

H-Diplo | ISSF

Roundtable, Volume VII, No. 8 (2014)



A production of H-Diplo with the journals *Security Studies*, *International Security*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, and the International Studies Association's Security Studies Section (ISSS).

<http://www.issforum.org>

H-Diplo/ISSF Editors: **James McAllister and Diane Labrosse**

H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable and Web/Production Editor: **George Fujii**

Commissioned for H-Diplo by James McAllister

Introduction by James McAllister

Henry R. Nau. *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy under Jefferson, Polk, Truman, and Reagan*. Princeton University Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780691159317 (hardcover, \$35.00/£24.95).

Published by H-Diplo/ISSF on **15 December 2014**

Stable URL: <http://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-7-8.pdf>

Contents

Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College	2
Review by Mark L. Haas, Duquesne University	4
Review by Robert G. Kaufman, Pepperdine University	11
Review by KC Johnson, Brooklyn College	17
Author's Response by Henry R. Nau, George Washington University	21

© Copyright 2014



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College

In *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy under Jefferson, Polk, Truman, and Reagan*, Henry Nau has written a book that will undoubtedly provoke impassioned debate among political scientists and historians. Despite all that has been written about the grand traditions of American foreign relations, Nau argues that scholars have thus far failed to acknowledge the distinctive tradition of what he calls “conservative internationalism.” In his view, conservative internationalism is a hybrid tradition that “mixes in different ways America’s responsibility to reform world affairs stressed by liberal internationalism, America’s power to maintain global stability emphasized by realism, and America’s respect for national sovereignty preferred by nationalism” (2). Nau’s purpose in identifying and explicating the conservative internationalist tradition, of course, goes far beyond simple classification. In his view, the conservative internationalist tradition has been quite successful in the past and continues to offer valuable insights into contemporary American foreign policy.

All of the reviewers agree that *Conservative Internationalism* is a welcome and important addition to the study of American foreign policy. Mark Haas argues that it is an “outstanding” book that demonstrates the importance of ideas and identities in international relations. In his view, one of the more impressive accomplishments of the book is its development of what he calls a “geo-ideological” approach to the question of democracy promotion. Robert Kaufmann finds much to admire about the book and believes that multiple audiences “will profit immensely from the wealth of wisdom it contains.” KC Johnson argues that Nau’s work “forces readers to consider continuities over time that might otherwise have been missed.”

It should not come as a great surprise that *Conservative Internationalism* also elicits criticism from the reviewers. KC Johnson believes that Nau’s book suffers from the author’s clear personal attachment to the foreign policy tradition he has identified. While Johnson believes Nau’s framework works best when applied to the presidencies of Thomas Jefferson and Ronald Reagan, he argues that it is much less convincing and accurate when applied to the Polk and Truman administrations. Robert Kaufman’s review offers several criticisms of Nau’s argument despite the fact that both authors are self-identified conservatives. In Kaufman’s view, Nau’s inclusion of Jefferson as a conservative internationalist simply “defies plausibility.” He agrees that Polk’s foreign policy deserves high marks, but disagrees with the contention that Polk should be classified as a conservative internationalist. More importantly, Kaufman argues that Nau’s efforts to distinguish conservative internationalism from neoconservatism, as well as the distinctions he makes between the foreign policy principles of Reagan and George W. Bush, are unconvincing.

H-Diplo/ISSF thanks Professor Nau and all of the reviewers for their thoughtful contributions to this important debate about the past, present, and future of American foreign policy.

Participants:

Henry R. Nau is a Professor of political science and international affairs at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. He holds a B.S. degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. From January 1981 to July 1983, he served on President Reagan's National Security Council as White House Sherpa to the G-7 and Cancun economic summits and senior director for international economic affairs.

Mark L. Haas is a Professor in the Political Science Department at Duquesne University. His primary research interest examines how ideologies shape states' core security policies. He has published two books on this subject: *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005], and *The Clash of Ideologies: Middle Eastern Politics and American Security* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012], as well as numerous scholarly articles.

KC Johnson is a professor of history at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center. He has written five books, and co-authored another, on U.S. political, diplomatic, and legal topics.

Robert G. Kaufman is a Professor at Pepperdine University's School of Public Policy, the author of three books, many scholarly articles, and in the process of writing a book on the Perils of the Obama Doctrine for University Press of Kentucky.

C*onservative Internationalism* is an outstanding book. It presents a persuasive argument that is supported by compelling, concise analyses of the foreign policies of four of America's most important presidents.

The book's central objective is to establish a heretofore neglected tradition in the examination of American foreign policies, what Nau calls conservative internationalism. Foreign policies based on the insights of conservative internationalism combine three core objectives or tenets. The first is the spread abroad of freedom-based institutions and values, though primarily only in areas of the world where this goal is most likely to succeed (I return to this caveat in greater detail below). The motive for this goal derives from conservative internationalists' belief that ideological differences among states are a critical source of threat and enmity in international relations.¹ As Nau puts it: "For conservative internationalists, threats emerge primarily from the nature of internal regimes, not from external relationships. Countries have different domestic ideologies and cultures. Some countries are tyrannies, others are free...The two political systems threaten one another whether they relate extensively or not...Regime type limits understanding and trust, even with maximum communications" (25).

To the extent that leaders believe that ideological differences are a key cause of international hostilities, a natural—almost inevitable—foreign policy implication resulting from this view is the need to defend and ultimately to export their own ideological beliefs if they expect to improve their countries' safety over the long-run.² The competition between freedom and despotism animates the competition for power. Applied to the United States, the more U.S. leaders can spread freedom-based institutions and values at the expense of authoritarian ones, the safer America will be. As the National Security Document NSC-68 expressed this point at the beginning of the Cold War when Harry S. Truman was President: "The only sure victory lies in the frustration of the Kremlin design by the speedy development of the moral and material strength of the free world and its projection into the Soviet world in such a way as to bring about an internal change in the Soviet system" (154). Or as National Security Decision Directive (NSDD)-75 put it near the Cold War's end during the Ronald Reagan presidency, central to America's goal to end the conflict with the USSR was "to promote, within the narrow limits available to us, the process of change in the Soviet Union toward a more pluralistic political and economic system" (177).

¹ This is also the core claim of much of my scholarship. See *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) and *The Clash of Ideologies: Middle Eastern Politics and American Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

² On regime exportation as a frequent tool of statecraft due to the effects of ideological differences, see John M. Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1500-2010* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

The second core tenet of conservative internationalism is the call for the perpetual integration of force and diplomacy. To conservative internationalists, force is not something to be used only after negotiations fail. Instead, the ability to project military force provides leverage both to ensure that adversaries cannot make advances outside of negotiations, and to increase the likelihood of outcomes beneficial to freedom within these talks. The need for this second tenet results to a great extent from the insights of the first. Because international hostilities are frequently the product of ideological differences as opposed to the workings of the security dilemma (the action-reaction process in which efforts by states to increase their security unintentionally threaten others, thereby resulting in unwanted tensions), the accumulation and occasional display of power will tend not to provoke unwanted conflicts, but deter intended aggression by ideological enemies.

To use an example from current events, conservative internationalists believe that a display of military force in eastern Europe today—such as increased military support for America’s allies in the region—would not destroy trust with Russia or be the core cause of an adversarial relationship. Lack of trust and perceptions of enmity *already* exist due to the effects of ideological differences between Russia on one hand and the United States and its European allies on the other. Moreover, these outcomes would be in play even without NATO expansion after the Cold War’s end (which some analysts assert to have been the root cause of hostilities with Russia after the Soviet Union’s demise). Even if NATO had not increased its membership in the 1990s and 2000s, Russia’s President Vladimir Putin would still fear the demise of authoritarianism and the spread of democracy in eastern Europe—as occurred during the “color” revolutions in the region in the 2000s and in Ukraine in 2014. The more democracy spreads in eastern Europe: 1) the greater the likelihood that revolution will spread to Russia, and 2) the more likely that states in this part of the world will shift their international loyalties away from Russia and toward Western regimes. These fears would exist independently of the composition of NATO’s membership. Vladislav Surkov, the Deputy Director of the Presidential Administration and a top advisor to Putin at the time of the color revolutions, for example, claimed that these political changes had “made a very strong impression on many [Russian] politicians,” and he worried that their spread to Russia was a “very real threat.”³ Because Russian policymakers viewed America as an important support behind the spread of democracy in the region, fears for these individuals’ domestic interests contributed to increasing tensions with the U.S.⁴ Putin expressed similar fears and hostility in justifying Russia’s annexation of Crimea after the revolution in Ukraine in 2014 that ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, a

³ Quoted in Thomas Ambrosio, “Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends,” *Democratization* 14, no. 2 (April 2007): 241. See also Giorgi Gvalia, David Siroky, Bidzina Lebanidze, and Zurab Iashvili, “Thinking outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States,” *Security Studies* 22, no. 1 (January-March 2013): 108, 120-121, 125. The latter source is particularly good at demonstrating how elites’ ideological identities are critical to threat perceptions and balancing preferences.

