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Introduction by Marc Trachtenberg, University of California at Los Angeles

Justin Vaïsse has emerged in recent years as perhaps the most perceptive French analyst of current American politics and foreign policy. But he is a historian by training, and in writing his book on neoconservative movement, his primary goal was to understand the neoconservative movement as a historical phenomenon. The book is not a polemic or a journalistic account. It is a scholarly analysis, based not just on published materials, but also on a series of interviews and on a good deal of archival work, especially in the Rosenblatt papers at the Johnson Library and in the papers of the Committee on the Present Danger at the Hoover Institution.¹ Given that sort of approach, Vaïsse, as John Ehrman writes in his comment, is able to deal in a fair-minded way with a topic that “seems to arouse great passions.” Robert Kaufman, the most critical of the four reviewers here, basically agrees. Vaïsse, he notes, “has raised the tone and the substance of the debate about who neoconservatives are and what neoconservatism means.”

And as a trained historian, Vaïsse begins by raising a question about change over time. “The original neoconservatism of the 1960s,” he points out, “had nothing to do with the muscular assertion of American power or with the promotion of democracy.” It took little interest in foreign policy, and its central message was “to stress the limits on state action.” But over the next forty years, the movement “transformed itself so thoroughly as to become unrecognizable.” The focus shifted from domestic to foreign policy; neoconservatism moved “from the left to the right side of the political chessboard”; the movement “left the world of sociologists and intellectuals for that of influence and power.” And above all there was a dramatic change in political philosophy, from one that stressed the limits on power to one based on the belief that American power could bring about very fundamental political change in the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East, and in particular in Iraq. Who in the early years of the movement would have thought that the movement would develop along those lines? “The idea,” says Vaïsse, “that the federal government should take it upon itself to administer and even democratize an unknown country of 25 million people 6,000 miles from Washington, D.C., would have seemed absurd to the original neoconservatives” (pp. 3-4). How then is that change to be understood?

He gets at the issue by tracing the development of the movement over time. He breaks its history down into three periods—an approach that makes sense to the reviewers: a first period, when a number of intellectuals, associated above all with the journal *The Public Interest*, were reacting to what were seen as the failures of the “war on poverty”; a second period, when the neoconservatives became more involved in politics and more interested in questions of foreign policy, and especially the question of the interpretation of the Vietnam War; and a third period, beginning around 1995, when the movement began to

¹ The sources are listed not in the book itself but in a website the author posted as a companion to the original French version of the book: <http://neoconservatisme.vaisse.net/doku.php>. That website also has an extensive analysis of the pamphlets put out by the Committee on the Present Danger. The companion website for the English-language version of the book, <http://neoconservatism.vaisse.net/doku.php>, does not have that material, but it does contain copies of a number of important documents Vaïsse cited in the book.

emphasize the need for a quite assertive foreign policy. Vaïsse sees here “three very different political and intellectual logics, loosely related to one another” (p. 6). The continuity from period to period—or at least from the first two to the third period—seems more institutional than conceptual: the neoconservatives had set up a kind of “counterestablishment,” a network of “like-minded magazines, think tanks, committees, journalists, and intellectuals” which was the “real source of power of the neoconservative movement over its three ages” (pp. 203, 206, 267).

But what sort of power did the movement actually have? This is an important issue for Vaïsse: “one of the aims of this book,” he says, “is to show concretely how ideas take hold and spread to the point where they influence political decisionmakers” (p. 20). He believes in particular that Ronald Reagan’s “support for democratic forces around the world” was “without a doubt due to specific neoconservative influence” (p. 191). And he believes neoconservatism played a major—although far from exclusive—role in shaping policy during the George W. Bush period (pp. 13-15). The reviewers, by and large, do not really disagree with that claim. Gil Troy especially sees the neoconservatives as the “ideological and intellectual vanguard of the Reagan Revolution”: “These are not Ivory Tower intellectuals. These citizen-activists use their brain power to change the world.”

But as Daniel Sargent suggests at the end of his comment, the whole question of the political impact of ideas is hard to get at: how, he wonders, do we measure the impact of ideas “in relation to other historical factors”? Certainly the neoconservatives themselves claimed they had played a major role; Vaïsse gives a remarkable quotation from Norman Podhoretz to that effect on p. 186. And more independent observers sometimes argued along the same lines: “Without *The Public Interest*, no Newt Gingrich,” George Will wrote (p. 205). But is it really clear that Reagan’s foreign policy or even George W. Bush’s was influenced in any fundamental way by neoconservative ideas?

To be sure, both presidents found certain neoconservative notions congenial, but neither president saw the world exactly the same way that the neoconservatives did. “There is no doubt,” Vaïsse says about Reagan, “that the president shared the neoconservative sensibility, but there is also no doubt that he had an antinuclear sensibility, and an evangelical sensibility, and a pragmatic sensibility, and, above all, a politician’s sensibility” (p. 195); the neoconservative Reagan coexisted with “other Reagans” who took a less hard-line view (p. 196). Bush, he says, was “not a neoconservative,” although he “did incorporate numerous neoconservative ideas into an ‘astonishing ideological cocktail,’” which had many other important ingredients (p. 14).² And both presidents, as time went on, tended to separate themselves from the neoconservatives. Reagan switched from a “bellicose policy to a policy of peace” (p. 197). As for Bush, although his “rhetoric became increasingly neoconservative in his second term, in fact he moved more toward realism and to all intents and purposes abandoned the ‘freedom agenda’ that he had previously promoted” (p. 258).

² The internal quotation is from a book on the neoconservatives by Alain Frachon and Daniel Vernet published in Paris in 2004.

What then does this imply about the impact of neoconservatism as a political movement? Reagan might have believed in promoting the spread of democracy abroad, but such notions (as Sargent points out) have deep roots in American political culture, especially at the level of public rhetoric. The United States, after all, went to war in 1917 “to make the world safe for democracy”—or at least that was the way U.S. policy was rationalized after the country got involved in that conflict. What was new, above all in the post-Cold War period, was not the Wilsonianism, but the military component, a point Vaïsse has no trouble recognizing. (On p. 12, he quotes Pierre Hassner’s phrase about a “Wilsonianism in boots,” a play on the French notion of Napoleon as the “Revolution in boots,” and a term that calls to mind Arthur Schlesinger’s reference to the neoconservatives as “Wilsonians with machine guns.”³) But if the core ideology is a constant, doesn’t that suggest that it is the shift in the global balance of power, resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union, and not any great conceptual breakthrough, that essentially accounts for the emergence of what people call a neoconservative foreign policy? That certainly is the way neorealists like Kenneth Waltz interpret the change in U.S. policy that took place after 1991. The United States during the post-cold war period, Waltz argued even before George W. Bush came to power, “has behaved as unchecked powers have usually done. In the absence of counterweights, a country’s internal impulses prevail, whether fueled by liberal or by other urges.”⁴

So the argument that neoconservative ideas played a key role in shaping American foreign policy is by no means intuitively obvious, and to make an argument in this area, it seems to me, one really has to make an argument about the ideas themselves—that is, one has to make a judgment about the intellectual quality, the intellectual distinctiveness, and indeed the intellectual power of the basic notions that lay at the heart of the neoconservative movement. And while Vaïsse clearly has a high regard for the neoconservatives of the first age, he takes a much less positive view of neoconservatism from the late Reagan period on. He sees a movement “frozen in time” (p. 197), locked at the end of the Cold War into a mindset that prevented many neoconservatives from understanding the extraordinary changes then taking place in the world. His judgment of the third-age neoconservatives is particularly sharp: they are arrogant, both intellectually and politically, especially with regard to the Middle East (p. 261); they are dogmatic and intellectually lazy (p. 265). What one had, therefore, was scarcely a case of brainpower changing the world. And indeed it seems that what Vaïsse really thinks is that it was not the power of the neoconservatives’ ideas, but rather their organizational ability—the network of institutions they were able to create and their skill in moving into the Republican power structure—that largely accounts for whatever influence they came to have.

³ Pierre Hassner, “Etats-Unis: l’empire de la force ou la force de l’empire?” Institute for Security Studies, Cahiers de Chaillot, no. 54 (September 2002) (<http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/chai54f.pdf>), p. 43. Vaïsse and Hassner, incidentally, co-authored a short book called *Washington et le monde: dilemmes d’une superpuissance* (Paris: Autrement, 2003).

⁴ Kenneth Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (summer 2000), p. 24.

And those assessments are linked to a series of judgments about the policies the neoconservatives were associated with, to a certain extent under Reagan, but much more under George W. Bush. Reagan succeeded with Gorbachev not because he followed the neoconservative lead, but because he parted company in his second term with people of that ilk. And Vaïsse takes a dim view of the Bush presidency, and especially of those aspects of the Bush policy linked most closely to the neoconservatives: “Bush’s failure in Iraq,” in particular, was also “the failure of neoconservatism” (pp. 3, 260)—a view which Ehrman shares, but with which Kaufman strongly disagrees.

But Vaïsse’s fundamental goal is not to sit in judgment on the neoconservatives, and indeed this book is not just about a particular political movement. Vaïsse’s interests are much broader than that. His goal as a scholar is to understand American politics and American society as a whole. A study of neoconservatism is a window into something much broader, and this book shows that this sort of study really can tell us something basic about “the way in which American political society works” (p. 20).

Participants:

Justin Vaïsse is a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution and serves as the Director of research for its Center on the United States and Europe. After a first stint at Brookings as a Visiting Fellow (2002-2003), he worked as a special adviser for the French Policy Planning Staff (2003-2007). A graduate of L’Ecole Normale Supérieure and Sciences Po, he received his Agrégation in history in 1996 and his Ph.D. in 2005. He has been successively a teaching assistant at Harvard University (1996-1997), an adjunct professor at Sciences Po (1999-2001 and 2003-2007), and a professorial lecturer at SAIS – Johns Hopkins University (since 2007). He is the author of numerous books on US foreign policy, including *Washington et le monde: Dilemmes d’une superpuissance*, with Pierre Hassner (Paris: Autrement, 2003). He is currently working on a group biography of four Harvard students of the 1950s who transformed US foreign policy (Zbigniew Brzezinski, Stanley Hoffmann, Sam Huntington and Henry Kissinger).

John Ehrman is an independent historian. He earned a bachelor’s degree in history and political science at Tufts University, a master’s in international affairs from Columbia University, and his PhD from the George Washington University. He is the author of *The Rise of Neoconservatism* (Yale, 1995), and *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan* (Yale, 2005), as well as numerous articles and reviews on modern American conservatism.

Robert G. Kaufman is Professor at Pepperdine University's School of Public Policy. He received his BA and PhD from Columbia University and his JD at Georgetown. He has written three books: *Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era* (Columbia University Press); *Henry M. Jackson, a Life in Politics* (University of Washington Press); and *In Defense of The Bush Doctrine* (University Press of Kentucky). He is working on two book projects, the most immediate of which is *A Tale of Two America's: Ronald Reagan, Barak Obama, and the Future of American Politics*. He also is working on a more long-term book project: A biography of Ronald Reagan focusing on his Presidency and his quest for it. Kaufman has

written frequently for scholarly and popular publications, and done commentary on television and radio.

Daniel Sargent is Assistant Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley. He graduated with a PhD in International History from Harvard University in 2008. He is a co-editor of *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Harvard, 2010) and is currently working on a history of American responses to globalization in the 1970s, provisionally titled "A Superpower Transformed: Globalization and the Crisis of American Foreign Policy in the 1970s" (Oxford University Press, Forthcoming).

Marc Trachtenberg got his Ph.D. in history from Berkeley in 1974, taught history at the University of Pennsylvania for the next twenty-six years, and has been a professor of political science at UCLA since 2000. He is the author of a number of books and articles on twentieth century international politics, most notably *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*, which came out in 1999. His book *The Craft of International History*, a guide to historical method for both historians and political scientists, was published in 2006.

Gil Troy is Professor of History at McGill University in Montreal and a visiting scholar at the Bipartisan Policy Center in Washington, DC. A graduate of Harvard University, he is the author of six books on the modern presidency, including *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*, *The Reagan Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* and *Leading from the Center: Why Moderates Make the Best Presidents*.

Review by John Ehrman, Independent Historian

It is easy to provide an overall evaluation of Justin Vaïsse's *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement*. Vaïsse has written a very good, and long needed, history of neoconservatism. His book is thoroughly researched, well written, insightful, and fair. *Neoconservatism* has a few flaws—about which, more later—but nonetheless will be the standard history of neoconservatism for many years and, therefore, will also be required reading for anyone studying modern American conservatism.

Neoconservatism is the first true history of the neoconservative movement to appear in some fifteen years. The early 1990s was the last period when historians looked seriously at the neoconservatives and their ideas, with several political and intellectual histories appearing between 1991 and 1995. In retrospect, we can see that these books appeared in a cluster because neoconservatism at the time seemed to be a thing of the past. With the end of the Reagan era, and especially the end of the cold war, the neoconservatives' emphasis on a strong foreign policy focused on countering the Soviet threat seemed, to say the least, outdated. At home, neoconservative views on domestic issues generally had come to coincide with those of the free-market intellectuals on the right, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish neoconservatives from many other conservatives; in any case, with Bill Clinton in the White House, the neoconservatives' policy views had little chance of implementation. Numerous writers in the mid-1990s noted the death of neoconservatism, as when John Judis wrote in *Foreign Affairs* in 1995 that neoconservatism had become a form of "cultural nostalgia," and Irving Kristol seemed to agree when he noted that neoconservatism had been a "generational phenomenon." Similarly, a headline in *Lingua Franca* promised to tell "how neoconservatism lived and died," and even Norman Podhoretz famously published in 1996 an article in *Commentary* entitled "Neoconservatism: A Eulogy." An observer at the time might be forgiven for having believed that neoconservatism had run its course.¹

Even for those who did not assume the end of the movement, the mid-1990s still were a good time to take stock of neoconservatism. Scholars knew little about conservatism when Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, but by the end of the decade, however, it was clear that conservatism was a powerful movement within American politics. Historians, political scientists, and journalists began untangling the various strands of conservatism, commenting on their futures and, in particular, interpreting the place of the neoconservatives within the American right. But writing on neoconservatism dropped off

¹ John Judis, "Trotskyism to Anachronism," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1995, p. 129; Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism* (New York: Free Press, 1995), p. 40; Daniel Westbrook, "The Counter-Intelligentsia," *Lingua Franca*, November 1996; see also Norman Podhoretz, "Neoconservatism: A Eulogy," *Commentary*, March 1996. The major histories from the 1990s are Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); and John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

after 1996 and, except for some highly specialized articles, it was well into the next decade before the neoconservatives and their ideas again received much serious attention.²

