THE NEOCON READER

Edited, with and Introduction by
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For Cita, who urged me to compile this volume and, as always, generously suspended work on her projects to assist on mine.
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Toby Mundy conceived this project and, along with my wife, Cita, persuaded me to undertake it, an effort on their part that I did not consistently appreciate as I learned that a volume of essays, like a convoy, moves at the speed of the slowest ship. In the end, if closer familiarity with the work of neoconservatives helps to dissipate some of the readers’ unreasoning hostility to its doctrines and its advocates, it will have been worth the time and effort.

Most of all, I would like to thank those who allowed us to use their prior works, and those who were good enough to contribute new essays. I have taken the liberty of making a very few minor, non-substantive edits to a few of the previously published essays.

I hope that all of those who helped with this volume will feel amply rewarded if critics of neoconservatism, and the merely puzzled, find these essays a source of a better understanding of what the neoconservative persuasion is all about.
neocons but because of the impact of the four airplanes hijacked on September 11, 2001. Following the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history, Bush realized the United States no longer could afford a 'humble' foreign policy. The ambitious National Security Strategy that the administration issued in September 2002— with its call for U.S. primacy, the promotion of democracy, and vigorous action, pre-emptive if necessary, to stop terrorism and weapons proliferation— was a quintessentially neoconservative document.

Yet the triumph of neoconservatism was hardly permanent or complete. The administration so far has not adopted neocon arguments to push for regime change in North Korea and Iran. Bush has cooled on the 'axis of evil' talk and has launched negotiations with the regime in North Korea. The President has also established friendlier relations with communist China than many neocons would like, and he launched a high-profile effort to promote a 'road map' for settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that most neocons (correctly) predicted would lead nowhere.

'NEOCONS ARE LIBERALS WHO HAVE BEEN MUGGED BY REALITY'

No longer true. Original neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol, who memorably Defined neocons as liberals who'd been 'mugged by reality,' were (and still are) in favor of welfare benefits, racial equality, and many other liberal tenets. But they were driven rightward by the excesses of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when crime was increasing in the United States, the Soviet Union was gaining ground in the Cold War, and the dominant wing of the Democratic Party was unwilling to get tough on either problem.

A few neocons, like philosopher Sidney Hook or Kristol himself, had once been Marxists or Trotskyites. Most, like former UN Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick, simply had been hawkish Democrats who became disenchanzed with their party as it drifted further left in the 1970s. Many neocons, such as Richard Perle, originally rallied around Henry 'Scoop' Jackson, a Democratic senator who led the opposition to the Nixon-Ford policy of détente with the Soviet Union. Following the 1980 election, U.S. President Ronald Reagan became the new standard bearer of the neoconservative cause.

A few neocons, like Perle, still identify themselves as Democrats, and a number of 'neoliberals' in the Democratic Party (such as Senator Joseph Lieberman and former UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke) hold fairly neoconservative views on foreign policy. But most neocons have switched to the Republican Party. On many issues, they are virtually indistinguishable from other conservatives; their main differences are with libertarians who demonize 'big government' and preach an anything-goes morality.

Most younger members of the neoconservative movement, including some descendants of the first generation, such as William Kristol, editor of The Weekly Standard, and Robert Kagan, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, have never gone through a leftist phase, which makes the 'neo' prefix no longer technically accurate. Like 'liberal,' 'conservative,' and other ideological labels, 'neocon' has morphed away from its original definition. It has now become an all-purpose term of abuse for anyone deemed to be hawkish, which is why many of those so described shun the label. Wolfowitz prefers to call himself a 'Scoop Jackson Republican'.

'NEOCONS ARE JEWS WHO SERVE THE INTERESTS OF ISRAEL'

A malicious myth. With varying degrees of delicacy, everyone from fringe U.S. presidential candidates Lyndon LaRouche and Patrick Buchanan to European news outlets such as the BBC and Le Monde have used neocon as a synonym for Jew, focusing on Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Eliot Cohen, and others with obvious Jewish names. Trying to resurrect the old dual-loyalties canard, they cite links between some neocons and the Likud Party to argue that neocons wanted to invade Iraq because they were doing Israel's bidding.

