

**Krauthammer, C. (July 21, 2005). The neoconservative convergence." *Opinion***

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The post-Cold War era has seen a remarkable ideological experiment: Over the past 15 years, each of the three major American schools of foreign policy--realism, liberal internationalism and neoconservatism--has taken its turn at running things. (A fourth school, isolationism, has a long pedigree, but has yet to recover from Pearl Harbor and probably never will; it remains a minor source of dissidence with no chance of becoming a governing ideology.) There is much to be learned from this unusual and unplanned experiment.

The era began with the senior George Bush and a classically realist approach. This was Kissingerism without Kissinger--although Brent Scowcroft, James Baker and Lawrence Eagleburger filled in admirably. The very phrase the administration coined to describe its vision--the New World Order--captured the core idea: an orderly world with orderly rulers living in stable equilibrium.

The elder Mr. Bush had two enormous achievements to his credit: the peaceful reunification of Germany, still historically undervalued, and the expulsion of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, which maintained the status quo in the Persian Gulf. Nonetheless, his administration suffered from the classic shortcoming of realism: a failure of imagination. Mr. Bush brilliantly managed the reconstitution of Germany and the restoration of the independence of the East European states, but he could not see far enough to the liberation of the Soviet peoples themselves. His notorious "chicken Kiev" speech of 1991, warning Ukrainians against "suicidal nationalism," seemed to prefer Soviet stability to the risk of 15 free and independent states.

But we must not be retrospectively too severe. Democracy in Ukraine was hard to envision even a few years ago, let alone in the early 1990s, and Mr. Bush's hesitancy did not stop the march of liberation in the Soviet sphere. It was the failure of imagination in Mr. Bush's other area of triumph--Iraq--that had truly stark, even tragic, consequences.

Leaving Saddam in place, and declining to support the Kurdish and Shiite uprisings that followed the first Gulf War, begat more than a decade of Iraqi suffering, rancor among our war allies, diplomatic isolation for the U.S., and a crumbling regime of U.N. sanctions. All this led ultimately and inevitably to a second war that could have been fought far more easily--and with the enthusiastic support of Iraq's Shiites, who to this day remain suspicious of our intentions--in 1991. One recalls with dismay that the first two of Osama bin Laden's announced justifications for his declaration of war on America were the garrisoning of the holy places (i.e., Saudi Arabia) by crusader (i.e., American) soldiers and the suffering of Iraqis under sanctions. Both were a direct result of the inconclusive end to the first Gulf War.

Still, the achievements of the elder Mr. Bush far outweigh the failures. The smooth and peaceful dissolution of the Soviet empire began, Saddam was stopped, and Arabia was saved. But then came the second, radically different experiment. For the balance of the 1990s, for reasons having nothing to do with foreign policy, realism was abruptly replaced by the classic liberal internationalism of the Clinton administration.

It is hard to be charitable in assessing the record. Liberal internationalism's one major achievement in those years--saving the Muslims in the Balkans and creating conditions for their possible peaceful integration into Europe--was achieved, ironically, in defiance of its own major principle. It lacked what liberal internationalists incessantly claim is the sine qua non of legitimacy: the approval of the U.N. Security Council.

Otherwise, the period between 1993 and 2001 was a waste, eight years of sleepwalking, of the absurd pursuit of one treaty more useless than the last, while the rising threat--Islamic terrorism--was treated as a problem of law enforcement. Perhaps the most symbolic moment occurred at the residence of the U.S. ambassador to France in October 2000, after Yasser Arafat had rejected Israel's peace offer at Camp David and instead launched his bloody second intifada. In Paris for another round of talks, Arafat abruptly broke off negotiations and was leaving the residence when

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright ran after him, chasing him in her heels on the cobblestone courtyard to induce him, to cajole him, into signing yet another worthless piece of paper.

Leon Trotsky is said to have remarked of the New York intellectual Dwight Macdonald, "Everyone has a right to be stupid, but Comrade Macdonald abuses the privilege." During its 7 1/2-year Oslo folly, the Clinton administration abused the privilege consistently.