Looking back, the irony of the post-1996 neglect of neoconservatism is striking. We now can see that in the late 1990s the neoconservatives were using their time on the sidelines to prepare for an eventual return to power. This was the period, most notably, when the *Weekly Standard* was founded, prominent neoconservatives began to appear regularly on the new Fox News network, and the movement consolidated its position in Washington think tanks. This was also the time when neoconservatives began promoting a domestic policy of “national greatness,” which called for ambitious public projects to unite Americans and repair the damage done to national cohesion by cultural conflicts. On the foreign policy side, under the label of “neo-Reaganism,” neoconservatives advocated taking advantage of US military superiority to spread democracy around the world. Despite the Republican victory in 2000, however, the neoconservatives did not immediately gain much influence in Washington—they had supported Sen. John McCain in the Republican primaries and then had an ambivalent relationship with George W. Bush. After September 11, however, with their media presence and neo-Reaganite positions at the ready, the neoconservatives were able to promote a set of policy proposals for responding to the attacks faster than any other political faction. Bush embraced their belief that democratizing the Middle East would be the best way to fight Islamic terrorism and, in turn, the neoconservatives became his strongest supporters.³

Iraq brought attention back to neoconservatism. Unfortunately, the long national debate before the invasion in 2003 and the difficult occupation that followed did not lead to a new generation of histories of neoconservatism. Instead, opponents of the invasion and, more broadly, critics of George W. Bush’s foreign policy, used the neoconservatives as targets rather than as subjects. First off the mark among conservatives were Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, whose *America Alone* (2004) was unabashedly hostile to the neoconservatives; Andrew Bacevich’s *The New American Militarism* (2005) soon followed, blaming neoconservatives for creating the “intellectual climate” that had militarized US foreign policy; finally, Francis Fukuyama, long an ally of the neoconservatives, broke with

² For books interpreting neoconservatism in the context of the overall conservative movement, see J. David Hoeveler, *Watch on the Right* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); R. Emmett Tyrrell, *The Conservative Crack-Up* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); Samuel Francis, *Beautiful Losers* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993); and Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996). For specialized articles on neoconservatism, see Susanne Klingenstein, “‘It’s Splendid When the Town Whore Gets Religion and Joins the Church’: The Rise of the Jewish Neoconservatives as Observed by the Paleoconservatives in the 1980s,” *SHOFAR* 21 (Spring 2003): 83-98; William King, “Neoconservatives and ‘Trotskyism,’” *American Communist History* 3(2004): 247-66; Michael Williams, “What is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory,” *European Journal of International Relations* 11 (September 2005): 307-37; and John Guelke, “The Political Morality of the Neoconservatives: An Analysis,” *International Politics* 42 (2005): 97-115.

³ For national greatness and neo-Reaganism, see David Brooks, “A Return to National Greatness,” *Weekly Standard*, March 3, 1997, and William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 1996.

the movement and offered his criticisms in *America at the Crossroads* (2006). On the opposite side of the spectrum, Peter Beinart's *The Good Fight* (2006) used neoconservatism's failure in Iraq as a foil to show the need to return to liberal foreign policies. Each of these books offered brief histories of neoconservatism, but none can be said to have been objective; rather, each author interpreted the facts to suit his criticisms and policy advocacy. The one exception to this in the post-Iraq wave of books on neoconservatism was Jacob Heilbrunn's *They Knew They Were Right* (2008). Heilbrunn offered an extensive and fairly objective history of the neoconservative movement, but he overemphasized the influences of the Jewish tradition and political philosopher Leo Strauss on neoconservatism, which hurt the book's usefulness.⁴

Clearly, the history of neoconservatism long has needed an update, if only to sweep away the distortions and polemics that have accumulated during the past fifteen years. Vaïsse's contribution has been to do this and, at the same time, provide a framework for analyzing neoconservatism. He does this, moreover, in a fair-minded way that, because neoconservatism seems to arouse great passions, is rare among writers on the topic. Perhaps it helps to be a Frenchman, with little direct stake in American intellectual and political feuds.

Vaïsse writes that the history of neoconservatism has three distinct periods. The first was from the mid-1960s until roughly the early 1970s, and covered the period from the founding of the *Public Interest* through the defeat of George McGovern in the 1972 presidential election. In this phase, the neoconservatives still were liberals and Democrats, and viewed themselves as trying to save liberalism from left-wing temptations. The second phase lasted from 1973 until 1995, when the neoconservatives realized that, mostly because of their hawkish cold war views, they no longer had a home in the Democratic Party. They became Reagan supporters and moved into the Republican Party. They gradually shed the remnants of their liberal identity and, during the Reagan years, became permanent members of the conservative coalition.

This part of the story takes about two-thirds of the book and, conceptually, adds little to our understanding of neoconservatism. The tale of the neoconservatives' disenchantment with liberalism and the Democrats was well known when the histories of the movement appeared in the 1990s. But even if he is going over familiar ground, Vaïsse does his readers a service by reminding them of neoconservatism's roots and dispelling the myths of recent years. First, because discussions of neoconservatism during the past decade have focused almost exclusively on foreign policy issues, Vaïsse helpfully recalls that neoconservatism first developed because of domestic political concerns. In particular, he reminds us of the intellectual caliber of the *Public Interest* and the strength of its critiques of the ambitions of Great Society liberalism—critiques, it might be added, that seem especially relevant today. Vaïsse also brings out of the shadows the importance of Sen. Henry Jackson for neoconservatism. Jackson was a classic cold war liberal, and many prominent neoconservatives began their careers working on his staff, but Jackson's role has been

⁴ Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 71.

overshadowed by that of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the flamboyant neoconservative hero of the 1970s. Finally, Vaïsse focuses on the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), the group the neoconservatives founded to try to move the Democrats back to the center after the McGovern disaster. In doing so, Vaïsse looks at the policies the CDM advocated and finds—especially in their promotion of the defense of democracy, tendency to exaggerate the scope of external threats to the United States, and support for a strong, unilateral American military capability—the roots of the foreign policy positions the neoconservatives would argue consistently from the 1970s through the present day.

Similarly, Vaïsse brings new insights into neoconservative thinking on foreign affairs. For one, he demolishes the canard that the neoconservatives have been influenced heavily by Leo Strauss. Strauss, he shows, was a marginal influence at best; far more important was the strategist Albert Wohlstetter, whose use of worst-case analysis did much to condition the neoconservatives to overstate external threats. Furthermore, Vaïsse takes advantage of recent research on Ronald Reagan to illustrate the intellectual problems that have afflicted neoconservative foreign policy thinking for the past twenty years. The neoconservatives, Vaïsse again reminds us, believed that Reagan's policies toward the Soviet Union were insufficiently tough, especially when Reagan began during his second term to follow conciliatory policies toward Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Vaïsse credits Reagan's move with doing much to help end the cold war, but notes that the neoconservatives reacted to it with fury, as they believed that Moscow still posed an undiminished threat. The neoconservatives could not give up this view, clinging to it even as the Soviet empire, and then the Soviet Union itself, collapsed. They lost touch with reality, Vaïsse concludes, and their foreign policy thinking froze; even today, they still view the world through the alarmist lens of their cold war thinking, in which any small problem can quickly turn into an existential threat to the United States.

The best section of *Neoconservatism*, however, is the last, when Vaïsse discusses the neoconservatives' third period. Vaïsse dates the start of this phase to 1995, with the founding of the *Weekly Standard* by Irving Kristol's son, William. By then, too, generational change meant that almost all active neoconservatives had come of age as conservatives, not as former radicals or disillusioned liberals. Vaïsse argues that their sense of triumph about the end of the cold war—accompanied by a convenient amnesia about the criticisms of Reagan—gave them an exaggerated sense of US military power. Combined with their ideology of national greatness and a lack of knowledge about the parts of the world that they wanted to transform, the neoconservatives fell into an overconfident belief that Washington could impose democracy wherever it chose. Here, too, Vaïsse reminds us of some important points that have been forgotten in the past few years—especially that before 9/11 the neoconservatives paid little attention to terrorism, or even Iraq, as they saw China, North Korea, and various threats to Israel as much more serious issues.

All this changed after September 11, and Vaïsse does an excellent job of untangling the various influences at work. Contrary to what so many have claimed, the neoconservatives did not control Bush or hijack American policy. As Vaïsse notes, it was not just the neoconservatives who were promoting war with Iraq as the first step to democratizing the Islamic world—such neoliberals as Paul Berman, who saw the need to stand up to the

threat of Islamic extremism, also joined the intellectual coalition. The alliance held together until it was clear that the effort in Iraq had run into deep trouble, at which point the neoconservatives blamed inept execution of the war for its difficulties, Bush backed away from his policy of spreading democracy, and the neoliberals walked away entirely. Since then, Vaïsse notes, US foreign policy has swung toward realism, leaving the neoconservatives isolated but still well organized and making the same arguments that they have for decades. Right or wrong, he tells us, the neoconservatives have not changed very much, and are ready to take advantage of events to advance their agenda once more. “All they need is the alignment of a mobilized and interventionist public opinion and a sympathetic administration,” he tells us. “Given the cyclical character of American foreign policy, such a moment will probably present itself again in the next decades” (p. 270).

As well presented as *Neoconservatism* is, Vaïsse has mixed results when he confronts two intellectual problems. The first, common to almost every book on neoconservatism, is to define it. Vaïsse admits the near impossibility of this, and deals with it through extensive description and analysis of positions, which serves him well when he is working on the first two periods of neoconservatism. At that time, the movement was dominated by Jewish ex-radicals and liberals, which makes defining it easy. In the third period, however, the movement into the conservative movement and generational change robbed neoconservatism of much of what had made it unique, and Vaïsse seems almost to define it on an “I know it when I see it” basis.

Vaïsse’s second problem is to say who is a neoconservative. This is related to the issue of what neoconservatism is, and Vaïsse sometimes makes questionable judgments. He spends several pages on Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, who had a close relationship in the 1970s to the CDM and echoed its calls for a strong defense and support for Israel. Vaïsse calls Zumwalt a “non-Jewish neoconservative” (p. 108)—which probably would have surprised the admiral—and this opens the door for him to label as a neoconservative anyone who travels in their circles or who allies with them on particular points. Vaïsse is fairly rigorous in choosing who he claims to be a neoconservative, but sometimes it is unclear how he distinguishes a neoconservative from any other mainstream conservative of the early twenty-first century. Reuel Marc Gerecht, for example, certainly supports neoconservative positions on the Middle East and Israel in his frequent contributions to the *Weekly Standard* and *Wall Street Journal*, but it is by no means clear that he is not just a garden variety conservative who happens to support a strong defense and internationalist position. Similarly, Mark Lagon began his career working as an aide to Jeane Kirkpatrick at the American Enterprise Institute and has a strong record on human rights, but otherwise does not seem to be distinct enough from other conservative policy intellectuals to be labeled a neoconservative.

Finally, Vaïsse seems too optimistic about the neoconservatives’ future. He is correct in noting that the core of the neoconservative movement—revolving around *Commentary*, the *Weekly Standard*, and their regular contributors—remains cohesive and coherent in its thinking, but he understates impact of the losses that neoconservatives have suffered in recent years. Most important, coherence has become rigidity. The neoconservatives have neither admitted errors on Iraq—“whatever one wants to say about the conduct of the Iraq

war, *going* to war to remove Saddam Hussein in 2003 was a necessary act,” wrote historian Arthur Herman in *Commentary* in 2007—nor written any retrospectives on the lessons of the war, even as they advocate attacking Iran. This leaves them sounding much like Talleyrand’s Bourbons, who learned nothing and forgot nothing.

Separately, the neoconservatives have lost some of their most influential platforms. Even though they still are entrenched in Washington’s think tanks and the media, the transfer of the *National Interest* to the Nixon Center and the folding of the *Public Interest* took two prestigious journals away from the neoconservatives. The founding of *National Affairs*, a successor to the *Public Interest*, in 2009 has not filled the gap; as intelligent and well written as it is, it still has neither the established reputation nor the list of prestigious contributors that marked the *Public Interest*. Moreover, it must compete for attention in the cacophony of the Internet age, which makes gaining sustained public attention much more difficult than in the 1960s. Finally, the perception that the neoconservative movement has become a nepotistic enterprise, run by succeeding generations of Kristols and Podhoretzes who allow no dissent from their orthodoxies, gives plenty of ammunition to critics who advocate ignoring the neoconservatives. Indeed, Benjamin Balint, who is sympathetic to the neoconservatives, noted in his *Running Commentary* (2010), that this isolation has led to a sharp decline in the intellectual quality of neoconservative thinking.⁵

The question of the intellectual decline of neoconservatism is one that would be worth exploring further in connection to the future of the American conservative movement. The neoconservatives were at their peak when they joined the conservative movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and they brought with them the intellectual firepower of such figures as Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Jeane Kirkpatrick, James Q. Wilson, and other leading intellectuals. But their successors have not been as talented, and the absence of strong intellectual leadership from the neoconservatives has contributed to the overall decline during the past decade in the quality of conservative arguments. The story of this decline has yet to be told, and Vaïsse may want to consider this as a follow-on project. In the meantime, however, *Neoconservatism* stands as solid contribution to our understanding of recent American intellectual and political history. Justin Vaïsse is to be congratulated on his achievement.

⁵ Arthur Herman, “Why Iraq was Inevitable,” *Commentary*, July-August 2008, p. 36 (emphasis in the original).

Review by Robert G. Kaufman, Pepperdine University

“Why a Neoconservative Foreign Policy is the Worst Alternative, Except for any Other: A Critique of Justin Vaïsse’s Critique of Neoconservatism.”

Neoconservatives bring out the worst in their enemies. Especially since the Iraq War of 2003, never has so much been written about neoconservatism by so many that is so wrong. From the dwindling fringe of the American right, Pat Buchanan has assailed neoconservatives for highjacking the Republican Party.¹ From the tonier academic left, John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt have castigated neoconservatives for their decisive role in the sinister Israeli lobby, which they claim, undermines the national interest.² What passes for a Western European intelligentsia has demonized Neoconservatives with a virulence that makes Buchanan, Mearsheimer, and Walt seem temperate by comparison. For instance, Robert Fisk, the Middle Eastern correspondent for the *Independent*, accused Kenneth Adelman and Eliot Cohen, “men who have not vouchsafed their religion” of leading a hapless President Bush into a feckless war against Islam.³

Justin Vaïsse’s *Neoconservatism: A Biography of a Movement* provides a far superior critique than most.⁴ Although I disagree frequently with his analysis, historiography, and policy judgments, Vaïsse has raised the tone and the substance of the debate about who neoconservatives are and what neoconservatism means. Vaïsse conveys admirably the variety, complexity, contradictions, and evolutions in neoconservative thought, particularly in its formative days. He wisely declines to define neoconservatism with a false precision beyond the level the subject legitimately admits. Instead, he takes a historical approach, which identifies three great ages of neoconservatism, loosely related to one another but with different political and intellectual logics. Domestic concerns dominated the first age, which began in the middle 1960s. Neoconservatives ranged themselves against what they perceived to be the excesses of the Great Society, the rise of the counterculture, the radicalization of the civil rights movement, and the profoundly leftward turn of American liberalism these developments epitomized.⁵ Vaïsse rightly emphasizes the pivotal role of Senator Henry Scoop Jackson for the second great age of neoconservatism, which unsuccessfully sought to recapture the Democratic Party from the New Politics wing which

¹ Patrick J. Buchanan, *Where the Right Went Wrong: How Neoconservatives Subverted the Reagan Revolution and Highjacked the Bush Presidency* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004).