Yes, neocons have links to the Likud Party, but they also have links to the British Tories and other conservative parties around the world, just as some in the Democratic Party have ties to the left-leaning Labour Party in Great Britain and the Labor Party in Israel. These connections reflect ideological, not ethnic, affinity. And while many neocons are Jewish, many are not. Former drug czar Bill Bennett, ex-CIA Director James Woolsey, the Revd Richard John Neuhaus, social scientist James Q. Wilson, theologian Michael Novak, and Jean Kirkpatrick aren't exactly synagogue-goers. Yet they are as committed to Israel's defense as Jewish neocons are— a commitment based not on shared religion or ethnicity but on shared liberal democratic values. Israel has won the support of most Americans, of all faiths, because it is the only democracy in the Middle East, and because its enemies (Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, and Syria) also proclaim themselves to be the enemies of the United States.
What is remarkable about this Strauss obsession is that Leo Strauss never held an opinion on Saddam Hussein. In fact, Leo Strauss has been dead for more than three decades. And, as critic Terry Teachout noted shortly after *Embedded* opened, the views of 'Pearly White' – Perle actually never studied with Strauss - were at no time offered by Strauss as his own, but seem to emanate from an article published by the organization run by conspiracy theorist, convicted felon, and perennial presidential candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr, which paraphrases the work of Shadia Drury, a professor of political theory at the University of Calgary, who has made it her life's work to attack Strauss.

Strauss (1899–1973), the author of fifteen books, was, for the most noted portion of his professional life, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, where he taught political philosophy. He was, by all accounts, a gifted teacher who drew some of the best minds in academia to his classroom. How Strauss came to be seen as allied with a movement of public intellectuals such as the neoconservatives is indeed paradoxical. Strauss was never involved in the policy movements of his day and never engaged in public policy research. Moreover, Strauss viewed intellectuals as somehow akin to the sophists of the ancient city: men less concerned with the quest for wisdom than with the prestige or power that accompany well-stated ideas. Readers interested in an overview of his philosophy and its roots might find the note appended to this essay (p. 207) of interest.

Straussians and their fellow travelers have been able to play a significant role in the public policy arena because of their ability to think through fundamental questions, distilling them to their essence. Their ability to make reasoned policy arguments on behalf of restraints on behavior – which is hard to do, especially as the right becomes increasingly market- and hence choice-oriented – and to make them replete with appeal to America’s founding principles, have made them powerful complements to traditional conservatives less able to produce secular arguments, but able to understand such issues through the prism of faith.

Strauss’s concern that the politics of liberty could degenerate into a libertinism that poses a danger to the republican character of the American regime, and his rejection of the language of values for that of virtues, have played a significant role in debates over the past few years on drug policy, welfare reform, and education. Among the Straussians who have reinvigorated such debates in the Bush administration are Leon Kass, MD, Professor of Social Thought at the University of Chicago, who chairs the President’s Commission on Bioethics; John P. Walters, who serves in President Bush’s cabinet as director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy; and Eugene W. Hickok, formerly Professor of Government of Dickinson College, who serves as Deputy Secretary of Education. Straussians have also served in significant positions in Democratic administrations, though in fewer numbers. Professor William Galston of the University of Maryland served as Deputy Assistant to President Clinton for Domestic Policy, and played a key role in shaping social policies.

But it is in the area of foreign policy that Straussianism and Straussians have attracted the most attention of late. Straussians came to hold significant roles in American foreign policy during the Reagan administration, handling portfolios for public diplomacy and human rights. Professor Nathan Tarcov of the political science department of the University of Chicago served on the policy planning staff of the Department of State, while Carnes Lord, now on the faculty of the Naval War College, was director of international communications and information policy for the National Security Council. Charles Fairbanks, now on the faculty of the Paul H. Nitze School for Advanced International Affairs at Johns Hopkins University, served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs; and Mark Blitz, now Fletcher Jones Professor of Political Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College, was associate director of the U.S. Information Agency. Through their knowledge of how America was founded as a regime dedicated to liberty and inalienable rights, these Straussians and others were able to offer a compelling and principled case for American anti-communism, which explains why so many Straussians served in the Reagan administration – more, even, than serve President George W. Bush.