⁴ Ambrosio, “Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution,” 237-241.

Putin ally.⁵ The higher Russia's threat perceptions due to the effects of ideological differences, the greater the need for the U.S. to arm its diplomacy for the sake of deterrence and achieving favorable negotiating outcomes. The display of modest amounts of force today could obviate the need for more extensive displays in the future.

Conservative internationalism's third tenet is that leaders must respect domestic constraints and public opinion, not only at home, but abroad. This tradition's call for the spread of democracy is thus not one based on a "one size fits all" approach. Instead, it is a "foreign policy approach dedicated to both the spread of democracy *and* the preservation of national sovereignty. Conservative internationalism envisions a world of 'sister republics' [Thomas Jefferson's phrase], diverse in culture and geography, but similar in republican ideology and democratic politics" (201).

Conservative internationalism's core tenets draw on key positions advocated by other major foreign policy traditions. It is thus a synthetic approach that combines the strengths of other strategies while minimizing their weaknesses. Like liberal internationalists, conservative internationalists believe that spreading freedom-based institutions and values will benefit U.S. security. Like realists, conservative internationalists recognize that power is a key precondition for successful diplomacy. As with nationalists, conservative internationalists understand the need to recognize the sanctity of national sovereignty and cultural differences, even among ideological allies.

The book has numerous strengths, though three in particular stand out. The first and most important from my perspective is the articulation of multiple specific foreign policy prescriptions for the advancement of U.S. security. These prescriptions are informed by both international relations theory and past foreign policy successes. To begin with, Nau develops what might be labeled a 'geo-ideological' approach to democracy promotion. To Nau, the United States should not attempt to spread freedom-based institutions everywhere in the world, but only in those locations where they are most likely to succeed. Nau hypothesizes that geography is critical to prospective success. Countries that neighbor existing democracies are more likely to transition to this regime type than are those states that are surrounded by authoritarian ones (8, 10, 54, 208, 232, 244).

Nau's geo-ideological position helps explain why the George W. Bush administration's efforts at regime exportation in Afghanistan and Iraq failed, as neither country was situated next to an established liberal democracy. It would have been more effective for America's interests in the Middle East and south Asia to have helped consolidate democracy in Turkey (next to Greece) and Pakistan (next to India) than to have dedicated massive resources for regime exportation in Iraq and Afghanistan. If threats to the United States originate from countries that do not neighbor democracies, such as Afghanistan after 9/11, Nau recommends a realist-based "in and out" military-strikes approach, rather than nation

⁵ Steven Lee Myers and Ellen Barry, "Putin Reclaims Crimea for Russia and Bitterly Denounces the West," *New York Times*, March 18, 2014.

building and democracy promotion (9, 238). Nau's insights in this area are very important contributions to the subject of democracy promotion.

Nau's analysis also instructs as to when more aggressive or more accommodating foreign policies are likely to be more beneficial to the advancement of U.S. interests. Forceful deterrent policies will tend to be most valuable when confronting enemy states led by ideological hardliners. Such actions carry with them the greatest likelihood of both preventing international aggression and stimulating domestic-ideological change, as ideological moderates and reformers in the target state may feel emboldened in the wake of hardliners' failed policies. When ideological reformers govern in the rival country, however, more accommodating policies by the U.S. are in order so as to encourage and reward ideological change. Because international threats are to a great degree a product of domestic ideological differences, less hostile policies are necessary the more the ideological gap dividing leaders shrinks (233).⁶ As Nau shows, Ronald Reagan exemplified both predispositions, arming his diplomacy against hardliners like Leonid Brezhnev and softening it against reformers like Mikhail Gorbachev.

Finally, Nau's argument adds to a key contemporary foreign policy debate, namely whether the United States should reduce its military presence in the world in favor of more isolationist or "offshore balancing" policies, or continue the internationalist and deep engagement policies it has adopted since the Second World War. A 2013 article by Stephen Brooks, John Ikenberry, and Bill Wohlforth provides perhaps the most systematic defense of the latter policies.⁷ Nau highlights a major benefit of U.S. internationalism that these scholars omit, however: the preservation and spread of democratic regimes in the face of authoritarian pressure. The more U.S. power retreats from the world, the more precarious some democracies will become, and relatedly, the more authoritarian regimes will push their increasing advantage. Nau's book thus correctly predicts that in response to U.S. retrenchment by the Barack Obama administration, tensions with Russia would grow as Putin attempted to reconstitute Russia's sphere of influence in eastern Europe, including by extending support to fellow authoritarians (9, 227). Extensive security and economic cooperation between illiberal Russia and China, including what one scholar labels a "counter-revolutionary proto-alliance" designed to prevent the toppling of governments by popular protests, is additional support for Nau's argument, as is the fact that the number of democracies in the world has shrunk in the last decade (226).⁸

⁶ I make a similar argument in *The Clash of Ideologies*, pp. 32-40. I argue that the George W. Bush and Barack Obama presidencies largely did not follow these prescriptions in dealing with Iran, to the detriment of U.S. interests. The Clinton administration was much more effective in this regard (*ibid.*, pp. 106-123).

⁷ Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home America: the Case against Retrenchment," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Winter 2012/13), pp. 7-51. For an extensive list of sources calling for offshore balancing policies, see the first footnote in this article.

⁸ Pavel K. Baev, "Russia's Counter-Revolutionary Stance toward the Arab Spring," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 3 (2011): 11-19; Sangtu Ko, "Strategic Partnership in a Unipolar System: The Sino-Russian Relationship," *Issues & Studies* 42, no. 3 (September 2006): 203-225; Jan-Werner Mueller, "Eastern Europe Goes South: Disappearing Democracy in the EU's Newest Members," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (March/April 2014), pp.

A second core strength of the book is that it draws clear differences between conservative internationalist and neo-conservative foreign policies (3, 6, 28, 33, 54-55). This is important because analysts often conflate all prescriptions to use force to spread democracy with neo-conservatism, with the Bush administration's failed policies as the primary example of the effects of this approach. Although conservative internationalism and neo-conservatism do share the goal of exporting democracy, their differences are also striking, as Nau makes clear. To begin with, conservative internationalists do not necessarily recommend direct armed intervention to topple authoritarians—as neo-conservatives did in the 2003 Iraq War, for example. The former instead champion armed diplomacy that frustrates the international ambitions of authoritarians while hopefully encouraging more moderate elements in these countries to push for leadership (6, 55, 204, 221, 233-34). Relatedly, and as discussed, conservative internationalists do not actively try to export democracy in all parts of the world, but only to those countries that border existing democracies.

It must also be stressed that to conservative internationalists, armed diplomacy means the use of *both* force and diplomacy, not just the former. As Nau puts it, "Timely compromise, knowing when to cash in military power to advance ideological goals, is the key to moving a world of ideological division toward a world of tolerance based on democratic community. Regime change is the ultimate goal because regime types determine the nature of international institutions and the operation of the balance of power. But regime change cannot be achieved in one fell swoop, particularly in parts of the world, such as the Middle East, that are devoid of democratic models and experience" (204). A key failing of Bush and his neo-conservative advisors is that they refused to negotiate with enemy states, most notably Iran, even when America's troop deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan gave it substantial diplomatic leverage and when Iranian ideological reformers (who were to a substantial degree sympathetic to the U.S.) possessed unparalleled political power (from 2000 to 2004, Iranian reformers controlled both the Presidency and Parliament). To the Bush administration, however, only a full-blown ideological revolution in Tehran would end America's enmity with it.⁹ Such a stance is not consistent with conservative internationalism as Nau develops it.