² John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

³ *Independent*, December 4, 2002.

⁴ Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 1-18.

George McGovern's candidacy had propelled to ascendance. Simultaneously, Jackson and his legion of admirers also mounted a sustained assault on the premises and policy of détente as Republican Realists Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford practiced it, as well as the Democratic Jimmy Carter's more idealistic version of it. Indomitable Cold Warriors, Jackson and those who rallied behind him advocated a policy of vigilantly containing the Soviet Union, which they considered totalitarian and insatiably expansionist because of the ideology and nature of the regime.

Unlike John Patrick Diggins and other Reagan revisionists intent on discrediting neoconservatism and distancing Reagan from it, Vaïsse accurately recounts the argument of Jeane Kirkpatrick's seminal "Dictatorships and Double Standards, which *Commentary* published in 1979.⁶ Kirkpatrick did not denigrate democracy. Nor did she embrace a version of the Nixonian version of realpolitik that slighted the importance of regime type and ideology in assessing America's opportunities and interests. On the contrary, Kirkpatrick supported democracy as a general goal of American foreign policy, just as Scoop Jackson and Ronald Reagan did. What she assailed was the Carter Administration's propensity to treat America's authoritarian right wing allies more sternly than America's totalitarian Communist adversaries. As Kirkpatrick rightly saw it, authoritarian regimes are the lesser of two evils when no plausible democratic option exists, because they are more pro-American and more amenable to benign evolutionary reform than the more repressive totalitarian Communist regimes.

Vaïsse ends his account of the second great age of neoconservatism with many neoconservatives deeming Carter hopeless, defecting to Reagan, and heavily influencing national security policy during Reagan's first term.

Vaïsse becomes more polemical, selective, and unconvincing in his coverage of neoconservatism after 1980. Even here, however, Vaïsse provides evidence or cites sources that allow the reader to reach a different conclusion than his own. For instance, Vaïsse acknowledges that every one of the five pillars of neoconservatism he finds so misguided nevertheless have deep roots in the American tradition. Although understating the number and credentials of historians and regional specialists congenial to neoconservatism --- such as Bernard Lewis, Richard Pipes, Donald Kagan, and Daniel Pipes --- Vaïsse does mention them. This gives a skeptical reader some basis to question Vaïsse's dubious claim that third generation neoconservatives lack interest and credentials in these areas. The Pipes, the Kagans, Lewis, and others whom he does not mention (Ephraim Karsh, Mary Habek, Victor Davis Hanson, John Keegan, Arthur Waldron, and others) can more than hold their own with scholars Vaïsse finds more persuasive.

Ultimately, the distorted prism through which Vaïsse views neoconservatism leads him astray in his assessment of its essence, impact, and trajectory. First, he devotes excessive

⁶ See, e.g., John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (New York: Norton, 2007); James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York, Viking, 2009).

attention to the lesser issue of neoconservatism's withering away in the Democratic Party after 1980, while neglecting the greater issue: the transformation of the Republican Party, which culminated in a large degree of convergence between neoconservatives and traditional conservatives largely prevailing today. Vaisse fails to take true measure of Ronald Reagan, the major catalyst of this transformation. He makes no mention of Reagan's watershed 1976 Presidential campaign, which began the process of moving the Republican Party away from the realpolitik of Nixon, Ford, and Kissinger to a foreign policy orientation highly compatible with that of neoconservatism.

Although he lost the nomination in 1976, Reagan won the hearts and minds of the Republican Party. Reagan's staunch opposition to détente, in terms almost identical to those of Scoop Jackson, played a major part in Reagan's success in recreating the Republican Party largely in his own image. Reagan and other prominent conservatives had begun to recognize the similarity between their foreign policy views and those of Jackson well before the 1976 campaign. Writing privately to Reagan in October 1973, William Buckley --the patron saint of American post-World War II American Conservatism and founder of its flagship Journal, *The National Review*, indentified "the young men around Scoop Jackson" as the "best pool" of talent to "expose" the perils of détente.⁷ Buckley meant Richard Perle, Charles Horner, and Paul Wolfowitz.

Then, in a series of radio addresses and speeches between 1975 and 1979, drafted in his own hand, Reagan formulated and articulated the precepts that guided his comprehensive strategy for winning the Cold War. Like Scoop Jackson, Reagan considered the Soviet Union a totalitarian state, a malevolent Leninist-driven entity with unlimited aims and ambitions, not a traditional great power, as Nixon, Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft considered it, or a defensive one driven to aggression by the arrogance of American power, as the dominant wing of the Democratic Party after 1968 considered it. Like Jackson, Reagan identified the Soviet Union's internal structure as the root cause of Soviet aggression. Like Jackson, Reagan also emphasized that the Soviet Union would remain an existential danger so long as it was a totalitarian state, so long as a handful of people made the decisions, and so long as there was no public opinion to limit the ambitions and actions of a small totalitarian leadership. Like Jackson, Reagan insisted there were no substitutes for American power to protect vital interests in geopolitically important regions. Like Jackson, Reagan's outlook on foreign affairs, his conception of the national interest, and his understanding of the necessary means to achieve it derived not from unalloyed idealism or realism, but from fixed transcendent principles grounded in Judeo-Christian morality, the Declaration of Independence, and Lincoln as he conceived of him. His support for democracy and condemnation of the moral evils of communism put him squarely at odds with realists such as Nixon and Kissinger, who were loathe to take morality and regime type into account. Reagan's emphasis on the importance of American military primacy and his belief that a devil always lurked around the corner in international relations even in the best of time because of the ineradicable flaws in human nature put him squarely at odds with liberal

⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr., *The Reagan I Knew* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 61.

multilateralists such as Jimmy Carter, whom Reagan believed exaggerated the natural harmony of interest among men and states.⁸

Defying the pessimism about America's prospects pervasive among the Democratic and Republican establishments during 1970's, Reagan also radiated tremendous confidence in the moral and economic superiority of democratic capitalism. He believed that America's best days lay ahead, that the Soviet Union was much weaker than it appeared -- that time was on the American side, not theirs. Unlike Nixon, Kissinger, Carter, and legions of academics impressed by the permanence and stability of the Soviet regime, Reagan believed that that Soviet Union had begun to encounter long-term, fundamental, economic trouble that made it highly vulnerable to economic pressure and a sustained military buildup with which Moscow could not ultimately compete.

What Neoconservatives also found compelling about Reagan was the way in which he came by his firm convictions about foreign policy, convictions to which he remained faithful for his entire political career. Even before World War II, Reagan was an internationalist. He frequently denounced appeasement of Hitler as suicidal dogma.⁹ He had been an unwavering champion of Israel since the 1940s. Unlike the old Republican right of Senator Robert Taft then and Pat Buchanan now, Reagan revered Winston Churchill --- whom he labeled the archenemy of appeasement "for doing more than any man to preserve civilization during its greatest trial."¹⁰ After World War II, Reagan concluded from his experience of the screen actors guild that Soviet totalitarianism posed as grave a threat to freedom as that of Nazi Germany under Hitler. He dedicated his political life to defeating rather than accommodating it: "The real fight with this new totalitarianism belongs properly to the forces of liberal democracy, just as did the battle with Hitler's totalitarianism. There is really no difference, except for the cast of characters."¹¹

Did Reagan's policies contribute mightily to winning the Cold War? Were his policies largely congruent with neoconservatism? Vaïsse and I agree on this point at least: The relevance of debate over Reagan's policies and significance for ending the Cold War "can hardly be overemphasized." For "if Reagan won the Cold War --- the greatest political and military confrontation of all time ---by following the neoconservative line of military assertiveness and insistence on "moral clarity," then this line gains historical validity,

⁸ Ronald Reagan, *Reagan in his Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal his Revolutionary Vision for America*, ed. Annalise and Martin Anderson (New York: Free Press, 2001), pp. 23-218.

⁹ Ronald Reagan to Victor Krulak, June 6, 1983, (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA (hereafter cited as RRPL), Presidential Handwriting File, series 2).

¹⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Speech at Westminster Cold War Memorial," (Fulton, Mo, November 19, 1990, RRPL).

¹¹ Ronald Reagan, "How Do You Fight Communism?" *Fortnight*, 1951, p. 13.

taking its place alongside the heroic stance of Churchill and offering a model of “regime change applicable to other countries (such as Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Libya).”¹²

As Vaïsse concedes, Reagan adopted many neoconservative foreign policy ideas during his first term. He claims, however, that Reagan wisely distanced himself from hardliners during his second term. According to the school of thought that Vaïsse embraces (whose ranks include James Mann, John Patrick Diggins, Jack Matlock, and Beth Fischer), the Soviet Union fell mainly for internal reasons, with Gorbachev the individual deserving the most credit. These authors regard Reagan’s most important, albeit secondary, contribution as his willingness to abandon his belligerent policies and compromise with Gorbachev.¹³ Hence, Vaïsse writes, “it would be better to avoid Neoconservative bluster in favor of openness, engagement, and dialogue with hostile regimes.”¹⁴

This interpretation ill fits the evidence. True, Reagan and Margaret Thatcher (who along with Pope John Paul, II, curiously receives no mention in Vaïsse’s book) recognized sooner than anyone that Gorbachev was a different kind of leader. As it turned out, prominent neoconservatives such as Norman Podhoretz wrongly worried that Reagan had misread both Gorbachev and the significance of the changes that Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika unwittingly had wrought in precipitating the Soviet regime’s collapse. Yet that mistake hardly belonged exclusively to neoconservatives, a crucial fact Vaïsse neglects to mention. The realists Vaïsse seems to admire --- Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft --- also challenged as naïve Reagan’s negotiations with Gorbachev and the Administration’s desire for a treaty that would eliminate intermediate ranged nuclear weapons in Europe.¹⁵

Similarly, liberal intellectuals and policymakers derided Ronald Reagan’s prophetic forecast of the Soviet Union’s demise which he made to the British Parliament in June 1982. In response, Columbia University Professor Serwyn Bialer, one of the most eminent Sovietologists of his day, pronounced that “the Soviet Union is not now nor will it be for the next decades in the throes of a true systemic crisis, for it boasts enormous unused reserves of political and social stability that suffice to endure its deepest difficulties” Writing in 1989, Lester Thurow, professor of economics at MIT, asserted that the Soviet Union “was a country whose economic achievements bear comparison with those of the United States.”¹⁶

¹² Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, p. 188.

¹³ Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*; Jack Matlock, *Superpower Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray --- and How to Return to Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Beth Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, p. 188.

¹⁵ Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, pp. 48-50.

¹⁶ Robert G. Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine* (Lexington and London: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), p. 119.

Also, virtually all neoconservatives and conservative hardliners on the Soviet Union realized, in retrospect, that Reagan's fundamental policy toward the Soviet Union remained faithful to the imperatives of National Security Decision Directive-75 (NSDD-75), which the President signed in January 17, 1983, and which the historian of Russia and arch-Cold Warrior Richard Pipes had a major hand in drafting. NSDD- 75 called not for learning to live with the Soviet Union as a permanent state, but for promoting "the change in the Soviet Union toward a more pluralistic order."¹⁷ This Reagan sought to achieve by applying unrelenting, comprehensive, economic, military, and political pressure on the Soviet Regime.¹⁸

It deconstructs Reagan beyond recognition and vastly exaggerates the differences between him and hawks of all varieties to say, as Vaïsse and James Mann do, that Reagan "dissociated himself from hardliners" and "switched from a bellicose policy" to a more "realistic" policy of peace.¹⁹ When circumstances changed during Reagan's second term, he adjusted his policies, but not the premises underlying them. He responded positively to the changes in the Soviet regime during Gorbachev's tenure. Keep in mind, however, that Gorbachev and the Soviet Union agreed to end the Cold War not on their terms, but Ronald Reagan's. American pressure on the Soviet Union did not abate at any point during the Reagan presidency, despite his view that Gorbachev was a different type of Soviet leader who could facilitate the implosion of the regime. Reagan refused to abandon SDI or the Zero Option; Gorbachev capitulated. American defense spending continued to rise, peaking at \$302 billion in FY 1988. The United States continued to aid freedom fighters, draining Soviet resources in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. From start to finish, Reagan also kept up the intensity of his moral challenge to the Soviet Union. In June 1987, over the objection of his realist advisors, Ronald Reagan called on Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall, which he scorned as the symbol of Soviet totalitarianism.²⁰

Vaïsse's dovish interpretation of Reagan's second terms also contradicts Reagan's understanding of himself. Summing up his foreign policy legacy to students at the

¹⁷ National Security Decision Directive 75 (NSDD) 75, January 19, 1983, RRPL ; NSSD 11-82, August 21, 1982; Richard Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 125-211.

¹⁸ For several excellent studies not mentioned by Vaïsse, which capture the real Reagan, particularly on the subject of the Cold War, see Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution: 1980-1989* (New York: Crown, 1989); Martin Anderson and Annelise Anderson, *Reagan's Secret War: The Untold Story of his Fight to Save the World from Nuclear Disaster* (New York: Crown, 2009); Paul Kengor, *Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York: Reagan Books, 2006); Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994); Dinesh D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary President* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, pp. 196-97.

²⁰ Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine*, pp. 113-23.

University of Virginia on December 16, 1988, Reagan welcomed the improvement in Soviet American relations, but urged Americans to “keep our heads” and keep “our skepticism because ‘fundamental differences remain. He attributed that improvement to a policy of firmness, not conciliation: “Plain talk, strong defenses, vibrant allies, and readiness to use American power when American power was needed helped prompt the reappraisal that the Soviet leaders have taken in their previous policies. Even more, Western resolve demonstrated that the hardline advocated by some within the Soviet Union would be fruitless, just as our economic success have set a shining example.” Reagan distinguished sharply his policies from the more conciliatory policies of his predecessors during the 1970s: “We need to recall that in the years of détente we tended to forget the greatest weapon the democracies have in their struggle is public candor: the truth. We must never do this again. It’s not an act of belligerence to speak of the fundamental difference between totalitarianism and democracy; it is a moral imperative.... Throughout history, we see evidence that adversaries negotiate seriously with democratic nations when they know democracies harbor no illusions about their adversaries.”²¹

By the end of his Administration, Reagan has also shifted away from his initial inclination to back America’s right wing allies unconditionally as it became apparent in El Salvador, the Philippines, Korea and Chile that liberal democracy was a plausible alternative to either authoritarianism or communism.²² He hailed “the democratic and free market revolutions” that occurred “in the last eight years of our foreign relations. He finished his Presidency with “a new sense of excitement, even perhaps felt by those who lived in Jefferson’s time: a sense of new possibilities for the idea of popular government. Only this time, it is not just a single nation at issue: It is the whole world where popular government might flourish and prosper.”²³

Neither George Shultz nor his realist critics such as Richard Nixon classify Shultz as “realist” the way Vaisse does. On the contrary, Shultz chose neoconservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz and Eliot Abrams to serve him in key positions during his tenure as Secretary of State. Shultz also disparaged criticism of neoconservative influence on President George W. Bush. “I do not know how you define neoconservatism,” he told Daniel Henninger of the *Wall Street Journal* ... “but I think it is associated with trying to spread open political systems and democracy. I recall President Reagan’s Westminster speech in 1982 --- that communism would be consigned to the ash heap of history. And what happened. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of countries that were classified as free or mostly free increased by 50 percent. Open political and economic systems have been gaining ground,

²¹ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks and a Question and Answer Session at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, December 16, 1988, RRPL.