British and American mainstream publications – the *Daily Telegraph*, *The New York Times*, *Harper’s*, among others – see a nefarious role for Straussians in President George W. Bush’s administration and in the run-up to the Iraq War. Much has been made of the fact that Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz studied as an undergraduate with Allan Bloom at Cornell (as immortalized by the character Philip Gorman in Saul Bellow’s 2000 novel about Bloom, *Ravelstein*), and with Leo Strauss as a graduate student at the University of Chicago. Just how influential Strauss was on Wolfowitz we do not know. But we do know, from James Mann’s *Vulcans: The Rise of Bush’s War Cabinet*, that Wolfowitz took only two courses with Strauss in graduate school; his doctoral dissertation, on the challenges of nuclear-powered desalting stations in the Middle East, was written with deterrence strategist Albert...
Company (BBC) aired an hour-long television special that began: 'This is a story about people who want the world run their way, the American way, [and]... scare the hell out of people.' The Times of London anxiously urged close British cooperation with the U.S. if only to gain the leverage needed to 'spike the ambitions of U.S. neoconservatives'.

Who makes up this potent faction? Within the administration, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz is usually identified as the key actor, together with Richard Perle, a member and until recently the chairman of the Defense Advisory Board. A handful of other high-level Bush appointees are often named as adherents of the neocon faith, including Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith, Under Secretary of State John Bolton, National Security Council staff member Elliott Abrams, and vice-presidential aide Lewis 'Scooter' Libby. The American Enterprise Institute (AEI, where I work), The Weekly Standard magazine, and William Kristol's Project for the New American Century — all three rent offices in the same building — are often described as constituting the movement's Washington command center. And then, of course, there is this magazine, crucible of so much neoconservative thought.

The history of neoconservatism is less sensational than its current usage implies. The term came into currency in the mid-1970s as an anathema — pronounced, by upholders of leftist orthodoxy, against a group of intellectuals, centered mostly in Commentary and the quarterly The Public Interest, who then still thought of themselves as liberals but were at odds with the dominant thinking of the left. One part of this group consisted of writers about domestic policy — Irving Kristol, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, James Q. Wilson, Nathan Glazer — who had developed misgivings about the programs of the New Deal or Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. The other main contingent focused on foreign policy, and especially on the decline of America's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the wake of the Vietnam War. The names here included, among others, Podhoretz, Jean Kirkpatrick, and Eugene V. Rostow. Although, at first, most of these people resisted the label neoconservative, eventually almost all of them acquiesced in it.

Today, many who are called neoconservatives are too young to have taken part in these debates, while others, although old enough, followed a different trajectory in arriving at their political ideas. This would hardly matter if neoconservatism were an actual political movement, or if there were general agreement about its tenets. But few of those writing critically about neoconservatism today have bothered to stipulate what they take those tenets to be. For most, the term seems to serve as a sophisticated-sounding synonym for 'hawk' or 'hardliner' or even 'ultraconservative'.

For others, however, it is used with a much more sinister connotation. In their telling, neoconservatives are a strange, veiled group, almost a cabal, whose purpose is to manipulate U.S. policy for ulterior purposes.

Thus, several scribes have concentrated on laying bare the hidden wellsprings of neoconservative belief. These have been found to reside in the thinking of two improbable figures: the immigrant American political philosopher Leo Strauss (1899-1973)* and the Bolshevik military commander Leon Trotsky (1879-1940). 'Who runs things?', The New York Times asked, concluding that it 'wouldn't be too much of a stretch to answer: the intellectual heirs of Leo Strauss' with whom the Bush administration is 'rife'. The Boston Globe ran a 3,000-word article claiming that 'we live in a world increasingly shaped by Leo Strauss', while in a sidebar to its own feature story on the neocons, Le Nouvel Observateur introduced French readers to 'Leo Strauss, their Mentor'.