Then came another radical change. By a fluke or a miracle, depending on your point of view, because of the confusion of a few disoriented voters in Palm Beach, Fla., this has been the decade of neoconservatism. Bismarck once said that God looks after fools, drunkards, children and the United States of America. Given the 2000 presidential election, it is clear that he works in very mysterious ways.

In place of realism or liberal internationalism, the past 4 1/2 years have seen an unashamed assertion and deployment of American power, a resort to unilateralism when necessary, and a willingness to pre-empt threats before they emerge. Most importantly, the second Bush administration has explicitly declared the spread of freedom to be the central principle of American foreign policy. George W. Bush's second inaugural address in January was the most dramatic and expansive expression of this principle. A few weeks later, at the National Defense University, the president offered its most succinct formulation: "The defense of freedom requires the advance of freedom."

The remarkable fact that the Bush doctrine is, essentially, a synonym for neoconservative foreign policy marks neoconservatism's own transition from a position of dissidence, which it occupied during the first Bush administration and the Clinton years, to governance. Neoconservative foreign policy, one might say, has reached maturity. That is not only a portentous development, requiring some rethinking of principles and practice, but a rather unexpected one.

It is unexpected because, only a year ago, neoconservative foreign policy was being consigned to the ash heap of history. In the spring and summer of 2004, in the midst of increasing difficulties in Iraq, it was very widely believed that neoconservative policies had been run to the ground, that the administration that had purveyed them would soon be thrown out of office, and that internecine recriminations were about to begin over who lost the war on terror, the war in Iraq and indeed the reins of American foreign policy. One prominent columnist, speaking for the conventional wisdom of the moment, called the Bush project in Iraq "a childish fantasy." And this, from a friend of neoconservatism.

As for the liberals who had come on board the project of liberating Iraq, they took its perceived foundering as an opportunity to engage in a mass jumping of ship. Some justified their abandonment of the Bush doctrine on the grounds that it was they who had been betrayed--by an administration whose incompetence, mendacity, political opportunism and various other crimes had ruined a policy that would already have been crowned with success if only they had been in charge of postwar Iraq, calibrating brilliantly precise troop levels, calculating to three decimal places the required degree of de-Baathification, and overseeing just about every other operational detail according to the dictates of their own tactical genius.

Other liberals donned the guise of realists, who by the summer of 2004 were back in fashion. At the height of this new vogue, just before the November election, even John Kerry's advisers, noting that the liberal-internationalist critique of the war (namely, that it lacked international support and legitimacy) was not exactly winning converts, settled instead on a "realist" line of attack. From then on, Iraq would be known as the "wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time," which, translated, meant that we should be chasing terrorists cave-to-cave in Afghanistan rather than pursuing an ideological crusade in the Middle East.

If you add to this mix the classical realists, from Brent Scowcroft to Dimitri Simes, who had opposed the entire project from the beginning and were now penning their I-told-you-so's, there seemed scarcely anyone left on board the neoconservative ship. But the most interesting about-face was that of some professed neoconservatives themselves. Among these, the most prominent was Francis Fukuyama, whose lead article in the summer 2004 *National Interest* was a "realist" attack on the entire ideological underpinnings of the Iraq war and the liberationist idea. The article's very title, "The Neoconservative Moment," made the mocking suggestion, also very much in vogue,

that neoconservative foreign policy was finished, that its moment had come and gone, that it had been done in by Iraq, by its own overweening arrogance, and by its blindness to the realist wisdom that failure in Iraq was, as Mr. Fukuyama put it, "predictable in advance."

As it happens, Mr. Fukuyama had neglected to make that prediction in advance; at the time of the war and during the months of debate preceding it, he had been silent. Moreover, from the perspective of today, even his retroactive prediction in summer 2004 of inevitable and catastrophic failure in Iraq appears doubtful, to say the least. Getting a retroactive prediction wrong is quite an achievement, but it tells you much about the intellectual climate just a year ago.