²² Peter Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1994), pp. 412-432; George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), pp. 608-42, 969-75.

²³ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question and Answer Session at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.”

and there's good reason for it. They work better. I don't know if it is neoconservative or what it is, but I think it is what is happening. I am for it." ²⁴ Furthermore, as Henninger points out, neoconservative did not originate the Bush Doctrine's most controversial tenet, preemption; George Schultz did during the Reagan Administration.

Like Reagan, Shultz also has a long and consistent record of supporting Israel and rejecting the arguments of those who view the Arab-Israeli conflict through the lens of moral equivalence. "The United States supports Israel not because of favoritism based on political pressure or influence, but because both parties and virtually all our national leaders agree with the American peoples view that supporting Israel is politically sound and morally just," Shultz opined in the forward of Abraham Foxman's *Deadly Lies, The Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control*. "Those who disagree with those policies... seem to assume they could not be wrong, and so they contend that the American people and its leadership must have been deceived, time and again, by Israel and its supporters.... at every level, those who blame Israel and its Jewish supporters for U.S policies they do not support are wrong. They are wrong because to begin with, support for Israel is in our best interest."²⁵

So Vaïsse and other critics of neoconservatism may legitimately disagree with neoconservatives for being wrong about the Soviet Union, Israel, democracy, or how the Cold War ended. What they cannot legitimately do is use the second term of Reagan or George Shultz as a club to make their case. Francis Fukuyama, an apostate from neoconservatism and now hostile to it, comes closer to the mark in this assessment of Reagan's relationship to neoconservatism:

Of the two Presidents in question (Reagan and Bush), Ronald Reagan in my view more clearly qualifies as a neoconservative. Much as his critics are loath to admit it, Ronald Reagan was an intellectual of sorts: in the first decade of his career, all he had to offer were arguments and ideas about communism and the free market, American values, and the defects of liberal orthodoxy. He also bore a similarity to the City College crowd insofar as he came to his anticommunism from the left; he started out as a liberal Democrat and an admirer of Franklin Roosevelt and was labor leader as president of the Screen Actors Guild. His insight about the nature of communism seems to have arisen as a result of his struggles with communists or communist sympathizers in Hollywood... He believed firmly that the internal character of regimes defined their external behavior and was initially unwilling to compromise with the Soviet Union because he saw more clearly than most more its internal contradictions and weakness.²⁶

²⁴ Daniel Henninger, "Father of the Bush Doctrine: George Shultz on Pre-emption and the Revolt of the Generals," *Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2006, A8.

²⁵ Abraham Foxman, *The Deadliest Lies: The Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 11-18.

²⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 45-6.

It is hard to see, too, how Gorbachev and a policy of conciliation deserve more credit for ending the Cold War in America's favor than Reagan and his policy of vigilance. The restoration of American power to which Ronald Reagan contributed vitally gave the Soviet Union little choice but to take the risk of choosing a reformer such as Gorbachev, who recognized that the Soviet Union could not compete against a rejuvenated, self-confident United States until it liberalized at home and persuaded a more conciliatory policy abroad.

Nor was Gorbachev a true democrat. He aimed only to reform communism, not to abolish it. His regime began to implode under the cumulative effects of decades of U.S. containment of Soviet ambitions, Reagan's confrontational policies, which intensified American pressure at a critical juncture, and the inherent contradictions in the Soviet regime. Whereas Gorbachev did not intend the breathtaking collapse of Communism that his domestic reforms unleashed, Ronald Reagan dedicated his political life to achieving that outcome.

The more conciliatory policies critics proffered as an alternative to Reagan's prolonged rather than hastened the dismal decade of détente. The Soviet Union responded to such conciliatory policies, which the Nixon Ford, and Carter Administration pursued, by intensifying its massive military buildup and interventionism in the underdeveloped world, which culminated in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Conversely, Reagan's policies of relentlessly exploiting Soviet vulnerabilities helped enormously to convince Russian leaders that the Soviet Union could no longer outbuild or outbully the United States. Both George Shultz and Alexander Bessmertnykh, former foreign minister of the USSR, cited Reagan's military buildup and SDI in particular for hastening the Soviet Union's collapse.²⁷ So William Kristol and Robert Kagan have a compelling claim in calling what they advocate a Neo-Reaganite foreign policy.²⁸

Vaïsse underplays the significant linkages between Reaganism and the emergence of third generation conservatism by slighting how the character of the Republican Party and the nature of conservatism changed during the 1990's. When Bill Kristol launched the *Weekly Standard* in 1995, neoconservatism and *National Review*, the flagship of traditional conservatism began largely to resemble one another on economic, domestic, and foreign policy; national security; and moral/cultural issues. These converging conservatisms also meshed well with the Republican Party's mainstream as it evolved after Reagan,

Newt Gingrich's tempestuous but seminal tenure as Speaker of the House of Representatives also facilitated this convergence. Indeed, Gingrich --- whom Vaïsse mentions only in passing --- is a pivotal figure bridging Reagan's Republican Party with its current incarnation: a welcome place for neoconservatives and ideas associated with them.

²⁷ Richard Pipes, "Misinterpreting the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no 1. (January/February 1995), pp. 154-60.

²⁸ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Torward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (July/August 1996), pp. 18-32.

Gingrich and the Republican Party he led during the 1990s repudiated the isolationism of Pat Buchanan, who finished the decade on the fringe of American politics after his two failed Presidential campaigns. On the North American Free Trade Treaty and the extension of NATO to Eastern Europe, issues dear to neoconservatives, President Clinton received greater support from Republicans than from his fellow liberal Democrats. Nor, after a brief revival during the administration of George Herbert Walker Bush, did Republican realists in the tradition of Nixon and Kissinger reassert their dominance in the party they enjoyed before 1980. Gingrich's views on foreign policy and national security largely mirrored Reagan's and those espoused in the *National Review* and the *Weekly Standard*.²⁹ Vaisse also ignores the significance of the Christian right, whose growing prominence in the Republican party also shifted it in a direction conducive to a neoconservative dispositions on a wide range of issues, including national security, foreign policy, the rejection of moral relativism, and Israel. Third generation neoconservatives --- virtually all of them Republicans themselves --- found the party largely hospitable even before 9/11.

The defects of Vaisse's analysis become most pronounced in his treatment of third generation neoconservatives and the Iraq war, Here Vaisse casts aside the balance and erudition that characterized much of his treatment of first and second generation neoconservatism. He omits as one of his five tenants of neoconservatism the categorical rejection of moral relativism emblematic of all the most robust forms of American conservatism, including neoconservatism. Perhaps he could have paid greater attention than just a few pages to the thought and policy prescriptions of the theocons (a branch to which I belong as a lesser member along with the more illustrious Michael Novak, George Weigel, Richard John Neuhaus, and William Bennett).³⁰ What unites the theocons, the Straussian wing of the neocons, Reaganites, and George W. Bush is the belief that Judeo-Christian morality refracted through the lens of a Judeo-Christian notion of prudence ought to serve as a guide for evaluating relative degrees of moral and geopolitical evil in the world.³¹

Generally, conservatives who view the defense of stable liberal democracy as an important national interest ground their views in the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln, their reading of the Bible, natural law, and the Founding Fathers rather than the radicalism of French Revolution or the progressivism and historicism of Woodrow Wilson, who distained

²⁹ See, e.g., Newt Gingrich, *To Save America* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2010).

³⁰ See, e.g., Michael Novak, *The Theory of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); George Weigel, *Faith, Reason and War Against Jihadism; A Call to Action* (New York: Doubleday, 2007); William Bennett, *The Last Best Hope (Volume II: From a World at War to the Triumph of Freedom)* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

³¹ For a fine study of this aspect of Reagan, see Paul Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (New York: Regan Books, 2004).

the fixed principles of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.³² Hence, pro-democracy conservatives of all varieties never embraced the multilateral presumptions of Woodrow Wilson, or the liberal multilateralists such as Joseph Nye, regnant in the Democratic party since 1968.³³ Hence, today's American conservatives typically consider the United States not just another nation, but the indispensable one in waging what conservatives regard as the perennial fight between freedom and tyranny. This categorical rejection of moral relativism accounts for Reagan's evil empire speech, his rousing defense of democratic capitalism, and his belief in fixed categories of good and evil which George W. Bush conveyed unabashedly in the Bush Doctrine and his State of the Union Speech identifying the "Axis of Evil".

These fixed moral principles also account largely for why not just neoconservatives, but Americans in general and Republicans in particular, overwhelmingly favor embattled democratic allies such Israel versus the Palestinian authority and tyrannies that menace the Jewish state. According to a Gallup Poll released in February, 2010, 67 percent of Americans have a favorable view of Israel, compared to only 15 percent who hold a favorable view of the Palestinian Authority. According to the same poll, Republicans favor Israel by a whopping 85 percent, compared to 60 percent for Independents, and only 48 percent for Democrats.³⁴

The neoconservative notion of fixed moral categories and its applicability to identifying America's friends and foes resonates deeply in the psyche and policies of the post-9/11 Republican Party, which finds neoconservatives in its mainstream across a spectrum of core issues. Even with controversy still raging over the Iraq War of 2003, the Republican Party has experienced no revival of its dormant, miniscule Isolationist win. Nor have so-called realists of the Chuck Hegel, James Baker, III, or Brent Scowcroft variety experienced any significant revival. On the contrary, Senator John McCain, the Republican Presidential candidate in 2008, championed a foreign policy and national security strategy highly congenial to those associated with neoconservatives. One of the major reasons Vaisse fails to distinguish what he terms the assertive nationalism of Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld from third generation neoconservatism is that their similarities overwhelm their marginal differences. What neoconservatism stands for --- even calling it something else --- thus has a much wider and deeper base in the Republican Party than Vaisse realizes when he estimates that it has a future merely as a minority school of thought.³⁵

³² For an authoritative study of this dimension of Woodrow Wilson, which places him miles apart from neoconservatives, see Ronald J. Pestritto, *Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

³³ See, e.g., Joseph Nye, Jr. *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Joseph Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

³⁴ Gallup Poll, February 1-3, 2010, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/126116/Canada-Places-First-Image-Contest-Iran-Last.aspx>

³⁵ Vaisse, *Neoconservatism*, p. 279.

Vaïsse's rendition of the five tenants of neoconservatism also makes it sound more marginal and untenable than it really is. This line of criticism applies most forcibly to Vaïsse's defense of his book during an event at the Brookings Institution, elaborating on some of its themes. Why, most egregiously, did Vaïsse choose the loaded, incendiary term of "militarism" to categorize one of the five core tenants of neoconservatism?³⁶ This is untenable. The pejorative term "militarism" hardly applies to describe neoconservatism based on any rational measure, including America's post-World War II experience. Military spending as a percentage of GDP peaked under Truman at 13.1% of the GDP, averaged more than 9% under Eisenhower, over 8% under Kennedy, 6.6% under Reagan, and 4.2% under George W. Bush.³⁷ The United States can easily achieve and sustain its current level of military predominance indefinitely and objectively, so long as Americans have the political will to do it.³⁸

True, neoconservatives unabashedly believe that the greatest dangers to the United States arise not from vigilance or the arrogance of American power, but from unpreparedness and an excessive reluctance to fight. So, they insist, American statesmen ought to strive to maintain what Churchill called "overwhelming power," with plenty to spare for unforeseen contingencies.³⁹ Neoconservatives have a much stronger case in their favor than Vaïsse indicates and implies. American primacy and the willingness to use American power will deter most aggressors most of the time and defeats them with less cost or risk if deterrence fails. Or as Churchill put it: "If you are going to do things on a narrow margin, one way or another, you are going to have war. But if you have five or 10 to one on one side, then you are going to have an opportunity to make a settlement that will heal the wounds of the world. Let us be the blessed union of power and justice."⁴⁰

Vaïsse correctly identifies regime analysis as a major tenant of neoconservatism in the realm of foreign policy. Yet he simplifies to the point of caricature. For one thing, Neoconservatives are on more solid ground than their critics in their insistence that all

³⁶ The Brookings Institution, *Neoconservatism and the Future of American Foreign Policy*, Washington, D.C., May 13, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2010/0513_neoconservatism/20100513_neoconservatism.pdf, pp. 1-64.

³⁷ Neoconservatives are not alone in making the case for the desirability and possibility of sustaining American hegemony. See, e.g., Steven J. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

³⁸ Even critic of neoconservatives, such as the once and future declinist Paul Kennedy, concede that point. See Paul Kennedy, "The Eagle Has Landed," *Financial Times*, February 2, 2002, pp. I, IV. See also Josef Joffe, "America: The Default Power," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88, no.5, (September/October 2009), pp. 21-35.