The third major contribution of the book is that it makes clear the causal impact that ideas in general and domestic identities in particular can have in international relations. As evidenced in the case studies, ideological differences are a profound source of threat in international relations (the chapters on Truman and Reagan are particularly good at demonstrating this), just as shrinkages in ideological distances are a key source of international conflict resolution (see the Reagan chapter and the analysis of the end of the

14-19. On Sino-Russian security cooperation over the last decade largely due to the effects of ideologies, see Mark L. Haas, "Ideological Polarity and Balancing in Great Power Politics," *Security Studies*, forthcoming.

⁹ See Mark L. Haas, "Missed Ideological Opportunities and George W. Bush's Middle Eastern Policies," *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 2012), pp. 440-450; Haas, *Clash of Ideologies*, pp. 140-163.

Cold War in the concluding chapter). Ideas can also generate specific foreign policy prescriptions, such as Jefferson's armed support for the principle of freedom of the seas (Chapter 4). Ideas are not epiphenomenal of power calculations, as realists contend.¹⁰ Quite the opposite. Ideas often give meaning to power distributions, e.g., who is a threat and who is not. The same power in the hands of an ideological ally is perceived as a very different threat in the hands of an ideological enemy. Nor do cooperative interactions among ideological rivals tend to indefinitely override the effects of domestic identity differences, contrary to what systemic constructivists, or as Nau explains, liberal internationalists assert (24-25, 49). Ideological differences tend both to limit cooperative interactions while imputing negative connotations to any that do occur (e.g., cooperation among ideological enemies will be viewed as temporary or a Trojan horse).¹¹

Despite the book's many strengths, *Conservative Internationalism* has a few weaknesses. Two are particularly important in my mind. Both have to do with the further development of the conditions that inform the analysis. Nau's argument is not an exclusivist one that denies that other foreign policy traditions have made positive contributions to American security. Indeed, Nau asserts that because the different traditions emphasize different dimensions of how the world works, all are necessary to maximize U.S. security. This is particularly true for liberal internationalism compared to its conservative counterpart. Liberal internationalists focus on the factors that unite countries, such as trade, worries about weapons proliferation, and environmental concerns. Conservative internationalists, in contrast, focus on factors that divide countries, chiefly ideologies, culture, and issues of national sovereignty.¹² Because each of these traditions "emphasizes a different aspect of the world...the two traditions exist better in competition with another than if one of the other were absent" (24).

If what unites states is some of the time of greater consequence than the factors that divide them—which increases the appropriateness of liberal internationalism in comparison to conservative internationalism—we need to know when this is likely to be the case. Greater attention to the conditions that increase the appropriateness of the other traditions in relation to conservative internationalism would have been a valuable contribution to the book.

¹⁰ Ido Oren, "The Subjectivity of the 'Democratic' Peace: Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall 1995), pp. 147-184.

¹¹ Iranian hardliners, for example, reacted to Obama's outreach policies in 2009 with contempt and fear, labeling them actions of "soft war" (i.e., efforts at ideological subversion) that were in some ways more dangerous than the Bush's administration's conventional threats. See Robert F. Worth, "Iran Expanding Effort to Stifle the Opposition," *New York Times*, November 24, 2009.

¹² Elsewhere in a very useful piece, Nau labels these logics those of the "jigsaw puzzle" and "chessboard," respectively. Both logics are at different times correct. The trick is to be able ahead of time to predict when one is more appropriate. This is worthy of further investigation. Henry R. Nau, "The Jigsaw Puzzle and the Chess Board: The Making and Unmaking of Foreign Policy in the Age of Obama," *Commentary*, May 2012, pp. 13-20.

A related issue concerns the relative potency of ideological differences in comparison to other key variables in international relations, especially power. Ideological calculations lie at the heart of conservative internationalists' foreign policy prescriptions. The more important ideological distributions are in relation to power distributions in the generation of states' foreign policies, the more successful conservative internationalism will be in comparison to other strategies. As Nau puts this point, "the case for conservative internationalism...hinges on when ideas matter more than institutions and power" (215). Understanding when ideas are likely to be most impactful, including when they are most potent in relation to power variables, is by no means easy, and I have struggled to discern these conditions in my own work. Nau provides some illumination on this subject based on the evidence provided in his case studies (215-219). Further development of this issue, however, would have been beneficial because it is so fundamental to both theory development and policy prescription.

The book, for example, could have made a more detailed linkage with John Owen's work on ideological polarization (Nau does cite extensively Owen's scholarship). To Owen, the mere existence of states dedicated to rival ideological beliefs is not sufficient to create high levels of ideologically-based threats and the resulting incentives for ideological exportation. These outcomes tend to obtain only during periods that Owen labels high in terms of "ideological polarization," which he defines as the "progressive segregation of a population into two or more [ideological] sets, each of which cooperates internally and excludes externally."¹³ Ideological polarization is most likely to occur when elites in various countries are dedicated to different ideological beliefs (i.e., there is not large agreement that one particular set of ideological principles is clearly superior to others), and states are either vulnerable to regime change or wars occur that makes such domestic change more likely. In the absence of regime vulnerability or war, ideologies, according to Owen, are unlikely to play a central role in the formulation of states' security policies.

Understanding when ideological identities are likely to be most salient to leaders' perceptions and policies is key to maximizing the success of conservative internationalist policies. It would have been useful to know if Nau's understanding of these conditions aligns with Owen's, and if not, how Nau refines them.

These relatively minor weaknesses do little to detract from the overall success of *Conservative Internationalism*, which provides genuine insight into how best to advance America's core interests. It should, as a result, be of enduring interest to all analysts of international relations, and especially foreign policy practitioners.

¹³ Owen, *Clash of Ideas*, p. 40.

Review by Robert G. Kaufman, Pepperdine University

Henry R. Nau has written incisively about international politics for decades. His *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy under Jefferson, Polk, Truman, and Reagan* illuminates and refines our understanding of American Foreign policy, though the book does have significant flaws that qualify its ample virtues.

Nau argues for the existence and superiority of an American foreign policy tradition he calls “Conservative Internationalism.” He distinguishes conservative internationalism favorably from other foreign policy traditions --- Nationalist, Realist, and Liberal Internationalist --- having multiple variations. He specifies six types of foreign policies, linking each with a particular President: the Minimalist Nationalism of George Washington, an isolationist wary of alliances and categorically opposed to entangling alliances; the Militant Nationalism of Andrew Jackson, vigorous in the use of force within but not beyond the hemisphere; the Defensive Realism of Richard Nixon, committed to maintaining a global balance of power; the Offensive Realism of Theodore Roosevelt, imperialistic and striving for dominance; Liberal Internationalism of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, championing interdependence and international institutions while relegating the use force to a last and eventually a past resort; Conservative Internationalism of Thomas Jefferson, James K. Polk, Harry S. Truman, and Ronald Reagan, envisaging force, balance of power, and cooperation among sister democratic republics as requirements for maintaining and extending freedom.

Nau distills the essence of conservative internationalism in eleven tenets, “explaining, in the process, how this tradition “overlaps and differs from other traditions as well as neoconservatism” (52). His conception of conservative internationalism blends an emphasis on geopolitics and power with an appreciation for the significance of ideology and regime type in identifying threats, opportunities, friends, and foes. In some respects, Nau’s conservative internationalism resembles the synthetic paradigms of Charles Krauthammer (Democratic Realism) George Weigel (Moral Realism) and this writer (Moral Democratic Realism).¹ All of them make a moral, empirical, and strategic case for a foreign policy rejecting Wilsonian multilateralism, stressing the imperatives of power and geopolitics, but giving high priority to extending the democratic zone of peace when prudent. Nau goes well beyond these alternatives, however, in his elaborateness and refinement of distinctions. He also includes presidents in the pantheon of conservative internationalists such as Jefferson and Polk who are normally identified with other traditions. The considerable originality of Nau’s scheme of classification and his treatment of the major case studies are the wellspring of the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the book.