Today, there is no euphoria regarding the Iraq project, but sobriety has replaced panic. Things have changed, and what changed them was four elections: two in the West, and two in the Middle East. First came the re-election in Australia of John Howard, a firm ally of the administration. This presaged the re-election of George W. Bush, which reaffirmed to the world America's staying power, gave popular legitimacy to the Bush doctrine, and established a clear mandate to continue the democratic project. The refusal of the American people last November to turn out a president who, rejecting an "exit strategy," pledged instead to remain until Iraqi self-governance had been secured, was a seminal moment.

The other two elections took place in the areas of our exertion: first the Afghan elections, scandalously underplayed by the American media, then the Iraqi elections, impossible to underplay even by the American media. The latter were a historical hinge point. After a string of other important steps in Iraq that had been confidently dismissed as impossible and certainly impossible to do on time--the writing of an interim constitution, the transfer of power to an interim Iraqi government--came the greatest impossibility of all: free elections as scheduled. The overwhelming popular turnout, in what was essentially a referendum on the insurgency and on the democratic idea, sent a clear-cut message. Those who had said that the Iraqis, like Arabs in general, had no particular interest in self-government were wrong--as were those who claimed that the insurgency was a nationalist, anti-imperialist and widely popular movement.

This is hardly to say that things have not remained difficult in Iraq. The insurgency is still raging. It has the capacity to kill, to instill fear, and perhaps ultimately to destabilize the elected government. What the election did do, however, was to confirm what was already suggested by the insurgency's clear lack of any political program, any political wing, any ideology, indeed even any pretense of competing for hearts and minds. The election exposed the insurgency as an alliance of Baathist nihilism and atavistic jihadism, neither of which has a large constituency in Iraq.

And that is hardly all. The elections newly empowered fully 80% of the Iraqi population--the Kurds and the Shiites--and created an indigenous representative leadership with a life-and-death stake in defeating the insurgency. By giving that 80% the political and institutional means to build the necessary forces, the elections infinitely improved the chances that a stable, multiethnic, democratic Iraq can emerge, despite the current mayhem. As Fouad Ajami wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* on May 16, upon returning from a visit to the region:

The insurgents will do what they are good at. But no one really believes that those dispensers of death can turn back the clock. . . . By a twist of fate, the one Arab country that had seemed ever marked for brutality and sorrow now stands poised on the frontier of a new political world. The elections' effect on the wider Arab world was likewise both immediate and profound. Millions of Arabs watched on television as Iraqis exercised their political rights, and were moved to ask the obvious question: Why are Iraqis the only Arabs voting in free elections--and doing so, moreover, under American aegis and protection? The rest is so well known as barely to merit repeating. The Beirut spring. Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon. Open demonstrations and the beginnings of political competition in Egypt. Women's suffrage in Kuwait. Small but significant steps toward democratization in the gulf. Bashar Assad's declared intent to legalize political parties in Syria, purge the ruling Baath party, sponsor free municipal elections in 2007, and move toward a market economy. (Not that Assad is likely to do any of this, but the fact that he must pretend to be doing it shows the astonishing reach of the Bush doctrine to date.)

Mr. Ajami has called this (in the title of a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*) the "Autumn of the Autocrats." Not the winter--nothing is certain, and we know of many democratizing movements in

the past that were successfully put down. There are too many entrenched dictatorships and kleptocracies in the region to declare anything won. What we can declare, with certainty, is the falsity of those confident assurances before the Iraq war, during the Iraq war and after the Iraq war that this project was inevitably doomed to failure because we do not know how to "do" democracy, and they do not know how to receive it.

In Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere in the Arab world, the forces of democratic liberalization have emerged on the political stage in a way that was unimaginable just two years ago. They have been energized and emboldened by the Iraqi example and by American resolve. Until now, it was widely assumed that the only alternative to pan-Arabist autocracy, to the Nassers and the Saddams, was Islamism. We now know, from Iraq and Lebanon, that there is another possibility, and that America has given it life. As the Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, hardly a noted friend of the Bush doctrine, put it in late February in an interview with David Ignatius of the Washington Post:

It's strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq. I was cynical about Iraq. But when I saw the Iraqi people voting three weeks ago, eight million of them, it was the start of a new Arab world. The Syrian people, the Egyptian people, all say that something is changing. The Berlin Wall has fallen. We can see it. The Iraqi elections vindicated the two central propositions of the Bush doctrine. First, that the desire for freedom is indeed universal and not the private preserve of Westerners. Second, that America is genuinely committed to democracy in and of itself. Contrary to the cynics, whether Arab, European or American, the U.S. did not go into Iraq for oil or hegemony but for liberation--a truth that on Jan. 30 even al-Jazeera had to televise. Arabs in particular had had sound historical reason to doubt American sincerity: six decades of U.S. support for Arab dictators, a cynical "realism" that began with FDR's deal with the House of Saud and reached its apogee with the 1991 betrayal of the anti-Saddam uprising that the elder Bush had encouraged in Iraq. Today, however, they see a different Bush and a different doctrine.

The Iraqi elections had one final effect. They so acutely embarrassed foreign critics, especially in Europe, that we began to see a rash of headlines asking the rhetorical question: Was Bush Right? The answer to that is: Yes, so far. The democratic project has been launched, against the critics and against the odds. That in itself is an immense historical achievement. But success will require maturation--a neoconservatism of discrimination and restraint, prepared to examine both its principles and its practice in shaping a truly governing philosophy.

In a lecture at the American Enterprise Institute last year, I tried to draw a distinction between a more expansive and a more restrictive neoconservative foreign policy. I called the two types, respectively, democratic globalism and democratic realism.

The chief spokesman for democratic globalism is the president himself, and his second inaugural address is its ur-text. What is most breathtaking about it is not what most people found shocking--his announced goal of abolishing tyranny throughout the world. Granted, that is rather cosmic-sounding, but it is only an expression of direction and hope for, well, the end of time. What is most expansive is the pledge that America will stand with dissidents throughout the world, wherever they are.

This sort of talk immediately opens itself up to the accusation of disingenuousness and hypocrisy. After all, the United States retains cozy relations with autocracies of various stripes, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Russia. Besides, if we place ourselves on the side of all dissidents everywhere, must we not declare our solidarity not only with democrats but with Islamist dissidents sitting in Pakistani, Egyptian, Saudi and Russian jails?

But we do not act this way, and we need not. The question of alliances with dictators, of deals with the devil, can be approached openly, forthrightly and without any need for defensiveness. The principle is that we cannot democratize the world overnight and, therefore, if we are sincere about the democratic project, we must proceed sequentially. Nor, out of a false equivalence, need we abandon democratic reformers in these autocracies. On the contrary, we have a duty to support them, even as we have a perfect moral right to distinguish between democrats on the one hand and totalitarians or jihadists on the other.

In the absence of omnipotence, one must deal with the lesser of two evils. That means postponing radically destabilizing actions in places where the support of the current nondemocratic regime is needed against a larger existential threat to the free world. There is no need to apologize for that. In World War II we allied ourselves with Stalin against Hitler. (As Churchill said shortly after the German invasion of the U.S.S.R.: "If Hitler invaded hell I would make at least a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.") This was a necessary alliance, and a temporary one: When we were done with Hitler, we turned our attention to Stalin and his successors.

During the subsequent war, the Cold War, we again made alliances with the devil, in the form of a variety of right-wing dictators, in order to fight the greater evil. Here, again, the partnership was necessary and temporary. Our deals with right-wing dictatorships were contingent upon their usefulness and upon the status of the ongoing struggle. Once again we were true to our word. Whenever we could, and particularly as we approached victory in the larger war, we dispensed with those alliances.

Consider two cases of useful but temporary allies against communism: Augusto Pinochet in Chile and Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. We proved our bona fides in both of these cases when, as Moscow weakened and the existential threat to the free world receded, we worked to bring down both dictators. In 1986, we openly and decisively supported the Aquino revolution that deposed and exiled Marcos, and later in the '80s we pressed very hard for free elections in Chile that Mr. Pinochet lost, paving the way for the return of democracy.

Alliances with dictatorships were justified in the war against fascism and the Cold War, and they are justified now in the successor existential struggle, the war against Arab/Islamic radicalism. This is not just theory. It has practical implications. For nothing is more practical than the question: After Afghanistan, after Iraq, what?