³⁹ Winston Churchill, "Dictators and the Covenant, in Robert Rhodes James, ed., *Winston Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963*, vol. 6, pp. 5717-21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

regimes do not behave alike. Consider this devastating rebuttal the French political scientist Raymond Aron offered to the so-called realist notion that states pursue the same kinds of foreign policy:

Is it true that states, whatever their regime, pursue the same kind of foreign policy? This statement is admirably ambiguous. Are the foreign policies of Napoleon, Hitler, and Stalin of the same kind as those of Louis XVI, Adenauer, or Nicholas II? If one answers yes, the proposition is incontestable, but it is not very instructive. The features which all diplomatic-strategic behavior have in common are formal; they come down to selfishness, to the calculation of forces, to a variable mixture of hypocrisy and cynicism. But the differences of degree are such that a Napoleon or Hitler suffices with the help of revolutionary circumstances to change the course of history.⁴¹

Neoconservatives are right to argue that vital moral and practical distinctions exist between stable liberal democracies and totalitarian regimes. Regime type and ideology account not only positively for the democratic peace so beneficial to America's security, but negatively for the most menacing threats against the United States. American statesmen rightly identified the militaristic regime of Kaiser Wilhelm II as the root cause of World War I, Nazi totalitarianism and imperial Japanese militarism as the root causes of World War II, Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime as the root cause of both Iraq Wars, and the militant Iranian regime as the root cause of the gathering danger Iran poses for the United States and its allies.⁴²

Of course, the United States cannot court enormous risks everywhere, on any pretext. Vaïsse makes a legitimate point that some neoconservatives such as William Kristol and Robert Kagan tend to underestimate the obstacles to promoting stable, liberal democracy; just as realists and liberal multilateralists have often exaggerated them. This criticism of Kagan and Kristol does not apply, however, to most neoconservatives. Consider Charles Krauthammer, who has warned that unbridled democratic globalism risks squandering America's resources and morale imprudently on peripheral interests that may be difficult to achieve. For Krauthammer and others of his inclination, including this writer, the United States must give priority to defending and extending the democratic zone of peace in East Asia, Europe and the Middle East. These constitute the major power centers of the world, the regions where the absence of liberty could prove to be most perilous. An unfettered worldwide crusade for democracy not grounded in the priorities and limits that geopolitics impose would endanger the unique capacity of the United States to perform the most vital task for American self interests, rightly understood: preventing hegemonic or other dangerous threats from emerging in the most vital geopolitical power centers. According to Krauthammer, the United States should vigorously support the extension of freedom and the democratic zone of peace, but not by threat, employment, or commitment

⁴¹ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Baker Fox (Malabar, Florida: Robert Krieger, 1981), pp. 597-8.

⁴² Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine*, pp. 88-90.

of American military power, except in rare circumstances where minimal force with minimal risk and with a prompt and certain exit strategy can avert mass murder or genocide.⁴³

The position of neoconservatives on spreading democracy is likewise more sophisticated than Vaïsse allows. First, neoconservatives deem crucial the adjectives 'stable' and 'liberal' for the democratic zone of peace to operate. Fareed Zakaria, Jack Snyder, and others have warned correctly that illiberal democracies such as theocracy in Algeria or the militant mullahs of Iran can pose a significant threat to freedom and to their neighbors.⁴⁴ Second, third generation neoconservatives do not reject, but take heed of Jeane Kirkpatrick's warning that premature efforts to choose a stable liberal democratic option when no viable one exists can lead to worse rather than better results. What they disagree with Vaïsse and others about is precisely how this warning applied to the situation the United States faced in the aftermath of 9/11. As Vaïsse rightly notes, neoconservatives advocated war with Saddam not because Iraq was a tyranny, but because they perceived Saddam's regime to be a gathering threat to America's national interest. Many informed people thought then, and still argue now, that strategies of containment and deterrence effective against other types of actors would not suffice against Saddam, given his belligerence, propensity for running enormous risks, and his determination sooner or later to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

Those who supported the war in Iraq deemed regime change as the most effective way to remedy the root cause of the conflict. This principle is not unique to neoconservatives, but has long and distinguished pedigree in the American way of war. As military historians such as Victor Davis Hanson have demonstrated, the most just and durable peace settlements usually occur when wars have decisive outcomes, which eradicate the root cause of aggression.⁴⁵

One of the major causes of World War II was the failure of the treaty of Versailles to address the root cause of World War I. By October 1918, German generals knew they were beaten, and forced the Kaiser to abdicate, expecting that a democratic German government would obtain more lenient peace terms. It did not appear to the German people that defeat was inevitable or imminent as the German army retreated in good order and German territory remained unscathed. When the German people reacted with outrage to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, German generals did not admit Germany's defeat or the responsibility of the Kaiser's regime for bringing about the war. Instead, they

⁴³ Charles Krauthammer, *Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000); Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: Norton, 2004).

⁴⁵ Victor Davis Hanson, *The Soul of Battle: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001); Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3d ed. (New York: Free Press, 1988).

mendaciously blamed the democratic Weimar Republic for “stabbing Germany in the back.” The Allies’ unwillingness to enforce the Treaty of Versailles compounded the mistake of letting the Kaiser off the hook in the first place. Hitler exploited that stab in the back myth which facilitated his rise to power, with all its horrendous consequences.

Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill did not make the same mistake during World War II. They settled for nothing less than unconditional surrender and total defeat of the Nazi and Imperial Japanese regimes, in a manner so devastating that the vanquished could not deny it. They demanded democratic regime change in Germany, Japan, Italy, and Vichy France, among other places, and determined to enforce it in order to create the conditions of a rightly ordered peace.

One of the major causes of the Iraq War was not neoconservative machinations, but the ambiguous outcome of the Gulf War of 1990-1991, which left Saddam in power. President George W. Bush and those who supported his decision believed that a just and durable peace in the Middle East required Saddam’s total defeat. Likewise, the Cold War could not end until the collapse of the Soviet Union’s malevolent regime that caused it.

Sometimes, the United States has had to settle prudently for less than total victory. During the Cold War, nuclear weapons precluded defeating the Soviet Union directly by traditional military means. The Korean War of 1950-53 is a compelling example of when fighting for less than total victory was a more prudential alternative than either capitulation or all out war. These are exceptions, however, to the strong presumption of the United States to wage its wars with the object of achieving total victory and imposing democratic regime change to remedy the root cause of the conflict. In this crucial respect, the way in which neoconservatives conceived of the ends and means of the Iraq War of 2003 fit well within the mainstream of the American tradition.

As for Vaïsse’s objection to the neoconservative position on multilateralism versus unilateralism, skepticism about the efficacy of collective security organizations has a long tradition among foreign policy realists of all varieties, including Republican internationalists such as Henry Cabot Lodge, Richard Nixon, and Henry Kissinger.⁴⁶ The United States had significantly more international support for the 2003 War in Iraq than the Nixon Administration did when it ordered an airlift to resupply Israel during the Yom Kippur War ---- an airlift for which every one of our NATO allies in Europe refused U.S. overflight rights until Congress bought off Portugal at the 11th hour to allow U.S. transport aircraft to fly over the Azores. Likewise, traditional conservatives share neoconservative skepticism about the efficacy of collective security systems and soft power as substitutes for hard American power and the willingness to use it.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 3-25, 53-5; Arnold Wolfers, “Collective Defense versus Collective Security,” in Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), pp. 181-204.

Nor is neoconservative opposition to multilateralism or soft power categorical. Conservatives in general and third generation neoconservatives in particular favor achieving as broad a coalition as possible that fits the mission rather than subordinating the mission to a multilateral consensus that often occurs, if at all, at the lowest common denominator of ineffective action. Scoop Jackson during the 1960's, Daniel Patrick Moynihan during the 1970's, and Jeane Kirkpatrick during the 1980s articulated a position on multilateralism versus coalitions of the willing identical in tone and content to the position that John Bolton, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Third Generation Conservatives have staked out since 9/11.⁴⁷

The dismal history of American endeavors to create collective security organizations should place a heavy burden of proof on those such as Vaïsse who criticize neoconservatives for their distrust of the United Nation as the arbiter of international legitimacy on when and how to use force. During the interwar years, the League of Nations failed completely to stop either Nazi or Imperial Japanese aggression that culminated in World War II. The United Nations has not worked much better. Typically, great power rivalry generates gridlock in the Security Council, rendering the UN impotent --- unable either to identify or respond effectively to major aggression. The two exceptions --- Korea in 1950 and Iraq in 1990 -91 --- prove this rule. The United States succeeded in enlisting the authority of the United Nations in resisting North Korean aggression only because the Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council for its refusal to recognize the People's Republic of China. Neither the Soviet Union nor any of the other powers with the veto on the Security Council ever repeated that mistake. Likewise, the apparent success of the United Nations in reversing Iraq's conquest of Kuwait occurred only because of a rare convergence of circumstances: Iraq had perpetrated a brazen act of aggression against a sovereign state. The impending collapse of the Soviet Union and the international fallout from the student massacre at Tiananmen Square gave Moscow and Beijing a powerful incentive to retain American goodwill; hence neither vetoed the UN action. Residual fear over German unification and the potential consequences made the French less obstreperous than usual.⁴⁸

Since 1991, the United Nations has reverted to the norm: gridlock and an obstruction to decisive action. Witness the lamentable results of the UN's dealings with Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Iran. Also, hypocrisy abounds in the criticism of America's penchant for unilateralism coming from the French and other who often resort to multilateral institutions to constrain American power rather than to generate any muscular

⁴⁷ Robert G. Kaufman, *Henry M. Jackson: A Life in Politics* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000), pp. 133-6.; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, with Suzanne Weaver, *A Dangerous Place* (Boston: Little Brown, 1978); Allan Gerson, *The Kirkpatrick Mission: Diplomacy without Apology at the United Nations, 1981-1985* (New York: Free Press, 1991); John Bolton, *Surrender is not an Option* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2007).

⁴⁸ For an excellent account of the UN's dreadful history in the realm of international security and human rights, see Joshua Muravchik, *The Future of the United Nations: Understanding the Past to Chart a Way Forward* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 2005), pp. 117-72.

consensus.⁴⁹ As William Shawcross demonstrated in the case of Iraq, for example, France had no intention of joining any effort use force against Saddam after 9/11, but led the Bush Administration on in the hopes that the UN would thwart American action.⁵⁰ One major point of contention between the neoconservatives and Vaïsse is whether the United States has been more wrong than right in disputes it has had with its Western European allies since 9/11. Vaïsse assumes yes. Why? For decades, European appeasement of Middle East dictators produced only futility. It failed miserably with Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The European approach of negotiation and conciliation without confrontation has yielded nothing but defiance from a militant Iran bent on developing nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. Events also have confounded the European alternative to the American approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Neoconservative admonitions about the perils of subordinating American foreign policy interests to multilateral institutions have wide and deep roots in the American tradition. Recall George Washington's warning against the danger of American commitments at variance with American interests.⁵¹ The record of the twentieth century has demonstrated that the vitality of a democratic alliance system such as NATO is a more permanent interest than even the wisest of the Founders contemplated. Yet no nation, no alliance, no international organization, can have a veto on American action. This holds especially true when the French (since De Gaulle) and others have employed international institutions in pursuit of their misguided balancing strategies against a United States which has protected Europe from its enemies and Europeans from themselves.

Vaïsse's flawed depiction of the Bush Doctrine also prejudices the case rather than debating it on the merits. The first pillar of the Bush Doctrine is not that democracies do not "seek wars," but that stable liberal democracies do not fight one another; the corollary is that certain types of regimes are more dangerous than others, especially those animated by noxious ideologies and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. Nor, contrary to Vaïsse's account, did Bush claim that American security problems in the Middle East would disappear with the advent of stable liberal democracy. He did claim that such an advent would substantially diminish the frequency and severity of America's problems. Was President Bush fatuous to think that democratic regime change as he envisaged it would produce, say, a much less menacing Iraq or Iran? The contingent success of the Bush Administration in creating the possibility of an open Iraqi regime decent to its citizens and its neighbors suggests otherwise. Would not the world and Iranians profit enormously from a more benign type of Iranian regime than this one? ⁵²

⁴⁹ Jean-Francois Revel, *Anti-Americanism*, Translated. Diarmid Cammell. (New York: Encounter Books, 2003).

⁵⁰ William Shawcross, *Allies: The U.S., Britain, Europe, and the War in Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003).

⁵¹ Patrick Garrity and Matthew J. Spalding, *A Sacred Union of Citizens: George Washington's Farewell Address and America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).

⁵² Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine*, pp. 1-7.

The second pillar of the Bush Doctrine is not unilateralism, but the need to consider using force preemptively rather than reactively against certain types of threats emanating from certain type of actors. Again, the Administration's position rests on a more solid foundation --- morally, historically, and practically --- than Vaïsse's dismissive tone implies. Aquinas's traditional and superior formulation of just war theory was silent on the question of whether to use force as a first or last resort.⁵³ There is, according to traditional Christian just war theory, no presumption against war that one routinely finds in modern religious and secular versions of just war theory.⁵⁴ Aquinas and the traditionalists are wiser than their successors for these deliberate omissions. In the Anglo-American tradition, a formidable pantheon of scholars and statesmen also have defended the doctrine of preemption or preventive war under certain circumstances: John Locke, Edmund Burke, John Quincy Adams, Theodore Roosevelt, Margaret Thatcher, and, of course, Winston Churchill.⁵⁵

They are right: Whether the United States resorts to force sooner rather than later is a prudential judgment rather than a categorical one. It depends on the gravity of the danger, the probability of its realization, the availability of alternative means, and the prospects for success.⁵⁶

Debate rages still over whether the Iraq War of 2003 was a sound application of the Bush Doctrine or the height of folly in principle and practice. Vaïsse has pronounced "Bush's failure in Iraq" also the failure of the finest minds who advised him, "as well as the failure of neoconservatism."⁵⁷ Yet that is hardly self-evident. History may well treat President Bush and his supporters more kindly than critics such as Vaïsse for reasons that Victor Davis Hanson set forth with his customary power and eloquence:

So was Iraq worth the cost? ... In some sense, that was asked post facto of every war--- whether it is the Spanish Civil War, World War II, Korea or Vietnam. The truth about Iraq is that, for all the tragedy and loss, the U.S. military performed a miracle. After nearly 7 years, a constitutional government endures in that country. It is too often forgotten that all 23 of the writs for war passed by Congress in 2002 --- from enforcing

⁵³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Revised by Daniel J. Sullivan, Vol. II (Chicago and London: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), pp. 577-81.

⁵⁴ James Turner Johnson, "Just War as it Was and Is," *First Things* 149 (January 2005), pp. 14-24.

⁵⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Michael Gove, "The Very British Roots of Neoconservatism and its Lessons for British Conservatives," in Irwin Stelzer, ed., *The Neocon Reader* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), pp. 269-88.

⁵⁶ Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine*, pp. 91-3.

⁵⁷ Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, p. 3.

the Gulf I resolutions and stopping the Destruction of the Kurds and Marsh Arabs, to preventing the Iraqi state promotion of terrorism, ending suicide bounties on the West Bank and stopping Iraq from invading or attacking neighbors or trying to acquire WMD -- -- were met and satisfied by the U.S. military. It is too often forgotten that, as a result, Libya gave up its WMD program; Dr. Kahn's nuclear franchise was shut down; Syria left Lebanon; and American troops in Saudi Arabia, put there as protection against Saddam, were withdrawn. Perhaps a peep about some of that --- especially the idea that in an oil short world, Saddam Hussein might have been more or less free to do what he pleased in Iraq. (The verdict is out on Iran; playing a genocidal Hussein regime against it was morally bankrupt. Currently Shiites participating in consensual government could be destabilizing to Iran in the long run as Iranian terrorists are to Iraq in the short run.) Furthermore, the destruction of al-Qeada in Iraq helped to discredit the entire idea of radical Sunni Islamic terrorists and the loss of thousands of foreign radical Islamists in Iraq had a positive effect on U.S. security ---- despite the fallacy we created them out of thin air by being in Iraq. Kurdistan was, prior to 2003, faced with the continual threat of genocidal attacks by Saddam Hussein; today it is a booming economy. All that would have been impossible without U.S. intervention.⁵⁸

Despite the serious flaws of book, which mount steeply as it progresses, Vaïsse deserves two cheers for moving the conversation in the right direction. He has transcended the conspiracy theories and demonization of neoconservatives so rampant across the Atlantic to initiate a richer, more civilized debate about how best to serve America's national interest in dangerous world. That is no small achievement.