Michael Lind, an American who writes for the British leftist magazine New Statesman, has been the most insistent voice invoking the name of Trotsky, or rather 'the largely Jewish-American Trotskyist movement' of which, Lind says, 'most neoconservative defense intellectuals... are products'. Jeet Heer, who expounded the Straussian roots of neoconservatism in the Boston Globe, went on to disclose the Trotsky connection in Canada's National Post. ('Bolshevik's Writings Supported the Idea of Pre-emptive War', ran the subhead.) Others agreed about this dual connection. William Pfaff, in the International Herald Tribune, contributed one column on the influence of Leo Strauss and another linking Bush's foreign policy to the 'intellectual legacy of the Trotskyism of many of the neoconservative movement's founders'. In particular, in Pfaff's judgment, administration policy 'seems a rightist version of Trotsky's "permanent revolution"'.

Actually, neither line of genealogical inquiry is new. Eight years ago, in Foreign Affairs, John Judis derided my advocacy of 'exporting democracy' as a kind of 'inverted Trotskyism'. As for Strauss, it was noticed as far back as the Reagan administration that a small number of the philosopher's former students had taken policy positions in the State and Defense departments. But the prize for the recent resuscitation of Strauss's name would seem to belong to the crackpot political agitator Lyndon LaRouche, who began to harp on it in speeches and publications months before any of the references I have cited above. LaRouche,  

* See the essay by Kenneth Weinstein, Ed.
who ceased using the pseudonym Lyn Marcus (a conscious derivation of Lenin Marx) when he vaulted from the far left to the far right, and who has served time in a federal penitentiary on charges of gulling elderly people out of their savings in order to finance his political movement, has fingered Strauss 'along with Bertrand Russell and H. G. Wells' as the parties responsible for 'steering the United States into a disastrous replay of the Peloponnesian war'.

This preoccupation with ancestor-hunting may seem of secondary interest, but since it is typical of the way most recent 'analysis' of neoconservative ideas has been conducted, it is worth pausing over for another moment.

For one thing, the sheer sloppiness of the reporting on the alleged Strauss—Trotsky connection is itself remarkable. Thus, The New York Times claimed extravagantly that AEI consists in its entirety of Straussian, whereas a little checking yields, out of fifty-six scholars and fellows, exactly two who would count themselves as Straussian and a third who would acknowledge a significant intellectual debt to Strauss; none of the three is in the field of foreign policy. The New York Times also identified Perle as a Straussian – which is false – while erroneously stating that he was married to the daughter of the late military strategist Albert Wohlstetter, whom it likewise falsely labeled a Straussian. Even after an initial correction (explaining that Perle had merely studied under Wohlstetter at the University of Chicago and had not married his daughter) and a second correction (acknowledging that Perle had never studied under Wohlstetter or attended the University of Chicago), the paper still could not bring itself to retract its fanciful characterizations of either Perle's or Wohlstetter's ties to Strauss. The paper also mischaracterized Podhoretz as an 'admirer' of Strauss, which is true only in a very loose sense. Similar errors have infected the stories in other publications.

And Trotsky? Lind in his disquisition on 'the largely Jewish-American Trotskyist movement' instanced seven pivotal neocon figures as the Bolshevik revolutionary's acolytes: Wolfowitz, Feith, Libby, Bolton, Abrams, James R. Woolsey, and Perle. This was too much for Alan Wald, a student of political ideas and himself a genuine Trotskyist, who pointed out that none of these men 'ever had an organizational or ideological association with Trotskyism'. Even more ludicrously, Lind characterized a series of open letters to the President published by the Project for the New American Century as 'a PR technique pioneered by their Trotskyist predecessors'; whatever Lind may have had in mind by this phrase, genuine Trotskyists would be less interested in sending petitions to the President than in hanging him from the nearest lamppost.