¹ Robert G. Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 87-100; Robert G. Kaufman, “The First Principles of Ronald Reagan’s Foreign Policy,” *First Principles Series Report no#40*, The Heritage Foundation, November 1, 2011; Charles Krauthammer, *Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World*, (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 2004); George Weigel, *American Interests, American Purposes: Moral Reasoning and U.S Foreign Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

Nau demonstrates elegantly the inadequacy of Realism, Nationalism, or Liberal Internationalism to capture the inspiration, logic, and success of Truman's and Reagan's foreign policies. Truman and Reagan also fall well outside of Walter Russell Mead's four schools of thought: the Hamiltonian (protection of commerce); the Jeffersonian (maintenance of a democratic system); Jacksonian (populist values, military strength); and Wilsonian (collective security and moral principles). Moreover, Nau rightly places Truman and Reagan in the same distinct category. President Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 75 (NSDD- 75), which was signed in the summer of 1983, bears striking similarities to the Truman Administration's April, 14, 1950² National Security Council Report (68). Both identified the Soviet regime as the root cause of the USSR's insatiable ambitions. Both called for maintaining unrelenting and comprehensive political, economic, and military pressure in order to facilitate the regime's collapse. In 1948, Reagan considered himself Truman Democrat, a position he eventually abandoned on domestic but never international politics. Likewise, many of Reagan's most influential advisors during his pivotal first term --- including Dr. Richard Pipes, the main author of NSDD-75 --- originally considered themselves Truman Democrats.

Truman's and Reagan's staunch support for promoting stable liberal democracy when geopolitically prudent and their unabashed condemnations of the moral evils of Soviet Communist totalitarianism contrast with the policies of realists such as Nixon and Kissinger who downplayed the importance of ideology, morality, and regime type. Truman's and Reagan's skepticism about the United Nations, their mixed view of human nature that was grounded in ineradicable human fallibility, and their emphasis on the importance of military might and the willingness to use it contrast with the policies of liberal internationalists such as Woodrow Wilson and Jimmy Carter who stressed the natural harmony of interest among men and states embodied in international institutions. Despite the paradox of Conservative internationalism having originated under the administration of the unrepentantly liberal Harry Truman, Nau has chosen his moniker for it wisely. President Barack Obama has finished off the last vestiges of Truman's tradition in the Democratic Party, which the 'New Politics' liberalism put on the path of ultimate extinction since the late 1960's. Truman's disposition towards foreign affairs and national security lives on most robustly in the Republican Party, especially its neoconservative wing.

Nau also makes a superb case for the greatness of Truman's and Reagan's foreign policies compared to the alternatives. He deftly makes the case for rating Polk's foreign policy highly, though not for classifying Polk as a Conservative Internationalist in the same vein as Truman and Reagan. Walter Russell Mead and Robert Merry more persuasively assign the

² Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 2001); 218-62; Robert W. Merry, *Vast Designs: James K. Polk, the Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 13-29.

Western Hemisphere oriented, nationalist, unilateralist Polk to the Jacksonian tradition rather than to any variant of twentieth-century internationalism.³

Nau's dubious assessment of Jefferson marks an appropriate segue for addressing the analytical and historical shortcoming of his book. The inclusion of Jefferson as an exemplar of Nau's conception of "Conservative Internationalism" defies plausibility. Walter Russell Mead, Robert Tucker, and David Hendrickson rightly see Jefferson as a liberal nationalist who was inclined to isolationism and highly averse to building or using military force.⁴ Jefferson strenuously opposed the wise efforts of the Federalists to build a blue-water navy capable of vindicating America's neutral rights against Great Britain or revolutionary France, leaving America woefully unprepared for the War of 1812 which the United States was lucky to draw thanks mainly to the dynamics of the European balance of power. He and James Madison shared a delusional faith in the efficacy of economic power as a substitute for muscular military deterrence. Jefferson's and Madison's feckless economic embargoes against Britain and France inflicted vastly more damage on the United States than those it aimed to persuade. Nau mischaracterized the foreign policy of Jefferson's Federalist opponents, while vastly inflating the credit Jefferson deserves for the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson's singular titanic foreign policy accomplishment. The Federalists favored neutrality with a pro-British tilt, not an alliance with England as Nau claims (43). Virtually any other major American statesmen of the time would have consummated the Louisiana Purchase with the opportunity Jefferson felicitously faced in 1803. Unlike many of his opponents, Jefferson acted in defiance rather than affirmation of his constitutional principles. William Borah, Jimmy Carter, and George McGovern have a greater purchase on Thomas Jefferson's foreign policy legacy than Truman, Reagan, or any other variation of conservative internationalism.

Nau also strives unsuccessfully to put more distance between "Conservative Internationalism" and neoconservatism than the evidence warrants. He wrongly conflates the views of Robert Kagan and William Kristol with neoconservatism in general. That is the wellspring of his artificial distinction between Reagan and the preponderance of leading neoconservatives. Francis Fukuyama has pointed out the striking affinities between Reagan and the neoconservatives in foreign affairs --- the trajectory and the substance of their intellectual and political journey.⁵ Or as former Secretary of State George Shultz put it approvingly: "I don't know how you define "neoconservatism" but I think it's associated with trying to spread open systems and democracy. I recall President Reagan's Westminster Speech in 1982 --- that communism would be consigned to the "ash heap of history and that freedom was the path ahead. And what happened? Between 1980 and

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 45-6.

1988 the number of countries that were classified as “free” or “mostly free” increased by about 50 percent. Open political and economic systems have been gaining ground and there is a good reason for it. They work better. I don’t know whether that is neoconservative or what it is, but I think it’s what has been happening. I’m for it.... I’m in favor of the vision. Ronald Reagan had a vision.⁶ Typically, Reagan found much congenial in neoconservatism, including a preference for stable liberal democratic outcomes when the United States could achieve it. Yet he struck a more prudential balance in recoiling from the reflective intervention of more exuberant neoconservatives such as Robert Kagan and William Kristol, who underestimated the obstacles to promoting stable liberal democracy in unpropitious circumstances. That distinction fails to apply, however, between Reagan and more sober neoconservatives such as Jeanne Kirkpatrick or Charles Krauthammer, who also harnessed their support for extending liberty to the priorities of geopolitics and the ethic of the lesser evil when no decent democratic alternative existed.⁷

Straining to distance “Conservative Internationalism” from the Iraq War of 2003, Nau draws untenable distinctions between Reagan and George W. Bush. The latter easily qualifies as “a Conservative Internationalist” or a Moral Democratic Realist as this writer called him. Reagan and Bush largely agreed on the first-principles of American foreign policy. The difference in the strategic circumstances each faced accounts for the minor variations in their approaches. The existence of a Soviet Union, armed with thousands of nuclear weapons, deprived President Reagan of the same latitude in an era of bipolarity that George W. Bush enjoyed in a unipolar moment in which American military power dwarfed all others.⁸

As Daniel Heninger observes, President George W. Bush did not originate his doctrine’s most controversial tenet ---- including military pre-emption in the repertoire of options against certain types of threats emanating from certain types of undeterrable actors.⁹ Secretary of State George Schultz fathered the idea during the Reagan Administration. For all the heartbreak of the Iraq war, it is not self-evident that fighting it was a mistake. George W. Bush left the office within hailing distance of achieving a major victory of establishing a decent democratic regime had the Obama Administration persevered to preserve the peace. Nor is it self-evident that Ronald Reagan would have acted any differently towards Iraq in the wake of 9/11 than George W. Bush did. Consider what Reagan had to say in his memoirs the danger of radical Islam in general and the “fanatics” in Iran in particular: “I don’t think you can overstate the importance that the rise of Islamic

⁶ Daniel Henniger, “The Weekend Interview with George Shultz: Father of the Bush Doctrine,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2006, A8.

⁷ Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); Charles Krauthammer, “In Defense of Democratic Realism,” *National Interest* 77 (Fall 2004), 15-25.

⁸ Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine*, 87-101.

⁹ Henniger, “A Weekend Interview with George Shultz: Father of the Bush Doctrine,” A8.

Fundamentalism will have on the rest of the world in the century ahead --- especially if, as seems possible, its most fanatical elements get their hands on nuclear and chemical weapons and the means to deliver them against their enemies.”¹⁰

In his propensity to lionize Reagan, Nau also slights the significance of Iran-Contra, a huge and politically costly blunder that substantially narrows the prudential gap between Reagan and George W. Bush.