⁵⁸ Victor Davis Hanson, "Iraq Through the Looking Glass, *National Review Online*, September 1, 2010, <http://www.nationalreview.com/blogs/print/245340>.

Review by Daniel Sargent, University of California, Berkeley

What is neoconservatism? When did it begin and how did it evolve? Did it precipitate the Iraq War? These will remain difficult questions into the future, but Justin Vaïsse's terrific new book gives us both insight and perspective on an elusive subject. As Vaïsse presents it, the history of neoconservatism resembles less a genealogy of roots and veins than the movement of quicksilver. Flitting from left to right, from domestic to international preoccupations, across arenas of thought and action, neoconservatism has left complex trails -- trails so twisted, in fact, as to raise the question of whether neoconservatism even has a history that can be written with much coherence.

Fortunately, Vaïsse does not brush over his subject's contradictions. Instead, he offers us a schema that provides some clarity. He proposes that we think of neoconservatism's history as a progression across three distinct "ages." The first of these, he tells us, emerged in the mid-1960s and in the most surprising of places: in Berkeley, California, where student radicals challenged the shibboleths of Cold War liberalism and a distinctive school of neoconservative thought began to cohere in reaction. As the left shifted in radical directions, liberal intellectuals such as Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer, who held true to the tenets of Cold War liberalism, became in the words of their New Left antagonists "neoconservatives." These thinkers often gravitated towards the journal *The Public Interest* and focused on domestic politics, especially on what they saw as the excesses of both the counterculture and Lyndon Johnson's ambitious social programs. Only later, as neoconservatism entered what Vaïsse calls its "second age," would the emphasis shift towards diplomatic and military affairs.

From the early 1970s, disenchanted centrists struggled for the soul of the Democratic Party. Fearing the party's self-immolation following George McGovern's disastrous presidential campaign in 1972, they founded the Coalition for a Democratic Majority as a caucus of intellectuals who aimed to reclaim the center ground and to restore the party's ties with its traditional, white, working-class constituencies. Making good use of the CDM's archives, Vaïsse explains how the Coalition embraced foreign policy. Determined to rehabilitate Cold War liberalism, it staked out tough-minded positions and developed a sharp critique of Henry Kissinger's détente. A new generation of neoconservatives -- including Eugene Rostow, Henry "Scoop" Jackson, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan -- would define the movement's "second-age." Eager for the United States to strike a firm and principled posture in the world, these men were not necessarily antagonists of progressive politics at home. Indeed, Jackson, whose Senate staff became a "nursery" for young neocons, never met a social program he didn't like (113-4). But the Democratic hawks failed to recapture the party. As the Carter administration vacillated, in their eyes, amidst a resurgent Soviet threat, some began to think the previously unthinkable: could they embrace a Republican, Ronald Reagan, as their candidate in 1980?

The 1980s, as Vaïsse presents them, were years of triumph and transition. Reagan embraced the neoconservatives but never wholeheartedly. Indeed, his opening towards Gorbachev after 1985 left many of them flummoxed. It exposed divisions between the old

hawks, such as Paul Nitze, who stood (or walked) ready to negotiate new arms control agreements, and a younger generation of neocons, such as Richard Perle, who opposed negotiation at any price. The Soviet Union's collapse after 1989 left the neoconservatives in disarray, lacking a *raison d'être* but clinging to a tenuous historical conviction: that Reagan's adoption of tough neoconservative policies had precipitated the Soviet defeat.

From the mid-1990s, Vaïsse tells us, a new generation of neoconservatives emerged, and this time its members were paid-up Republicans. Intellectuals such as Robert Kagan and William Kristol founded initiatives and dominated think tanks, all with the purpose of reorienting the GOP towards a foreign policy of "national greatness." The emphasis on human rights -- a legacy of the 1970s -- remained, but with no Soviet Union to restrain American power, the new neocons envisaged an ambitious recasting of world politics in an American image. They "loved" John McCain and viewed George Bush, scion to a realistic dynasty, with some trepidation (231). But 9/11, as is well known, shifted Bush towards the neoconservatives and created space for them to influence foreign policy. While Vaïsse does not give his neoconservatives a decisive (or even a necessary) role in the 2003 choice for war in Iraq, he acknowledges that they provided "one source of inspiration among others for a complex, multifarious policy" (261).

With Iraq, Vaïsse concludes a sweeping narrative. One of his book's achievements is to have situated the recent history of neoconservatism -- the "third age" -- in a larger context. In fact, Vaïsse's single chapter on third age neoconservatism is perhaps the most familiar and predictable part of his manuscript.¹ Vaïsse's accomplishment is not to have retold a story that has been told elsewhere but to have probed a context that is less familiar. That depth marks this book out as being not only an insightful history of neoconservatism but also a significant contribution to historical understanding.

But questions remain. The first that I shall raise has to do with Vaïsse's description of neoconservatism as a "nationalist" political philosophy; that designation, I would suggest, raises thorny issues involving race and ethnicity and, no less vexing, the question of whether we can understand American nationalism in a timeframe that begins in the 1960s. The second is the problem of coherence, or what we might see as the challenge of writing the "biography" of an often incoherent subject. The third and final point ponders the role of ideas in political history, including their relations to material change but also their influence on outcomes and choices.

Ethnicity, race, and nationalism are prominent subtexts in the history of neoconservatism as Vaïsse tells it -- and not only when he makes the familiar point that American Jews have been well represented among the neocon ranks. We learn, for example, that first- and second-age neoconservatives disliked the New Left's multiculturalist leanings, while some

¹ Among others, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (New York: Basic Books, 2007); Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge, 2004), and Fred Kaplan, *Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power* (Hoboken N.J.: Wiley, 2008).

Jewish Democrats became estranged from a party that indulged “Third Worldist and pro-Palestinian” sentiments (146). Strikingly, the author contends that neoconservative ideology is at its core “fundamentally a manifestation of patriotism or nationalism” (279)? This is fascinating, and this reviewer wonders whether Vaisse might have gained more traction out of these themes. How, for example, might we relate his historical observations about the roles of race and ethnicity in the genesis of neoconservatism to his argument that neoconservatism is a nationalist force?

What kind of nationalism is it that the neoconservatives represent? Should we see them as the inheritors of an integrative version of melting-pot nationalism -- a creed that the left since the 1960s has largely forsaken for multiculturalism and the salad bowl?² If so, what might be the implications for their relations with the GOP today? This is a point that Vaisse’s discussion of “third-age” neoconservatism does not explore. But if the left in the 1970s embraced the politics of multiculturalism, the right in recent years has embraced an identity politics of its own. (That so many GOP-identified voters falsely identify President Obama as a Muslim is a troubling illustration of this point.) If the rise of multiculturalism helps us to understand neoconservatism’s past, what might the resurgence of nativism mean for its future. After all, do neoconservatives not purport to be so universalist, so color-blind, that they embrace the liberation of all people -- regardless of race, religion, and culture -- as the purpose of foreign policy? If the left’s lurch towards multiculturalism in the 1970s pushed the neocons towards the right, as Vaisse argues, where might the right’s tolerance for intolerance lead them in coming years? Does universalist nationalism, in other words, have a future in a stubbornly multicultural world?

These are difficult questions, but they bear on the past as well as the future. For the designation of neoconservatism as a nationalist movement may call into question the assumption that we can situate the neoconservatism’s ascendancy in the limited historical context of post-1960s America. Insofar as they embraced a universalist version of American nationalism, did the neoconservatives not drink from deeper historical currents?

Reflect on one of the more marginal -- but most interesting -- figures who appears in Vaisse’s narrative, Bayard Rustin. A gay black man who was jailed as a conscientious objector during the Second World War, Rustin appears in Vaisse’s history as a second-age neoconservative. A liberal to the marrow, Rustin worried with his friend Pat Moynihan that the politics of ethnic particularism imperiled the cause of individualist egalitarianism. He became an influential voice for human rights in foreign policy during the 1970s. How should we situate Rustin and other idealistic “neoconservatives” in relation to their times? Was their belief in freedom and universal human rights largely a function of circumstances -- whether the dead weight of Cold War liberalism or the stains that Vietnam and Henry Kissinger left on the body politic? Or did their conviction in a universalist American creed transcend circumstances: did Rustin and the others articulate a faith in individualist liberalism that, as Moynihan described it, descended through the centuries from Jefferson

² For a careful account of multiculturalism’s rise and its dilemmas, see, David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

to Wilson to Roosevelt and into the future.³

The question has important implications for the history of neoconservatism. Is its universalist nationalism a response to the circumstances that have prevailed since the 1970s, or does it tap deeper intellectual flows?⁴ Vaisse's historicist agenda implies that neoconservatism is a creature of recent times. But how then do we relate it to the larger -- and surely longer -- history of universalist American nationalism, which Vaisse takes as neoconservatism's essence?⁵ Why not follow Robert Kagan and locate the impulses that have animated neoconservatives -- their faith in human liberty and in America's special providence as the agent of its realization -- as themes present since at least the eighteenth century.⁶ If messianic liberalism has long been a core element of American nationalism -- despite recent challenges from nativism on the populist right and multiculturalism on the academic left -- should we not locate the origins of the "neoconservative" imagination in the thought of the Founding Fathers and even the Puritan pioneers who preceded them? And if we do concede that neoconservatism draws from deeper wells of universalist nationalism, we might reconsider what it is about the neoconservative imagination that is so distinctive in the first place. Perhaps it is not so much the neoconservatives' vision of a world transformed in an American image but their conviction that such a world might be achieved through military power that demarcates them as a distinctive sect? (Another way of putting this point would be to ask whether liberal American nationalism can be rescued from the neoconservatives?) But what then of the movement's inner coherence, for the third-age neocons' conviction in the utility of force has not necessarily been shared by those whom Vaisse calls their predecessors.

This leads to my second point, which has to do with the cohesiveness of Vaisse's primary analytical category: "neoconservative." Consider the ideological, intellectual, and political differences between the characters who populate Vaisse's history: Rustin on the left shoals of the neoconservative waters and Kagan and the Kristols on the rightward beaches. The distance between them is substantial. While Vaisse's three-age scheme offers a partial response, it is difficult for the reader not to be distracted by a fluid terminology. We learn that "neoconservatives" in the 1970s are liberals who remained liberals when the Democratic Party veered leftwards. Yet by the 1990s, hawkish liberals would be known as "neoliberals," and the ranks of "neoconservatives" would include both conservative neoconservatives (third age) as well as formerly liberal (second age) neoconservatives.

³ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Was Woodrow Wilson Right?," *Commentary* 57, no. 5 (1974): 25-31.

⁴ Sam Moyn's new history of human rights will be provocative for readers interested in this question and, more broadly, the role of ideas in international history. See Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁵ For an alternative perspective emphasizing the deep roots, see Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁶ Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2006).

This is confusing, and it leaves open the question: what, if anything, is the neoconservative essence? For my own part, I still doubt the capacity of the term “neoconservative” to accommodate the complex intellectual developments that Vaïsse charts -- especially when its intuitive sense for most readers is linked, indelibly, with the “third age” neocons and not with Vaïsse’s “first age” and “second age” thinkers. What would we call these earlier “neoconservatives” if we were to seek an descriptive vocabulary rather than an ascriptive one? To put it more bluntly, does the case for continuity across Vaïsse’s three ages depend less upon the substance than on a label that originated as a term of political abuse?

But there are many ways to skin a cat. Might we trace continuities across the three ages of neoconservative thought on grounds other than a tenuous intellectual genealogy? One approach would be to take their contrarianism -- their hawkish dissent from the mainstream of foreign-policy thought -- as the unifying theme. If the second-age neoconservatives bucked against Kissinger’s realism, so too would their third-age counterparts rebel against Clinton’s cautious internationalism, especially in his first term. Could it be the diplomatic mainstream, plodding and cautious, and not the “neoconservative” reactions against it that provides our narrative continuity? This approach would have the advantage of relating successive neoconservative eruptions to the political circumstances they inhabited rather than to each other. Such an approach would diminish the need for coherence across the three ages. Could there have been a “third age” of neoconservatism without the first or second phases? It is easy to imagine that there could have been, but to concede the possibility is necessarily to diminish the case for a neoconservative genus. Perhaps we should see neoconservatism as a contrarian disposition with universalist intent rather than as a coherent “movement”? But would it then still warrant a “biography”?

Finally, we might ponder some of the connections that Vaïsse conjures between ideas and the material circumstances they inhabit. In line with many historians of American foreign policy today, Vaïsse takes the importance of ideas as self-evident: “in domestic and foreign policy,” he writes, “ideas matter” (13). While he concedes that “material forces are also crucial,” it is the possible connections between these two arenas that constitute one of the most tantalizing themes of this book. Notably, he describes the general condition of American power in the 1970s (not good) and in the 1990s (much better) as a crucial influences on these decades’ neoconservatives. Preoccupied with decline, 1970s hawks like Scoop Jackson favored a vigorous *defense* of democracy against what appeared to be a relentless Soviet onslaught. With the Soviet Union’s demise, however, the constraints on American ambition lifted. The forward *promotion* of democracy became the goal of “third age” neocons in the 1990s. This is quite persuasive, and it leads this reviewer to ask what other material conjunctures, beyond the ebb and flow of American primacy, might help us to frame Vaïsse’s neoconservative thinkers?

Consider, if you will, some of the changes that globalization has wrought upon American society and politics in recent decades. Forces as varied as demographic mobility, economic interdependence, and cultural globalization have permeated American society since the 1970s, rendering the United States far more porous to the external world that it was in the

1950s heyday of Cold War liberalism.⁷ If this globalization subverted the certitudes of Cold War politics and even the basic autonomy of the American nation-state, how might we situate neoconservatism in relation to its onward march? Vaïsse suggests that multiculturalism (a reflection, in part, of changing demographic realities) may help explain the neoconservatives' shift from the political left to the center. Might we see the neocons, perhaps more profoundly, as clinging to an older vision of the unimpeded, superpowerful nation-state, even as the march of globalization created new, complex, and interdependent global realities? While globalization has in the eyes of liberal institutionalists brought new opportunities for leadership (the United States, for Joseph Nye, is "bound to lead" in an interdependent world), did the neocons revolt, perhaps, against the proposition that the United States should be bound at all?⁸ Might neoconservatism represent a kind of American Gaullism: a bid for grandeur and an elusive autonomy in a world in that transnational forces have rendered increasingly interdependent? This is one way in which a deeper grasp of structural conditions might enhance our historical perspective on neoconservatism's career, but there are surely others.