The answer is, first Lebanon, then Syria. Lebanon is next because it is so obviously ready for democracy, having practiced a form of it for 30 years after decolonization. Its sophistication and political culture make it ripe for transformation, as the massive pro-democracy demonstrations have shown.

Then comes Syria, both because of its vulnerability--the Lebanon withdrawal has gravely weakened Assad--and because of its strategic importance. A critical island of recalcitrance in a liberalizing region stretching from the Mediterranean to the Iranian border, Syria has tried to destabilize all of its neighbors: Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and now, most obviously and bloodily, the new Iraq. Serious, prolonged, ruthless pressure on the Assad regime would yield enormous geopolitical advantage in democratizing, and thus pacifying, the entire Levant.

Some conservatives (and many liberals) have proposed instead that we be true to the universalist language of the president's second inaugural address and go after the three principal Islamic autocracies: Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Not so fast, and not so hard. Autocracies they are, and in many respects nasty ones. But doing this would be a mistake.

In Egypt, we certainly have liberal resources that should be supported and encouraged. But, keeping in mind the Algerian experience, we should be wary of bringing down the whole house of cards and thereby derailing any progress from authoritarianism to liberal democracy. Saudi Arabia has a Byzantine culture, and an equally Byzantine method of governance, which must be delicately reformed short of overthrow. And Pakistan, which has great potential for democracy, is simply too critical as a military ally in the war on al Qaeda to risk anything right now. Pervez Musharraf is no bastard; but even if he were, he is ours. We should be encouraging the evolution of democracy in all of these countries, but relentless and ruthless means--of the kind we employed in Afghanistan and Iraq and should, perhaps short of direct military invention, be employing in Syria--are better applied to enemies, not friends.

What is interesting is that the Bush administration, in practice, is proceeding precisely along these lines. It pushes on Hosni Mubarak, but gently. It moves even more gingerly with Saudi Arabia, fearing what may emerge in the short term if the royal kleptocracy is deposed. And, because Pakistan is so central to the war on terror, it disturbs not a hair on the head of Mr. Musharraf.

In short, the Bush administration--if you like, neoconservatism in power--has been far more inclined to pursue democratic realism and to consign democratic globalism to the realm of aspiration. This kind of prudent circumspection is, in fact, a practical necessity for governing in the real world. We should, for example, be doing everything in our power, both overtly and covertly, to encourage a democratic revolution in Iran, a deeply hostile and dangerous state, even while trying carefully to manage democratic evolution in places like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Indeed, the behavior of the Bush administration implies that in practice, the distinction between democratic realism and democratic globalism may collapse, because globalism is simply not sustainable.

Another important sign of the maturing of neoconservative foreign policy is that it is no longer tethered to its own ideological history and paternity. The current practitioners of neoconservative foreign policy are George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld. They have no history in the movement, and before 9/11 had little affinity to or affiliation with it.

The fathers of neoconservatism are former liberals or leftists. Today, its chief proponents, to judge by their history, are former realists. Ms. Rice, for example, was a disciple of Brent Scowcroft; Mr. Cheney served as secretary of defense in the first Bush administration. September 11 changed all of that. It changed the world, and changed our understanding of the world. As neoconservatism seemed to offer the most plausible explanation of the new reality and the most compelling and active response to it, many realists were brought to acknowledge the poverty of realism--not just the futility but the danger of a foreign policy centered on the illusion of stability and equilibrium. These realists, newly mugged by reality, have given weight to neoconservatism, making it more diverse and, given the newcomers' past experience, more mature.

What neoconservatives have long been advocating is now being articulated and practiced at the highest levels of government by a war cabinet composed of individuals who, coming from a very different place, have joined and reshaped the neoconservative camp and are carrying the neoconservative idea throughout the world. As a result, the vast right-wing conspiracy has grown even more vast than liberals could imagine. And even as the tent has enlarged, the great schisms and splits in conservative foreign policy--so widely predicted just a year ago, so eagerly sought and amplified by outside analysts--have not occurred. Indeed, differences have, if anything, narrowed.

This is not party discipline. It is compromise with reality, and convergence toward the middle. Above all, it is the maturation of a governing ideology whose time has come.