In truth, I can think of only one major neocon figure who did have a significant dalliance with Trotskyism, and that was Irving Kristol. The dalliance occurred during his student days some sixty-odd years ago, and whatever imprint it may have left on Kristol's thought certainly did not make him a neoconservative on foreign policy, for in that area his views have been much more akin to those of traditional conservatives. During the 1980s, for example, Kristol opposed the 'Reagan Doctrine' of support for anti-communist guerrillas and belittled the idea of promoting democracy abroad.

But that brings us to the actual ideas of these two presumed progenitors of neoconservatism. Strauss, according to Jeet Heer, emerges from a close reading as a 'disguised Machiavelli, a cynical teacher who encouraged his followers to believe that their intellectual superiority entitles them to rule over the bulk of humanity by means of duplicity'. Similarly, Pfaff: 'An elite recognizes the truth... and keeps it to itself. This gives it insight and implicitly power that others do not possess. This obviously is an important element in Strauss's appeal to American conservatives... His real appeal to the neoconservatives, in my view, is that his elitism presents a principled rationalization for policy expedience, and for "necessary lies" told to those whom the truth would demoralize.'

Neither Heer nor Pfaff offers a clue as to where in Strauss's corpus one might find these ideas, giving one the impression that they learned what they know of him from a polemical book by one Shadia Drury, who holds a chair in 'social justice' at a Canadian university and who finds Strauss to be a 'profoundly tribal and fascistic thinker'. In any event, although Strauss did write about restrictions on free inquiry, notably in Persecution and the Art of Writing, his point was not to advocate persecution but to suggest a way of reading philosophers who had composed their work in unfree societies. Far from the authoritarian described by Heer and Pfaff, Strauss, a refugee from Nazi Germany, was a committed democrat whose attachment and gratitude to America ran deep and who, in the words of Allan Bloom (perhaps his most famous student), 'knew that liberal democracy is the only decent and just alternative available to modern man'.

Both Heer and Pfaff make Strauss out to be a Machiavellian, but both have the story upside down. If there is a single core point in Strauss's teachings,
Irving Kristol contends that 'there is nothing like neoconservatism in Europe'. Kristol is right. There is a small network of pro-American writers and policy intellectuals who are attracted to some neoconservative ideas. But the environment for neoconservatism as such is an inhospitable one. It would probably be hard to imagine a less hospitable place than Germany. How has Germany responded to George W. Bush’s neoconservative foreign policies of the last four years? Is there a constituency in Germany, however modest, for ideas of the neoconservative ‘persuasion’?

The debate of the last couple of years about neoconservatism in Germany, like elsewhere in Europe, has been obscured above all by an obsession with who the neoconservatives are, rather than what they think.

‘Ich sage nur Wolfowitz’ – I’ll only say Wolfowitz. That is how one seething citizen put it to two columnists of the center-right daily Die Welt during a chat aboard a train last year. The woman apparently felt that those four words were sufficient to express her anger with today’s America. A senior German businessman once calmly asked me, after I had delivered a speech in Frankfurt on Iraq, whether it was the Jews who were responsible for American foreign policy that was aimed at removing Saddam Hussein from power. One German commentator speaks of ‘unbridled chauvinism’, ‘right-wing zionism’, ‘crass materialism’, and ‘permanent chaos’ in the Middle East. Writes the Financial Times Deutschland: ‘Wolfowitz still has appetite... despite the military misery in Iraq.’

Observe the German debate on neoconservatism and you might get the feeling that Lyndon LaRouche’s conspiracy theories have credence and that Aljazeera rantings sound reasonable. Habsburg heir Otto von Habsburg, who has represented the Bavarian CSU in the European Parliament, told an interviewer that the Pentagon has become ‘a Jewish institution’.

THE PROSPECT FOR NEOCONSERVATISM IN GERMANY

JEFFREY GEDMIN