Finally, a word or two on ideas, causation, and scholarly purpose. Vaïsse refrains quite carefully from ascribing to the neoconservatives decisive responsibility for either George Bush's 2003 war in Iraq or Ronald Reagan's purposeful escalation of the Cold War in the early 1980s. This is judicious and probably correct. But it raises the difficult question of how historians of foreign relations -- a sphere of inquiry that is concerned at some fundamental level with action -- should engage with the history of ideas. Do we accept the history of ideas as an element of international (or foreign relations) history that merits sustained attention in its own right (which would be my own strong preference)? Or do we believe that ideas have value principally insofar as they bear upon outcomes? If so, how do we measure their impact in relation to other historical factors? Vaïsse, like most other authors, punts on this point. But the question has some importance for the history of neoconservatism; the topic, after all, has attracted much scholarly interest in recent years thanks largely to its perceived influence on the Bush administration's controversial choices. If we shy away from ascribing to the neoconservatives decisive influence for contentious outcomes, can we still neoconservatism as a topic worthy of our attention, as a compelling historical subject in its own right? The important and durable contribution of Justin Vaïsse's *Neoconservatism*, I would suggest, is to show that we can.

⁷ For an elaboration of this point, see my essay in Niall Ferguson et al., *Shock of the Global? Rethinking the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁸ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

If Neoconservatives have been the black sheep of the Reagan Revolution since the Iraq war debacle, they have been wayward children historiographically for much longer. The term “neoconservative” has been around for nearly half a century, suggesting that these conservatives are not all that “neo” or new to conservatism after all. But as Justin Vaïsse notes in his thought-provoking new book, the fog is so thick around Neconservatism’s origins, definitions, and character that even the person who supposedly coined the term, Michael Harrington, used the label in a different context than legend suggests. Vaïsse’s great contribution to the discussion comes when he resists the urge to boil down the movement to one essential characteristic or crusade. Instead, with a good historical sense, he defines “three ages of neoconservatism,” which he labels the times of: “Liberal Intellectuals in Dissent,” “Cold War Democrats in Dissent,” and “National Greatness Conservatives.”

In many ways, the debate about what neoconservatism is and was parallels the raging historiographical debate about the nature of Progressivism. For nearly a century now, historians have been dueling about that late nineteenth-century, early-twentieth-century, reform movement, impulse, moment. The first draft of the analysis, written by Progressives themselves, internalized and romanticized the Progressive narrative. In his multi-volume classic, *Main Currents in American Thought*, the Progressive author Vernon Parrington described all of American history as divided between haves and have-nots, while lionizing his fellow Progressives for fighting the good fight in favor of the have-nots. Subsequently, as interpretations multiplied, the definitions blurred. In the 1950s, the historian Richard Hofstadter went sociological, defining Progressives in *The Age of Reform* as up-and-coming urbanites allied with fading Brahmin elites suffering from status anxiety. In the 1960s, Gabriel Kolko went ideological and critical, describing the Progressive movement in *The Triumph of Conservatism* as the march of the “haves,” with big businesses seeking stability and a welcoming environment for political capitalism. By 2005, in *A Fierce Discontent* Michael McGerr went spectral, tracking the various Progressive impulses that helped shape the twentieth century, while for many of America’s elites, Progressive simply became shorthand for a good person and a political idealist. [1]

Similarly, for years, the discussion about neoconservatism began and often ended with the quip of one of its founders, Irving Kristol, that a conservative is a liberal who has been “mugged by reality.” (p. 275) Neoconservatives defined themselves – and were mostly defined – as refugees from the 1960s, ex-radicals, and ex-liberals who saw the light as the New Left succumbed to the forces of darkness and nihilism. Simultaneously – not sequentially – neoconservatism was defined sociologically as a mostly urban Jewish

¹ Vernon Parrington, *Main Currents In American Thought*, vols I-III (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1927); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage, 1955, 1960); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History 1900-1916* (New York: The Free Press, 1963); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

movement, with the neoconservative poster children being those refugees from the immigrant ghettos of New York and New York's City College who both succeeded professionally and traveled ideologically, as Kristol did, from left to right. As the legends about neoconservatism's power grew, and the inevitable backlash began, critics spoke ominously about neoconservatism's reach, until, during the George W. Bush administration, "neoconservative" was popular Democratic shorthand for pro-Israel, pro-Iraq war, aggressive imperialist insiders who seduced George W. Bush and derailed America.

As popular disdain – at least on the left – for neoconservatism grew – the phenomenon itself seemed fuzzier. A movement that initially seemed most concerned with domestic affairs was now defined by its foreign policy. A movement rooted in New York's rhythms, ambitions, obsessions, pretensions and grit, had shifted its center of gravity to the sanitized whiteness and power games of Washington, DC. A movement founded and first defined publicly by Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Jeane Kirkpatrick was now led and defined by their intellectual offspring, sometimes quite literally their children as with William Kristol. And a movement that was part of the surge of confidence during the Reagan era now seemed mired in the pessimism of the George W. Bush-Barack Obama years. In fact, the character of the movement can seem so elusive, that even after 271 pages Justin Vaïsse still admits: "neoconservatism is such a diverse thing that the term has always been close to meaningless." (p. 271)

In truth, Vaïsse's organizing principle for the book and for understanding the movement contradicts this defeatist remark. His three phases are well-defined and convincing. The first, "Liberal Intellectuals in Dissent," portrays the first wave of neoconservatives in flight from the Sixties radicals, in despair over America's crisis of confidence, and in doubt that either scholarship or policy can solve America's problems. The second stage, "Cold War Democrats in Dissent," shows the growing concern with foreign at the expense of domestic policy, with a particular focus on the threat posed by the Soviet Union in the 1970s despite talk of detente. Finally, the new wave of neoconservatives emerged as "National Greatness Conservatives," fusing traditionally liberal Wilsonian idealism with the post-9/11 conservative patriotism of Dick Cheney and George W. Bush.

Along the way, Vaïsse deftly navigates through the thicket of myths and facts regarding neoconservatives. He slays the Straussian dragon, showing that the impact of the philosopher Leo Strauss often has been exaggerated. Some neoconservatives were Strauss's students, even his protégés. But many other neoconservatives had many other, more significant, influences. Similarly, Vaïsse shows that the caricature of neoconservatives as hawkish Likudniks advancing Israel's interests is exaggerated. Vaïsse reveals that not all neoconservatives were Jewish and not all Jews were neoconservatives. He should have added a corollary, and explored the fact that, nevertheless, most Jews who became Republicans were neoconservatives. More broadly, during and just before the Reagan Revolution, neoconservatism served as the great outpatient clinic for disappointed Democrats, helping them find a way into Republicanism and Reaganism without feeling that they were violating core ideals or their fundamental identities. Neoconservatives let Democrats, intellectuals, cosmopolitans, and Jews into the

Republican Party without having to join the Chamber of Commerce, belong to a country club, conquer Wall Street, or wear docksiders.

Vaïsse, like the movement itself whose “biography” he is recounting, sometimes gets bogged down in the inside baseball of the neocons and their allies. The acronyms fly fast and furious, in unconscious homage to Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal alphabet soup and the Left’s hyper-factionalist compulsion to found splinter groups during the 1930s and 1940s.

For all his good work, Vaïsse disappoints at the end, succumbing to the definitional essentialism the rest of his book shows is too sweeping and simplistic. Insisting that neoconservatism will remain a player on the national scene, he argues that “neoconservatism is fundamentally a manifestation of patriotism or even nationalism.” (p. 279) This conclusion is akin to writing a book about Christianity and saying it is fundamentally about belief in God. Yes, there is an up-beat nationalism shaping the neoconservative worldview. But nationalism in America takes on many forms. There is the don’t-tread-on-me nationalism of Tea Party activists, the-with-me-or-against-me nationalism of Fox News, the supremacist nationalism of white militants, the messianic nationalism of evangelicals, the multicultural nationalism of Barack Obama, the up-with-democracy internationalist nationalism of the Wilsonians and the universalist do-gooders, the pragmatic nationalism of the Clintons. In short, if Vaïsse wants his definition of neoconservatism to hinge on nationalism, he needs to find the right adjectives to narrow the term and give it some bite.

Vaïsse’s ultimately generic conclusion reflects a broader methodological miss. He spends more time burrowing deep into the movement’s factions and internal tiffs without investing enough in connecting neoconservatism to other major movements of the time, especially Reaganism. In the index, the entry for Ronald Reagan takes up slight less space than the entry for Penn Kemble. Placing neoconservatism in its broader context would yield two helpful conclusions. First, the three ideas which define Vaïsse’s phases are three of the bigger ideas that have shaped modern conservatism. With their focus on the limits of the Great Society and social policy, the need for a muscular skepticism vis-à-vis Soviet Communism, and the desire to fight terrorism with an expansive democratic ideology as well as an aggressive military stance, neoconservatives have in been the ideological and intellectual vanguard of the Reagan Revolution. They have been the leading Big Government conservatives, far less obsessed with shrinking the budget or cutting taxes but far more concerned with the quest for national greatness.

Second and related, they have developed and disseminated these ideas through an elaborate institutional infrastructure of think tanks, conferences, ad hoc advocacy groups, journals, articles and books. All these define the movement as intellectual, creating a conservative alternate universe to the more left-leaning academic world. To neoconservatives, development and dissemination have been equally important and defining. These are not Ivory Tower intellectuals. These citizen-activists use their brain power to change the world. They believe that if an intellectual tree falls in the policy forest and no one hears it, the silence is real and negates the effort. They are, and always have

been, a particularly self-conscious and exhibitionist group of intellectuals, reading the public, seeking popular appeal, working the corridors of power, securing access and getting either acclaim or notoriety but always attention. Just as Progressives were ultimately defined by their vision of national reform and their mode – their heavy reliance on experts, commissions, and rationalizing structures – neoconservatives can be defined by their vision of American greatness and their mode – their commitment to their pragmatically-oriented, policy-obsessed, publicity-hungry, intellectual hothouses producing big ideas. The biggest headline is that these ideas and institutions have gotten traction, especially in the two-term presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. The neoconservatives were not the only intellectuals of the Reagan Revolution, but, in many ways, they were the paradigmatic intellectuals of this era, which may or may not have ended. The fuzziness with both the neoconservatives and their Progressive predecessors is a mark of integrity and impact. Complex movements, ideas, and impulses which matter will take on different forms. They make their mark in various, sometimes contradictory, ways.

These days, with the growing caricature by Obama supporters of Republicans as ignorant, impatient, and intolerant, perhaps neoconservatism will begin its fourth phase. Distancing the movement from the unrealistic and premature Wilsonian triumphalism of the Iraq War, neoconservatives can emerge as the intellectual Republicans, the muscular nationalists seeking American greatness from the red-side of the great, often-overstated modern American divide. Judging from the analysis developed in the book, they have the think tank infrastructure and an army of smart, ambitious, savvy game players poised to do just that. And they have just enough common threads intellectually and ideologically to weave a product that will perpetuate their brand, with their logo, as usual, most prominently and cleverly displayed.

Author's Response by Justin Vaisse, The Brookings Institution

There are many reasons for me to start by expressing heartfelt thanks to Tom Maddux and Marc Trachtenberg, as well as to each of the four reviewers individually. As a non-American writing on America, reviews here have extra significance. As a historian having composed an academic book, but working in a think tank, I was most anxiously waiting the reaction from professional historians, people of my trade. As a long-time subscriber to H-Diplo, who indirectly started to work on the neoconservatives because of a discussion launched by Christopher Bright on this very listserv ten years ago, I couldn't think of a more appropriate place to debate the book. Lastly, as an author, I could only enjoy the careful and thoughtful evaluation of my work – not to mention occasional favorable comments – by the four reviewers, and be grateful to them.

While it is impossible to do justice to all the relevant points the reviewers raise, I will try to offer a few thoughts, and sometimes responses, on three different levels: historiography, history and politics. Or, to put it in the form of rhetorical questions, “Do ideas matter?”, “What is neoconservatism after all?”, and “Were Neocons right?”

But first, let me start with a few words on the relative heterogeneity of the book. John Ehrman notes that the part on the second family of neoconservatives, the Scoop Jackson Democrats, “takes about two-thirds of the book and, conceptually, adds little to our understanding.” He is right about length: this is because the book grew out of an archival research on this second family of neoconservatives, and in particular the papers of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM, at the LBJ Library) and the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD, at the Hoover Institution). I was the first historian to gain access to each collection, and had to spend a week creating the finding aid of the CPD boxes before I could even start working. While John Ehrman wrote an excellent history of neoconservatism in 1995, I would respectfully submit that this archival work enabled me to add quite a bit substantially, but also conceptually. To take just a few examples, I highlight the importance of internal Democratic party fights for people like Jeane Kirkpatrick and Joshua Muravchik in the early 1970s ; the role of the AFL-CIO in encouraging and financing the CDM and the CPD (on issues ranging from Democratic party rules to the Soviet threat) ; the birth of a neoconservative doctrine on human rights and democracy in the 1970s ; and the “difficult proximity” between Scoop Jackson Democrats and the Democratic Leadership Council in the 1980s.

In contrast to the chapters devoted to the Scoop Jackson Democrats, the chapters on the other two families (the original neoconservatives and the latter-day neocons) do not rest on archival work but on interviews, published materials and secondary sources. I am glad that John Ehrman liked the section on the most recent Neocons, but on the other hand I can understand why Daniel Sargent calls it “familiar and predictable” and Robert Kaufman finds it less balanced and erudite. Evidently, we'll have to wait a few more years before we can do serious research on the past two decades, especially the George W. Bush administration. Lastly, many thanks to Marc Trachtenberg for pointing out the companion website to the book (<http://neoconservatism.vaisse.net>), which offers many original

documents from the 1960s to the 1980s for future researchers, or simply interested readers.

The question raised by several reviewers about the role of ideas in foreign policy has been ever present in my research. One of the objectives of the book was precisely to explore how a certain set of ideas was born, nurtured, transmitted, publicized, advocated and pushed to the front of the political debate. As a political historian or a diplomatic historian, "concerned at some fundamental level with action" as Sargent puts it, I see intellectual history as inseparable from a sociological history, describing and analyzing the concrete conditions in which actors produced and defended their ideas, and the channels through which these ideas might have had a real-life impact on major decisions (say, a war). Hence the detailed attention given over a long period of time not only to individuals but also to structures and organizations (CDM and CPD, and various think tanks, among others), journals and magazines, networks and personal relationships.