The similarities between Bush and Truman also loom larger than their differences. Both Presidents enunciated and implemented new foreign policy doctrines that were more robust and proactive than their predecessors. Both suffered precipitous erosion of the huge public support they enjoyed initially when the wars they waged became long, costly, stalemated, and without any clear exit strategy. Indeed, Bush made fewer mistakes in achieving his positive outcome in Iraq and entailing far less loss of American lives than Truman did in the Korean War that Nau justly defends. Nau implies but cannot sustain the claim that the failure of the Truman Administration to predict Chinese intervention did not approach the seriousness of the intelligence failures involving Weapons of Mass Destruction or the dynamics of the insurgency in Iraq. Like Truman, history may vindicate Bush rather than his contemporaries who vilify him, especially if negotiation and conciliation fail to pacify the nuclear ambitions of a revolutionary Iran.

It is political contingency, not substance, that accounts for the most significant difference between Truman and Bush. Truman’s reputation received a powerful boost sooner than Bush can hope to contemplate because his successor consolidated Truman’s iconic initiatives, providing the architecture for vigilant containment. Conversely, Bush has the misfortune of having his successor repudiate the main staples of the Bush Doctrine. Imagine if the isolationist Republican Robert Taft rather than Dwight Eisenhower had won the 1952 Republican Nomination and presidential election. Or imagine if the “Conservative Interventionist” John McCain rather than Barack Obama had won the Presidential Election of 2008. Taft probably would have eviscerated the Truman Doctrine. McCain probably would have sustained the Bush Doctrine. Had these hypotheticals materialized, Truman would have received more belated positive recognition than Bush.

Generally, Nau has well-conceived his eleven tenets of “Conservative Internationalism.” Nevertheless, two of them require substantial qualification. His Tenet to “Prioritize Opportunities to Spread Freedom on the Borders of Existing Freedom” may legitimately establish a presumption, but not a categorical imperative. Otherwise, the United States would not have imposed stable liberal democracy in Japan or Germany after World War II. Nor would the United States have pressed for it in much of post-War Europe, including France where the Vichy Regime initially was significantly more popular than the beleaguered Third Republic preceding it.¹¹ Although the United States should never go to

¹⁰ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (Simon & Shuster, 1990), 409).

¹¹ For the definitive work on this disgraceful chapter in French History, see Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard, New Order* (New York: Knopf, 1972). Nor was the Triumph of Democracy a sure thing

war absent a concrete vital geopolitical interest, regime change is often a valid war aim to solve the root cause of the conflict. Think of Germany and Japan in the Second World War as prime examples. Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill rightly insisted on unconditional surrender and democratic regime change. Similarly, the United States did not go to war in Iraq in 2003 because Saddam Hussein was a tyrant, but because he menaced America's concrete interests, invading Kuwait, provoking regional conflagration, pursuing weapons of mass destruction, flouting seventeen UN resolutions. Democratic regime change offered the most reliable means of extinguishing the gathering danger of Saddam's Iraq for good. As with leaving Europe after World War I precipitously without establishing a permanent American presence that may have consolidated the peace, the United States made the mistake of leaving Iraq too soon before the fledgling fragile democracy rested on a durable foundation.

Nau's eleventh tenet -- "Always Trust the People to Determine the Limits on Both Freedom and Force" --- also cannot withstand historical or practical scrutiny as a categorical imperative. In the first place, Nau's heroes -- Truman and Reagan -- sometimes honored those principles in the breach. Many of Truman's boldest initiatives occurred at the low point of his pre-1948 popularity, challenging rather than acquiescing to the sometimes fickle mistress of public opinion. Reagan launched many of his most controversial and successful initiatives at the low point of his popularity in 1982, amidst a deep recession and mounting public skepticism to his confrontational policies towards the Soviet Union, particularly his arms buildup, belligerent rhetoric, and the Strategic Defense Initiative. During the 1930's Winston Churchill, rightly violated Nau's 11th Tenet (Always Trust the People to Determine the Limits of Both Freedom and Force) (p, 59) assailing the feckless policy of appeasing the unappeasable Nazi regime. Great Statesmen must respect, cultivate, and respect public opinion but never becoming a slave to it.

In the second place, Nau's formulation also inverts the relationship between cause and effect. Failure will breed discontent. Success will generate support. The United States did not lose the Vietnam war because the war was unpopular. Initially popular, Vietnam became increasingly controversial because the United States seemed not to know how to win it at tolerable cost in a time certain. This relationship holds for initially popular Iraq War of 2003. Conversely, the initially formidable public opposition to the Iraq War of 1991 vanished when the United States seemed to win quickly, decisively, and cheaply.

For all these caveats about Nau's historiography, classifications, and tenets, *Conservative Internationalism* is a worthy book on many levels. Scholars, statesmen, and the general public will profit immensely from the wealth of wisdom it contains.

after World War II. The Communists in France represented a serious threat which an American continental presence and significant American overt and covert aid helped stave off in favor of an open, free, democratic, if tumultuous Fourth Republic. See Anthony Beevor and Artemis Cooper, *Paris after the Liberation: 1944-49* (London: Penguin, 2004), 3-341.

Review by KC Johnson, Brooklyn College

When I teach my graduate course on the history of the presidency, I often have assigned Stephen Skowronek's *The Politics Presidents Make* as an introductory text.¹ The book moves across chronological periods and historical contexts to place presidents into differing categories. Its weaknesses, however, are also clear: sometimes the differences between events in, say, 1799 and 1993 are simply too large to provide meaningful analysis.

Herny R. Nau's study of conservative internationalism shares many of the strengths—but also suffers from some of the weaknesses—of Skowronek's work. By choosing administrations separated by as much as 180 years, the book forces readers to consider continuities over time that might otherwise have been missed. But one of Nau's selections works poorly, and he sometimes comes across as too enthusiastic about his subject matter to persuade neutral readers.

Nau seeks to elevate the tradition of “conservative internationalism” in the study of U.S. foreign policy. He suggests that unlike its competitors (liberal internationalism, realism, and nationalism), it has received insufficient attention from foreign policy commentators and scholars alike. He lists eleven central characteristics of conservative internationalism, which he mostly seeks to distinguish from its liberal counterpart.

Nau somewhat convincingly argues that conservative internationalists are far more likely than liberal internationalists to recommend the prudent use of force, especially to preempt broader threats; that they are less likely to trust U.S. national security to international organizations; and that they are generally more respectful of the constitutional limitations of the presidency. Nau also sees conservative internationalists—unlike realists—as committed to “expand freedom and ultimately increase the number of democratic, constitutional governments in the world community” (52).

Nau argues that the conservative internationalist tradition dates from early Republic and was revived by President Ronald Reagan; the book's most passionate section celebrates Reagan's handling of international affairs. Reagan, Nau suggests (p. 29), embodied three distinguishing features of conservative internationalism—he stood for the “spread of freedom”; he was realistic but not wedded to “the status quo of existing domestic regimes”; and he “respected the limits of domestic politics when it came to the pursuit of freedom” (29).

Nau hails Reagan's commitment to a military buildup to enhance his diplomatic posture, and his tendency to work diplomatically through ad hoc mechanisms rather than through the UN. The author stresses the importance of rhetoric to Reagan's foreign policy vision. While the ‘evil empire’ remarks were the most famous of this pattern, Nau also points to

¹ Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton, Revised Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997).

the President's consistent willingness to attack the Berlin Wall's existence, as well as his public conceiving of a world in which nuclear weapons would be less important. And, like successful conservative internationalists before him, the President held firm in the face of foreign pressure. Like many who have positively reviewed Reagan's foreign policy, Nau cites the pressure that Reagan placed on the Soviets through his nuclear buildup, whether through the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program or through the placement of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) missiles to Europe. Nau strongly praises Reagan for not succumbing to the anti-nuclear protests that spread throughout Europe in the early 1980s—a decision that in retrospect proved correct (182).

Nau also defends Reagan from his critics. It's wrong to say, Nau contends, that Reagan abandoned negotiations, as some liberals and realists charged in his first term; rather, he "understood as a conservative internationalist that diplomacy could accomplish very little unless the underlying balance of forces supported it" (190). Once the United States was in a better position to bargain—after 1985—the President showed considerable flexibility in diplomacy.

