different from other Americans', but they express strong approval for public spending, the Democratic party and liberal organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union. Historically, American Jews have benefited from the public sector and the institutions which support it, because of the barriers against their entry into the private sector. Since the late 1960s, their position within the 'public economy' has been challenged by African-Americans, on whose support the Democratic party has increasingly come to rely since 1964. Those Jews who have remained within the Democratic coalition have had to reach an uneasy accommodation with often antagonistic African-Americans. Those who have chosen to leave the Democratic coalition have had to accommodate themselves to equally antagonistic partners (such as Christian Zionists) in the Republican party. However, the support of such antagonistic partners is necessary, according to Ginsberg, if Jews are to maintain positions of status and respect in the public sector. Viewed from this perspective, neoconservatism can be understood in sociological terms as a contemporary version of a Jewish survival strategy. This is not to reduce neoconservatism to an expression of material interest, but to stress that it needs to be placed within the ethnic, class and interest group networks of American politics. As the political scientist, Amy Chua, has pointed out, Jews with wealth but without political power or alliances (such as the contemporary Russian oligarchs) are dangerously exposed.³³

³² Ginsberg, *The fatal embrace*, pp. 145–224; Marc Dollinger, *Quest for inclusion: Jews and liberalism in modern America* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), pp. 224–7; Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: the Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against liberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), pp. 47–54.

³³ Amy Chua, *World on fire: how exporting free market democracy breeds ethnic hatred and global instability* (London, 2003), pp. 77–94.

Commentators on neoconservatism have not begun to consider this theory, because they refuse to admit that the fact that so many neoconservatives are Jews might be more than a coincidence.

There are many other questions that remain to be examined. For many neo-conservatives, such as Richard Perle and Michael Ledeen, the security of Israel is of such central concern that the entire geopolitical map of the Middle East should be re-drawn in order to destroy hostile regimes.³⁴ It remains to be investigated how this is related to the complexity of attitudes which American Jews hold about Israel. In the light of Peter Novick's observations on the centrality of the Holocaust in defining Jewish identity in contemporary America, much work needs to be done on investigating how this has affected neoconservatism.³⁵ In short, we are only at the threshold of developing a scholarly understanding of the origins and significance of this extraordinary phenomenon.

³⁴ Richard Perle and David Frum, *An end to evil: how to win the war on terror* (New York, NY, 2003); Michael Ledeen, *The war against the terror masters: why it happened, where we are now, how we'll win* (New York, NY, 2002).

³⁵ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory: the American experience* (London, 1999), p. 190.