But of course that sociological-intellectual description, however accurate and entertaining, doesn't provide an answer to the question of impact. Or, as Trachtenberg puts it, "is it really clear that Reagan's foreign policy or even George W. Bush's was influenced in any fundamental way by neoconservative ideas?" Neocons themselves are great believers in the power of ideas. Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz and Jeane Kirkpatrick, among others, have all expressed their strong belief in the importance of elite perceptions – either in driving the larger public opinion or in directly influencing public policy, particularly foreign policy. It doesn't mean they are right, but it is still relevant to note that they had a clear sense of the purpose and meaning of their activities.

Between the believers, who think that ideas matter enormously because deciders act primarily on perceptions and interpretations, and the skeptics, who ask if ideas play any autonomous role at all alongside material considerations, it is hard to escape some sort of middle ground. Historians might benefit from a more thorough exploration of the channels through which ideas impact policy – perhaps in a discussion with political scientists. For what it is worth, my own typology on the impact of ideas – without the necessary nuances and complexities – would rest on four broad categories: (i) Direct causality, when a thinker offers a vision or a plan which is implemented by policy makers, a rare occurrence (such as Fred Kagan and Jack Keane on the Iraq surge of 2007); (ii) Indirect causality, when policy makers interpret events through a particular lens (such as the Munich or the Vietnam analogies, or the link between 9/11 and the lack of democracy in the Middle East); (iii) Background influence, when majority perceptions and opinions on large issues are oriented in a certain way (for example, the importance of the way certain regimes are seen, whether inherently aggressive or primarily defensive and conservative – the USSR, China, Iraq, Iran, etc.); (iv) Permissive environment, when the diffusion of certain concepts weaken the reaction against specific policy initiatives, eventually making them possible (such as the democratic peace theory or the right of humanitarian intervention in relationship with the Iraq war). And of course, such a typology should be complemented by a study of the various levels at which ideas have an impact (public opinion, elites, officials), and how they travel from one sphere to the other.

Who is a neoconservative, and does neoconservatism have an essence? I am pleased that my refusal to "boil down the movement to one essential characteristic or crusade" (Troy), and instead distinguish three coherent ages or families of neoconservatives, meets approval from the reviewers. My approach to "who is a neoconservative" is straightforward - it consists in defining a substantial content (a set of ideas and policy prescriptions) for each family, and examining whether an individual holds these views or not. This can lead to "questionable judgments," but I don't think I placed the neoconservative label on "anyone who travels in their circles or who allies with them on particular points" (Ehrman). For example, I would maintain that Admiral Elmo Zumwalt was indeed a Scoop Jackson Democrat, as he was both a liberal Democrat on domestic issues (a strong advocate of civil rights, among other things) and a very hawkish cold warrior who opposed Kissinger on Détente and Israel and was an active member of both the CDM and the CPD. Let's take a contrasting example: Zbigniew Brzezinski was another Democrat associated with the CDM (he signed the original appeal) and a committed cold warrior, but not a neoconservative, for his views on Soviet-American relations were distinctly less alarmist than those of, say, Eugene Rostow or Richard Perle, his views on the Middle East were less partial to Israel than theirs, and he considered Scoop Jackson too hawkish and extreme in his positions. (The same would be true for Samuel Huntington, who is sometimes considered a neoconservative).

But then, why consider that Scoop Jackson Democrats are neoconservatives? If the only way to define neoconservatism is by offering two or three successive descriptions, why not dispense with the expression altogether? Isn't Dan Sargent right when he argues that "the case for continuity [...] depends less upon the substance than on a label"? In other words, do we really have to put Daniel Bell, Pat Moynihan, Doug Feith and Max Boot under the same roof? Ironically, while some original neoconservatives like Nathan Glazer express their unpleasant surprise at the evolution of the label, younger neocons dispute the Fukuyama argument that neoconservatives started by stressing the limits of government intervention and ended up preaching nation-building in Afghanistan and Iraq - "we're not the same neoconservatives," they seem to be saying.

I could explain and describe with great detail how, in spite of all their differences, the label "jumped" from the original New York intellectuals to the Scoop Jackson Democrats (same enemies, same journals and think tanks, a few "members" in common, etc.), and from the Scoop Jackson Democrats to the *Weekly Standard* - PNAC crowd in the 1990s (same focus, large substantial continuity, and many "members" in common). I could also point to the few features or dispositions that are common to the three ages like the reaction against the anti-American tendencies of the left, or what I call nationalism - on which more later - or the rejection of moral relativism. I could also point out the evolution of specific individuals who embody a possible continuity between the three ages like Norman Podhoretz, even though he was not a major figure of first-age neoconservatism. But that wouldn't change the fact that there exists a substantial gap between, in particular, the first age (or domestic neoconservatism) and the second and third ages (or foreign policy neoconservatism). As a historian, I can only recognize that the same label was used for both. But as an observer, I can also point out that this was not a logical necessity, and that history can get pretty confusing.

There are probably five options to write about neoconservatism. The first one consists in focusing on its domestic aspects only, its political philosophy (like Peter Steinfels in *The Neoconservatives* or Mark Gerson in *The Neoconservative Vision*) – an exercise which to a large extent revolves around Irving Kristol's thinking, which had led Daniel Bell to quip "Whenever I read about neoconservatism, I think, 'That isn't neoconservatism; it's just Irving.'" The second option is to focus mostly on foreign policy, like John Ehrman did in his *Rise of Neoconservatism*. The third option is to offer a brief and broad historical overview of neoconservatism, and then to offer an in-depth analysis of a few major figures, so as to illustrate and accommodate the diversity of the movement (Gary Dorrien in *The Neoconservative Mind*). The fourth one consists in overemphasizing – in my view – its continuity and coherence and to insist that there is indeed such a thing as an essence of neoconservatism through the ages, from Nathan Glazer to Richard Pipes and I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby (see Jacob Heilbrunn's *They Knew they Were Right*). The first two options exclude significant portions of what the label has encompassed, but they are coherent, while the third one offers a robust intellectual history and penetrating vignettes, but not a compelling political history. The fourth one, as suggested above, glosses over the heterogeneity of the movement and leaves internal tensions unresolved (the fact, for example, that the "godfather" Irving Kristol was at odds with most other neoconservatives on foreign policy issues). The option I chose consisted in considering all those who had been labeled "neoconservatives" at one time or the other, but then to distinguish three different ages or families (not "generations", as dates of birth don't match and some were members of two, even three families), while pointing out the elements of continuity and coherence among them.

This explains why I would reject the charge of "succumbing to definitional essentialism" made by Gil Troy about the last two paragraphs of my book – where I suggest nationalism as a common characteristic of the three ages. I am not trying to divine the essence of neoconservatism or reveal its secret hidden identity, but simply to find an attitude, a feature shared by the three different ages of a loose movement – and by all neoconservatives. I could certainly, as Troy and Sargent suggest in very similar terms, try to "find the right adjectives" to describe that nationalism. But my remark actually boils down to something more simple: each neoconservative age is a reaction to the questioning or even the indictment of the American experience and the American character by liberals (or by "other liberals"), revisionists and radicals. As Mark Lilla pointed out two years ago ("The Pleasures of Reaction," *The New Republic*, February 27, 2008), neoconservatives are reactionaries. And in a sense, neoconservatism always incorporates a dose of anti-anti-Americanism, whether about foreign policy (against the notion that the U.S. is a malevolent and imperialist power on the world scene) or domestic policy (against the notion that the U.S. is an oppressive and racist plutocracy).

Then of course, for the second and third families concerned with foreign policy, comes a much more specific form of nationalism – American exceptionalism, wrapped in liberal and universalist values (hence my comparison with the mix of nationalism and universalism the Jacobins exhibited – but given their excessively poor image in this country, this comparison has been received coolly by Neocons). Here again, Dan Sargent asks questions

that occupy me a lot: are neoconservatives really universalist nationalists, preoccupied with ideology, not identity, and can they remain so in “a stubbornly multicultural world” in which “the right’s tolerance for intolerance” seems to be increasing? My answer to both questions would be positive – but only for a slight majority of them.

Islam, of course, is the great touchstone here, dividing neoconservatives between true universalists and culturalists ready to adopt a civilizational vision of world affairs like most social and cultural conservatives. Neoconservatives like Robert Kagan, Paul Wolfowitz, Max Boot, Michael Novak or Gary Schmitt are definitely in the first category – as is George W. Bush, who regrettably kept silent when other parts of the right were corrupting his universalist legacy during the “Ground Zero mosque” controversy in the summer of 2010. Others like Norman Podhoretz and Midge Decter, Frank Gaffney, Michael Ledeen or the late Richard John Neuhaus are in the second category, believing that Islam in itself is, at the very least, a major part of the problem for societies on the road to freedom. While I do not know what the future holds, I would guess that most neoconservatives will retain their universalism and remain, on the right, the most consistent force in favor of a world vision based on considerations of ideology and regimes, not culture and identity. The rise of China and the possible refocusing of international debates around questions of multipolarity, rather than Middle-East politics, might help; Robert Kagan gave a good example of this in his 2008 book, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*.

But if neoconservatism is the latter-day expression of American exceptionalism, there isn’t much “neo” to it, write Dan Sargent and Marc Trachtenberg. Then doesn’t its originality lie in its militarism, or its blending of idealism and militarism, rather than in its specific vision of America? Which leads Trachtenberg to the next question: isn’t that militarism – shared by other conservatives – simply the byproduct of the dominant position in which the U.S. found itself at the end of the 1990s? I probably could have emphasized the longer genealogy of neoconservatism, and better identified the familiar elements in it. Yes, it draws from deeper and older wells of messianic liberalism. And yes, it was shaped, after the Cold War, by systemic factors (see p. 261). But this doesn’t mean it can be *reduced* to these elements – a familiar foreign policy tradition or the automatic response to a certain international situation. In other words, it was to be expected that there would be a school of thought defending a messianic, interventionist and muscular foreign policy in the 1990s and 2000s, and even that it would overreach (based on Kenneth Waltz... or François Fénelon). But no one could have predicted its shape, its distinctive features and axioms: these were uniquely shaped by the historical developments of the 1970s and following decades. And the aim of the book was to document that singularity, and insist on the differences with previous proponents of universalist nationalists.

Lastly, on the political plane, I shall address the spirited and substantial defense of neoconservatism offered by Robert Kaufman. I use the word “address” rather than “respond to” for three reasons. First, some of his points are more directed at “critics of neoconservatism” than at myself or my description of what neoconservatism is (a typical example is about regime analysis where neither my book nor I are not the true targets). A second reason is that in the cases where I do offer an interpretation that criticizes neoconservatives, especially in the third age, the gap in opinion between us will remain.

The third reason is that Kaufman offers a wealth of scholarly observations, and a full-scale reply would double the size of this already too long rejoinder.

Still, while I can't debate all the historical points raised by Kaufman (and defend French foreign policy in the same breath), I will pick a few arguments where I do have a clear answer, starting with vocabulary. Kaufman chides me for using the "loaded, incendiary term" of 'militarism' if not in the book, then at least during the book launch at Brookings and for a paper I wrote in the spring of 2010 (entitled *Why Neoconservatism Still Matters*) – a term I used again just two paragraphs ago. Being a non-native speaker, I checked my *Oxford English Dictionary*, which reads as its first entry for that word: "1. Military attitudes or ideals, esp. the belief or policy that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests." This seems a very adequate description that no neoconservative would disavow. And since none of them has, I guess the connotation of the term must not be that incendiary.

The interpretation of Reagan's political and diplomatic positioning in his second term is certainly an issue of controversy, and I would concede that my description of a switch "from a bellicose policy to a policy of peace" (p. 197) is putting it too starkly – it should have been "a policy of critical dialogue" or "careful engagement". But whatever the terms, it's hard to deny that there was a growing gap between the President and his most hard-line advisers and supporters, especially the neoconservatives, on relations with the Soviets. After all, to take just one example, Richard Perle and Frank Gaffney ended up quitting the Pentagon in 1987 and started lobbying against its arms control policy carried out by less hawkish figures (if still determined Cold Warriors) like George Shultz and Paul Nitze, two CPD alumni. I maintain that had they been able to call the shots, neoconservatives would never have left so much breathing space to Gorbachev as Reagan gave him, which thereby allowed him to avoid a backlash from the Politburo and conduct the reforms that would ultimately lead to the demise of the USSR. Incidentally, one word in a citation by Francis Fukuyama given by Kaufman makes my point: "[Reagan] believed firmly that the internal character of regimes defined their external behavior and was *initially* unwilling to compromise with the Soviet Union because he saw more clearly than most more its internal contradictions and weakness." (emphasis mine). My point is that if the "neoconservative Reagan" had not coexisted with other Reagans ready to disregard advice from hawks and skeptics (yes, that includes some realists), a very different picture might have emerged. The bottom line is I admire Reagan not for becoming a dove or abandoning his principles (it is not what I am saying), but for veering away from an uncompromising hard line which could have proven disastrous.

On the 1990s, Kaufman points out that neoconservatives found the Republican party largely "hospitable," thanks to Newt Gingrich in particular. The importance of the latter notwithstanding, *The Weekly Standard* was partly devoted to, and the Project for the New American Century was essentially created for, fighting temptations of isolationism among Republicans, most notably on the Balkans – to harangue them into a more internationalist position. After all, the Contract with America had virtually nothing to say about foreign policy – and it took John McCain to push George W. Bush in a more forceful and interventionist direction in the run-up to the 2000 election. The "enemy" in the Republican

party was not so much Pat Buchanan as the reflexive opposition to Bill Clinton... and to some extent, libertarianism. On the third age of neoconservatism, Kaufman writes that I omitted the categorical rejection of moral relativism, and it is true I should have emphasized this element, whether among theocons or among other groups.

Lastly, on the Bush doctrine. The only time I ever felt sympathy for Sarah Palin is when she was asked by Charlie Gibson if she agreed with Bush doctrine ("In what respect, Charlie?, she asked; "Well what do you interpret it to be?", he replied, not wanting to let this gotcha journalism moment slip away), as if it was obvious, or based on a legal text or a clear political statement. Journalists and commentators made fun of her, but the truth is many had to double check what it was first. And even then, they came up with different answers: preemptive war, or preventive war, or attacking states that support terrorism, or democratizing the Middle East through regime change, or democratizing the world...etc. Even if the Bush doctrine is at least partly in the eyes of the beholder, I have the feeling that my definition and Kaufman's (in his *Defense of the Bush Doctrine*, 2007 and in this review) are not that far apart. The first pillar is indeed the promotion of democracy, loosely based on the democratic peace theory – which I describe in the book, admittedly, in too elliptical a way – and applied to the Middle East. Whether because of they are hyperbolic pieces of rhetoric, or because Bush actually thought this way, the citations I give on page 244 seem to me more positive or sweeping on the expected positive effects of the advent of stable liberal democracy than Kaufman admits. And as far as the second pillar is concerned, I do include preemption in it (see pp. 17 and 245), but see a broader set of principles that include unilateralism.

To conclude, let me say again that I benefitted greatly from the perspectives of the four reviewers, and will include some of these points in my future work. One more reason to thank them cordially.

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