The book's Reagan chapter is solidly argued, yet sometimes Nau's enthusiasm for Reagan leads him to obvious overstatements. For instance, Nau identifies Reagan as a domestic conservative on four grounds, including his claims (196) that on domestic affairs, Reagan "always gave preference to the individual not government" and that he was a "paragon of character rather than of puffed-up intelligence" (196). It clearly is not true that Reagan *always* "gave preference to the individual not government" (to take an obvious example, no criticism of *Bowers v. Hardwick* emanated from a White House that in general was hostile to gay rights). And I'm not aware of any credible study that links character with a politician's ideology.

The book also needed a broader take on Reagan's handling of international affairs. The President's approach to the Soviet Union fits well into Nau's framework, but what about Reagan's initial policies toward Chile, the Philippines, and South Africa, none of which could be described as promoting freedom or democracy abroad. (That Reagan eventually changed course regarding the first two of these nations might have enhanced Nau's argument, but he does not make the point.) And the administration's funding of anti-communist Contra rebels in Nicaragua, a policy that consistently aroused both congressional and public opposition, contradicts several tenets of Nau's conservative internationalism, chiefly the claims that conservative internationalists respect popular attitudes and constitutional norms.

Reagan, Nau contends, did not stand alone. Rather, he formed part of a group of four presidents the author selected as embodying conservative internationalism on the basis of their "ambitious ideological aims and assertive use of military force" (30).

Two of these choices work quite well. Thomas Jefferson, Nau admits, is something of a "protean" figure (81). Elements of his foreign policy are consistent with realism and liberal internationalism, but conservative internationalists, too, can look to his record for guidance, chiefly in his prudent expansionism and his use of force despite U.S. weakness.

In Nau's portrayal, Jefferson spread democracy opportunistically; the book cites the examples of the Barbary Wars, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Embargo Act. In discussing the Barbary Wars, Nau notes that Jefferson long had been interested in a more robust U.S. presence in the Mediterranean, but had been unable to persuade the administration of George Washington, in which he served a term as secretary of state, to devote the necessary resources. His use of force against Tripoli shortly after taking over as President "implied a military action of choice not necessity" (91). Nau also praises Jefferson's determination to act unilaterally rather than in cooperation with the Europeans. He ultimately stretched American power and ideals to the limit, but succeeded in weakening the Barbary threat.

In handling the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson likewise exhibited the careful use of threat of force to expand freedom. It is true, Nau observes, that Jefferson would not have succeeded without outside developments (much as occurred with Reagan and the emergence of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev), but he was positioned to take advantage of the situation when Napoleon Bonaparte's European needs led the French emperor to shed his Western Hemisphere possessions.

With regards to Harry Truman, Nau concedes the obvious—that Truman is most generally considered a liberal internationalist—but suggests that Truman's foreign policy differed enough from that of Woodrow Wilson to be claimable for conservative internationalism as well. Nau points to the creation of NATO, the embrace of containment, and Truman's decision to adopt a more ideological rather than a geopolitical interpretation of the Cold War as reflecting conservative internationalist priorities. He also observes that, when necessary, Truman sidelined the United Nations to achieve his goals. (163)

Nau for the most part elides the weaknesses of his interpretation of Truman as a conservative internationalist, particularly the fact that few would consider the Missouri Democrat a "constitutional conservative" (169) on domestic issues and in his aggressive use of executive authority in Korea and in the aborted seizure of the steel mills.

Nau doesn't claim that either Truman or Jefferson could be construed solely as a conservative internationalist. But rather than finding a third President who might fit into a mixed ideological legacy (Theodore Roosevelt? William Howard Taft?), Nau instead identifies James K. Polk as reflecting conservative internationalist beliefs. But since Nau is sympathetic to conservative internationalism, the inclusion of Polk leads the author to unconvincing portrayals of Polk's beliefs and foreign policy agenda.

To take a few examples, I would not describe Polk as "haunted" (7) by the fact that black people could not vote in the 1840s. Nor do I think it could be safely said that a President who sought protectorates over Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Yucatán was motivated by an ideology determined to "tilt the balance of power toward freedom" (51).

Nonetheless, Nau contends that three aspects of Polk's foreign policy made him a conservative internationalist: that he "went beyond the status quo to spread democratic

self-government but disciplined this quest by setting clear priorities”; that he used force to accompany diplomacy; and that he “respected the right of Congress and public opinion to pass final judgment on his foreign policy” (113). Only the most charitable interpreter of Polk’s administration would describe the President’s imperialist ventures in this fashion.

Nau oddly portrays the expansion of U.S. control to the Southwest as serving “the cause of freedom for natives and settlers alike,” (115) on the grounds that post-1850 Mexico generally did not respect popular opinion or democratic rights, and therefore the residents ultimately were better off as part of the United States. Yet this definition of “freedom” excludes a right to self-determination—a hallmark of Reagan’s criticism of the communist puppet states in Eastern Europe.

Nau also excuses the imperialist diplomacy that predated the U.S. invasion of Mexico. Instead, he portrays the war as one of last resort, necessary only once Mexico rebuffed James Polk’s diplomatic overtures. As “the sword always served the olive branch” (129), Nau reasons that the major issue in 1846 came from Mexico’s excessive weakness, which prevented the Mexican government from negotiating in good faith with Polk. In this respect, “Mexico’s leadership or lack thereof also shared blame for the war” (p. 135).

This is an extraordinary claim. Polk’s diplomatic ‘overtures’ aimed to seize a significant portion of a sovereign nation’s territory. No credible Mexican government, weak or strong, could ever have agreed to such a demand.

The book ends with a lengthy conclusion that seeks to apply these historical patterns to future policy developments. Nau notes that recent decades have seen continual differences between parties, along with aggressive swings of the foreign policy pendulum from the realism of George H. W. Bush (Bush I) to the liberal internationalism of Bill Clinton to the nationalism of George W. Bush (Bush II) to the somewhat defensive realism of Barack Obama. He clearly anticipates that another swing will be coming again in the post-Obama world.

If a Republican prevails in 2016, will we see a new conservative internationalist administration? Given the aggressive nationalism of congressional Republicans since 2009—indeed, the party no longer could accommodate even one of Reagan’s most important foreign policy supporters, Indiana senator Richard Lugar—I’m skeptical. But if Nau is correct, the conservative internationalist tradition should have sufficient strength to, at the least, challenge the nationalism that has come to dominate so much of the contemporary congressional right

Author's Response by Henry R. Nau, George Washington University

In the academic world, critique is compliment. Such is the case for the three H-Diplo reviews of my book, *Conservative Internationalism* by Mark Haas, KC Johnson and Robert Kaufman. The reviews reflect, for the most part, a careful reading and understanding of my book and offer not only reasonable but helpful criticisms.

Haas and Kaufman recognize “the considerable originality” of the conservative internationalist approach, its focus on regime type and ideology as the primary (not exclusive) source of behavior in international affairs, which they share in their own work, and the relative absence of this approach in the literature on U.S. foreign policy (best illustrated by the matrix on page 27 of my book). As they point out, the emphasis on ideology clearly distinguishes conservative internationalism from nationalism and realism, which emphasize power, and from liberal internationalism, which emphasizes diplomacy. It also distinguishes Presidents Truman and Reagan, who emphasized ideology, from Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Richard Nixon, who downplayed it. The historian KC Johnson questions any effort to compare presidents across widely varying historical contexts and passes over the concepts in my book or associates them largely with the chapter on Ronald Reagan, which he says, though “solidly argued . . . celebrates” Reagan.¹ I’ll come back to this point at the end.

Haas also captures incisively the integration of military force and diplomacy emphasized by *conservative internationalism*. The deployment and, if necessary, use of force early to deter aggression outside negotiations is always coupled with priorities and timely compromises inside negotiations to move freedom forward where it counts the most, namely on the borders of existing freedom, not everywhere at once. The use of military force during negotiations distinguishes conservative internationalism from liberal internationalism, which sees the threat or use of force as unhelpful during negotiations and appropriate only as a last resort after negotiations and economic sanctions fail; and the willingness to set priorities and compromise distinguishes conservative internationalism from neoconservatism, which in some versions at least shuns diplomatic concessions and often exhausts the public will.

Conservative internationalism sets priorities by reference to geo-ideology, meaning that conflicts on the borders between existing strong democracies and aspiring despots matter more than conflicts in regions where few if any democracies exist. Losing freedom on the border between Europe and Russia, for example, is more devastating because despotism rolls menacingly toward the center of the free world. And winning freedom on this border or the borders between South Korea and North Korea is more likely because neighboring democracies such as the United States, European Union, Japan, and Taiwan exert powerful

¹ For a similar review of my book by another historian, see Alonzo Hamby, “Book Shelf: Conservative Internationalism,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 2013. For my response, see Letters to the Editor, “History: Hard Core of Interpretation, a Cloud of Facts,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 15, 2013. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304106704579135340955640078#printMode>

pressures (alliances, civil societies and markets) to facilitate success. In short, a threat in Ukraine and Korea takes priority over a threat in Iraq or Afghanistan remote from neighboring democracies.

The post-Iraq debate between neoconservatives and other conservatives muddles these distinctions. My study neither identifies with nor excoriates neoconservatives.² It has a much larger and more lasting purpose, namely to define a fourth foreign policy tradition that includes neoconservatives but does not equate solely with them and expands the debate beyond nationalism, realism, and liberal internationalism.

Neoconservatives and conservative internationalists share the commitment to spread freedom and to back diplomacy with force. But they differ on the need for priorities and compromise. During the Cold War, neocons and other conservatives shared a priority on the Soviet Union but differed over if and when to compromise. Some, such as Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and CIA Director Bill Casey, spurned any compromise with the Soviet Union. Others, like President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz, saw compromise that weakened the Soviet Union as the whole point of an arms race and negotiations. After the Cold War, neocons and other conservatives divided on both priorities and the need for compromise. Less assertive conservative internationalists such as U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Jeanne Kirkpatrick urged America to become a more normal nation and pull back, while more assertive neoconservatives like Robert Kagan and William Kristol called upon it to undertake new heroic exertions – against terrorism, rogue nations, the enemies of Israel and the like.³

Reagan, Kaufman argues, “struck a more prudential balance.” But then Kaufman equates Reagan with George W. Bush, saying that given “the unipolar moment” Reagan would have behaved after 9/11 the same way as Bush. According to Kaufman, Reagan saw the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and the potential acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by rogue states as the equivalent of the Soviet communist threat in central Europe, in short a World War IV (after World Wars I and II and the Cold War) as the most ardent neoconservatives labeled it.⁴ If so, Reagan’s approach was hardly “prudential.”

² Kaufman accuses me of distancing myself from neocons and Michael Desch accuses me of identifying with them. See Desch’s review and my response in *The American Conservative*, November/December 2013, “Neoconservatism Rebaptized,” and “Conservative Internationalism is not Bushism,” respectively, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/neoconservatism-rebaptized/>.

³ See Kirkpatrick, “A Normal Country in a Normal Time,” *The National Interest* (Fall 1990), 40–44; and William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, 75:4 (1996): 18–32. For another view like Kirkpatrick’s, see Kim J. Holmes and John Hillen, “Misreading Reagan’s Legacy,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, 5 (September/October 1996), 162–168.

⁴ Norman Podhoretz, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamo-Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

More plausibly, Reagan, while applying force, set clearer priorities and was more inclined to look for compromise. As declassified records now show, he intended to negotiate with Moscow from the very beginning but wanted to establish an indisputable position of military and economic strength before doing so.⁵ He compromised at the moment he determined that ideological divisions had narrowed under Gorbachev.⁶ Bush, by contrast, set no priorities (“support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world”) and spurned negotiations even at the moment of maximum military leverage. As Haas notes, reformers in Iran were ready to deal in 2003-04.⁷ But Bush missed the opportunity, delayed the formation of an Iraqi government for three years, and did not launch a Middle East peace initiative until November 2007 (in contrast to his father, who followed the first Persian Gulf War almost immediately with the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference). Moreover, there is considerable evidence, which I amass in chapter 3, that George W. Bush was at heart a conservative *nationalist* not internationalist. Unlike Reagan, Bush called for a more humble foreign policy when he came into office, reacted with populist and unilateral belligerence after 9/11, and put his Middle East Democracy Initiative front and center only after the United States failed to find WMD in Iraq. Since Kaufman clearly knows more about Bush than I do, I wish he had engaged this evidence.

Bush’s failure to set priorities had consequences. Kaufman says that conservative internationalism’s emphasis on priorities should be presumptive not categorical. Otherwise, he says, Germany and Japan would not have become democratic. But Germany and Japan, by my geo-ideological reckoning, were on the borders between free and unfree countries in 1945. Yes, France and Italy had weak democratic governments that included communist parties, but the communists were out of government by mid-1947. Spain and Portugal too were not democratic; nor were Greece and Turkey. But, more importantly, the United States, Canada, England, the low countries, and most of Scandinavia were solidly democratic. Everyone understood that the frontlines of freedom were in Germany and central Europe, especially after the Berlin Blockade. The same was true in Japan after the Korean War. By contrast, Lebanon and Vietnam were remote from central Cold-War conflicts.

Recent U.S. interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan were not on the borders of existing free countries. While these interventions may have been justified to counter threats, as Kaufman insists and I agree (Al Qaeda in the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and WMD in Iraq), they did not constitute priorities for spreading freedom. The United States would

⁵ For the best account of Reagan’s presidency thus far, based entirely on newly declassified records, see Martin and Annelise Anderson, *Reagan’s Secret War* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2009).

⁶ Haas’s work shows this clearly. See “The United States and the End of the Cold War: Reactions to Shifts in Soviet Power, Policies, or Domestic Politics?” *International Organization*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter 2007), 145-179.

⁷ Mark L. Haas, *The Clash of Ideologies: Middle Eastern Politics and American Security* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

have been better off getting in and out of these countries quickly, dealing with threat but not trying to build democratic nations. After more than ten years, governments in Iraq and Afghanistan are no stronger or more democratic today than they were in 2006-07. Ukraine, Turkey, the Korean peninsula, and Taiwan, on the other hand, are far more central to the fortunes of freedom. Unfortunately George W. Bush hurt the prospects of freedom in Turkey by bypassing it in the Iraq invasion and in Ukraine by staying so long in Iraq and Afghanistan that the public eventually lost its will for any foreign involvement.

In any case, as Haas points out, the differences between conservative internationalism and neoconservatism are as important as the similarities. Conservative internationalism is not the same thing as neoconservatism, any more than a one world or post national internationalism, as espoused by Henry Wallace in Truman's day or European socialists today, is the same thing as liberal internationalism. Neoconservatism belongs in the conservative internationalism quadrant (see the matrix on page 27), just as one world or post national internationalism belongs in the liberal internationalist quadrant. But the quadrants include many variations of each tradition, and no one would equate liberal internationalism exclusively with one world or post national internationalism.

Johnson and Kaufman also miss the significance of my third major point, that conservative internationalism respects the constraints of domestic public opinion and national sovereignty in legitimating the use of force. Johnson conflates this point with individualism (character) and libertarianism (gay rights), when I am talking about majoritarian decision making in the public square where libertarianism may be only one point of view. Kaufman, on the other hand, argues that public opinion, as in the case of Truman and in his opinion also of George W. Bush, does not matter if history vindicates a presidential decision. According to Kaufman, history vindicated Truman because Eisenhower consolidated Truman's initiatives but did not vindicate Bush because President Barack Obama repudiated Bush's initiatives. But that is my point. Public opinion determined the respective outcomes, not verdicts of history or academic sages. Presidents may lead during times of low public approval, as Kaufman points out in the case of Truman (1946-48) and Bush (2006-08), but ultimately they are judged by public opinion. And public opinion swung so sharply after Bush that Obama reversed the status quo in Iraq and Afghanistan. It swung less sharply after Truman, which allowed Eisenhower to preserve the U.S. position in Korea. (One reason for public responses in both cases, based on conservative internationalist logic, may be that Korea was on the border of freedom with Japan while Iraq and Afghanistan were remote from strong neighboring democracies.) Conservative internationalism rejects the idea, more prevalent in liberal internationalism and realism, that elites or experts know better than the general public about foreign affairs. Elites have to make their case in the public square (at the time and later through historical debates) and, like everyone else, accept the verdict of the people if they are true democrats with a small "d." The public may get it wrong, but if they do, they bear the responsibility and the costs as the ultimate source of accountability in free societies.

The best we can do in a democracy, therefore, is to educate the public and ensure that all points of view are heard in the public debate. This is the main purpose of my book, to revive an awareness of a fourth foreign policy tradition and improve the public debate. My

rationale accords with Jefferson's two main markers for a healthy democracy. When one side loses the debate at any given moment, it has a right to try to win the debate the next time but no right to secede or impose its minority view on others: "He who would do his country the most good . . . must go quietly with the prejudices of the majority until he can lead them to reason."⁸ And the place to win that public debate is not by the judgment of history or foreign policy experts but in the public square in which "error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."⁹

Haas asks the best question as to when *conservative internationalism* may be the most appropriate choice in this public debate. He and others such as John Owen and Iain Johnston have done a lot of work to illuminate this question.¹⁰ In general, the stronger the divergence of ideologies (the greater the substantive ideological distance between actors), the more *conservative internationalism* may apply because of the greater need to arm diplomacy to deter hostile actions and to influence the direction of negotiations. This was the case during religious wars in Europe in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and again during ideological wars in the twentieth centuries. At moderate levels of ideological divergence, realism may be a more appropriate choice. This was the case perhaps of Europe between 1648 and 1789 and during the long peace after the Napoleonic wars. When ideologies fully converge, nationalism or liberal internationalism may become more applicable, nationalism if one is thinking of a conservative world of separate nations that are all democratic (North Atlantic community), or internationalism if one is thinking of a liberal world of centralized institutions solving common problems (European Union or United Nations).

The problem with specifying such conditions is that measuring ideological distance may be a function of interpretation as much as of objective fact. How do we know how far apart ideologies may be? The traditions debate the extent of ideological distance, knowing that it affects their relevance to the existing situation. They can be pretty passionate about it. One way to interpret Iraq in 2003 is to say that the most assertive neoconservatives won that debate because they convinced Congress and the public that the ideological gulf between Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Washington could not be bridged. They defined the problem as regime change when it may have been more of a security dilemma (containing the terrorist and WMD threat in Iraq). Today, the realists and nationalists seem to be winning the debate. They define the problem as a security dilemma (do not threaten them and they will not threaten us) when it may be a matter of fanatical Islamic ideology. We can't know these things objectively. They are a function of what we select and emphasize.

⁸ Quoted in Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation* (New York: Oxford, 1970), 703.

⁹ Quotation from Jefferson's first inaugural address in March 1801, <http://www.princeton.edu/~tjpapers/inaugural/inednote.html>

¹⁰ See, respectively, Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Cornell University Press, 2005); Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510-2010* (Princeton, 2010); and Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)

My solution at this stage, therefore, is to have all schools represented vigorously and equally and as a good democrat to trust the people to decide.

A few final points about specific presidents studied in my book. The reviewers agree with my assessment that Reagan and Truman are the conservative internationalist bookends of the Cold War, similar in their emphasis on the deployment of force (arms buildups) to influence negotiations and the critical role of regime type (anti-communism) to end disputes. Johnson, however, objects strongly to my assessment of Polk, and Kaufman objects to my assessments of both Jefferson and Polk.

Jefferson and Polk, I say in the book, are controversial presidents and my assessments of them will not settle the debate. But in this case the reviewers did not read my book as carefully as they might have. I provide considerable evidence from multiple historical sources that Jefferson did support a blue-water navy in the 1780s and again in the 1800s when he built up and deployed U.S. naval power against the Barbary pirates and British attacks on neutral trade. He opposed the navy buildup in the late 1790s when he saw it as part of a phony war against France waged by Federalists to trample the individual rights of Republicans through the Alien and Sedition Acts. To be sure, Jefferson asserted his Constitutional scruples against the Alien and Sedition Acts, to the point of justifying nullification by the states, because these Acts suppressed individual freedom; but he waived these scruples in the case of the Louisiana Purchase because in this case the acquisition of territory expanded individual freedom. I see no inconsistency or hypocrisy in these positions. I also provide ample evidence that Jefferson did not consider economic sanctions as a substitute for war but rather as a way to prepare for war while events unfolded that might avoid war. And on page 43, I do not say, as Kaufman claims, that the Federalists sought an alliance with England but that they “championed the Jay Treaty, which aligned the United States with Great Britain . . .” Kaufman’s review glides over all of these points and in this instance at least seems to be jumping at shadows.

Johnson takes particular exception to my assessment of Polk. And so do many of his fellow historians. But a majority or dominant view in the history or any other profession is not necessarily the correct or only reasonable view. I make the case that Polk, like Jefferson, favored territorial expansion to enable more citizens to vote, land ownership being a prerequisite for voting. In this sense, both Polk and Jefferson were internationalists not isolationists; after all, the western half of the continent was international, not national, terrain. And they were champions of individual freedom because the battle for freedom (meaning self-determination for individuals, not for states which concerns Johnson) was being fought in the 1840s among white male voters, less than half of whom enjoyed the right to vote. Johnson and other historians condemn Polk and Jefferson for not also championing the voting rights of slaves, women, and native Americans. But this is presentism – judging the past by contemporary standards. It may make us feel more moral than our predecessors but it is not sound analysis. Jefferson and Polk waged the battle for freedom where it existed at their time, namely among white males; and if that battle had been stopped with less than half of white males voting, it would have never been won for non-whites and females.

Johnson also objects to my argument that America did more for freedom in the conquered territories than Mexico would have done and that Mexico's internal division and weakness were also reasons that a negotiated settlement was not possible. I concede my argument may be read as blaming the victim for the crime. But that is not my point. All states have a responsibility for their behavior (that's the true meaning of self-determination), and in the 1840s Mexico did too. It was not as far along in the development of democracy as the United States. A much smaller percentage of citizens voted, and military leaders staged repeated coups against one another, undermining any accountability to a civilian electorate. Nor did Mexico progress as rapidly after 1848, either politically or economically, as the United States. These are demonstrable facts, and while they do not justify the American conquest they explain why Mexico could not make a deal, why the U.S. conquest succeeded, why the United States did not annex all of Mexico when it occupied Mexico City and could have, why the conquered territories fared as well as they did under American auspices, and why no one today (with a few exceptions) calls for the return of the conquered territories to Mexico.

One last word about "celebrating" Reagan. Yes, I served in the Reagan administration and cannot be fully objective about that presidency. I say all that in the book. But neither can my critics be fully objective. They too have political preferences, and they too study things they like or dislike, such as one president or party versus the other.¹¹ We should deal with evidence, not aspersions. And my reviewers offer not a single piece of evidence to show that I "celebrate" Reagan where it is not justified. Johnson says Reagan did not promote freedom in Chile, the Philippines, and South Africa. Yes, and that was because he was more concerned with promoting freedom on the borders of existing freedom in central Europe and Korea and did not want to disown the help of authoritarian regimes in the developing world that were not communist, a logical point that follows from concepts in my book such as geo-ideology, which Johnson dismisses. Kaufman cites my oversight of Iran-Contra, but again this scandal had little to do with the victory of freedom in Europe or Asia. And while serious, it revealed no wrong-doing by the President and might be interpreted, along with Paul Kennedy's best-selling book in 1987, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, which portrayed Reagan's policies as a house of cards, as a mostly partisan attempt to discredit Reagan's larger achievements in the Cold War (as Internal Revenue Service and National Security Agency scandals are passed off today as partisan attempts to weaken President Obama). I will feel better when the day arrives that favorable studies of Franklin Roosevelt (and most of them are favorable) are accused of "celebrating" that president as often as studies of Reagan are accused of doing so. Meanwhile, I will comfort myself with the many compliments these three critiques (and others) pay to *Conservative Internationalism*.

¹¹ On the human and political limits of scholarship, see my "The Scholar and the Policy-Maker: Who Speaks Truth to Whom?" in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal eds., *Oxford Handbook on International Relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 635-648.