

# **Ascendancy to Power – a Structural Realist Account of the Neo-Conservatives' Rising Influence Over American Foreign Policy**

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## **Abstract**

Neo-conservatism is a doctrine that has been increasingly analyzed and debated in the last years because of its growing influence on the foreign policy of the United States. Despite the growing body of scholarship on the movement, little or no attention has been paid to the structural causes of the neocons' success in influencing U.S. foreign policy, with most authors focused on personalities and historical moments to account for their increasing influence on American foreign policy. In contrast to accounts that rely on historically contingent events, this thesis provides a structural realist account of the growing influence of the neo-conservative ideology on American foreign policy in the later part of the twentieth century and at the turn of the twenty-first century. The thesis shows that the ascendancy of neocons to power is best understood by analyzing the permissive structural conditions of the international system after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Research Question and Importance.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Literature Review and Research Gap .....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Overview of the Argument.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Methodology.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Thesis Structure.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<b>CHAPTER 1 – NEO-CONSERVATISM AT A GLANCE.....</b>	<b>15</b>
1.1 <i>The Growth of an Idea.....</i>	<i>15</i>
1.2 <i>Differences Between the Generations .....</i>	<i>19</i>
1.3 <i>Neo-neocon Foreign Policy Objectives.....</i>	<i>22</i>
1.4 <i>The Neo-neocons' Ascendance to Power.....</i>	<i>26</i>
1.5 <i>Preliminary Conclusion 1.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<b>CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>30</b>
2.1 <i>The Logic of Anarchy.....</i>	<i>30</i>
2.2 <i>System, Structure and Units.....</i>	<i>32</i>
2.3 <i>Agent-Structure Relationship.....</i>	<i>36</i>
2.4 <i>Why Structural Realism?.....</i>	<i>37</i>
2.5 <i>Preliminary Conclusion 2.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<b>CHAPTER 3 – A STRUCTURAL REALIST ACCOUNT OF NEOCON ASCENDANCY.....</b>	<b>40</b>
3.1 <i>Structural Transformation of the International System.....</i>	<i>41</i>
3.2 <i>The Right Message at the Right Time.....</i>	<i>44</i>
3.3 <i>A Powerful Combination.....</i>	<i>47</i>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>52</b>

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## Introduction

Neo-conservatism is an intellectual predisposition of a number of influential academics and political thinkers that emerged during the social upheaval of the 1960s,<sup>1</sup> which has had, at different points and with differing degrees of success, an important say in U.S. policy-making.<sup>2</sup> Neo-conservatives<sup>3</sup> have gone a considerable intellectual distance since they started as liberals and ended up as conservatives, albeit of a special type. Although many are very well known today, until some time ago very few, outside of the academic and policy-making circles, would know what a neocon was. They gained notoriety around 2003; notably, when Howard Dean, then candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, accused the Bush administration of being captive to the neo-conservative interests and agenda.<sup>4</sup> Ever since, many books and articles were published on the topic ranging from complimentary to outright derogatory; from accusing neocons of being a cabal to stating that they were nothing more than harmless intellectuals with no real power.<sup>5</sup>

The fascination of the daily press and academic circles with this movement, which is largely intellectual in character, started with their association with America's new foreign policy after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. This policy, perceived by many as revolutionary and as breaking with past administrations' policies, brought them attention as well as a higher level of scrutiny by analysts, writers, and political scientists.<sup>6</sup> The neocons have been analyzed and criticized extensively regarding their ideology, domestic proposals, foreign policy stands, philosophical roots, institutional growth and individual networking inside the

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<sup>1</sup> Grant Havers and Mark Wexler, "Is U.S. Neo-Conservatism Dead?" *Quarterly Journal of Ideology*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> I call this movement a predisposition based on Irving Kristol's statement that there is no neo-conservative movement as such, but rather a neo-conservative persuasion.

<sup>3</sup> The term neo-conservative and neocon will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Irwin Stelzer, "Neoconservatives and their critics. An introduction," In *The Neocon Reader*, ed. Irwin Stelzer, Grove Press, 2004: 3-6.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, Yale University Press, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Books by Gary Dorrien *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana*, by Halper and Clarke *America Alone: the Neo-conservatives and the Global order*, by John Judis *The folly of Empire: What*

power centers of the American government. Because their greatest influence, both in policy formation and implementation, has been in the area of national security, and specifically foreign policy, most of the analysis regarding neocons has focused on this.<sup>7</sup> Since research on this movement has increased substantially, this thesis will provide a new account of their rise to power by using structural realist analytical lenses to highlight a different aspect of this debate that has not yet been fully analyzed.

This thesis analyzes the influence of the structure of the international system, specifically the changes in the system after the fall of the USSR, on the neocons' ascendance to power during the late 1990s and early 2000s. In brief, this thesis puts forth and defends the view that recent changes in the distribution of capabilities among states and therefore the structure of the system, created the right foreign policy climate for this particular group of neocons to come to power. The thesis provides evidence that the transformation of the structure of the international system created the right conditions for neo-conservatism to become legitimate in the eyes of the American leadership as a solution to the country's contemporary foreign policy problems.

### ***Research Question and Importance***

The question that this thesis sets out to answer is how the neocons came to power and how they were able to achieve such awesome influence over American foreign policy. As the literature review in the next section will show, this question has either not been addressed or only tangentially so. An even more pointed question is how this particular generation of neocons (rather than its progenitors) managed to attain access to the corridors of power. Moreover, why were neo-conservatives more successful than traditional conservatives in gaining influence and power in the Bush II Administration? In order to answer these

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*George W. Bush Could Learn from Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson* are just some of the works that have analyzed and criticized neocon propositions and implications for American foreign policy after 9/11.

<sup>7</sup> Works by Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*, by James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* are some of the books that have analyzed neocon foreign policy and its impact on the Bush II Administration.

important questions, the thesis will use IR theory and specifically Waltz's theory of structural realism to show that changes in the structure of the international system paved the way for the neocon ascendancy.

Analyzing the international system, specifically the changes in its structure and the distribution of capabilities among its units, is a powerful and useful tool for understanding the conditions that paved the way for the ascendancy of neocon thought in U.S. foreign policy. Such an analysis will help the reader understand why this specific way of thinking about the world and foreign policy prevailed in the Bush II Administration over the liberal interventionist position of Secretary of State Powell or other conservative subgroups such as the paleo-conservatives who have a narrower definition of national security and are less prone to international endeavors. Critically, this analysis will demonstrate that the emergence of this ideological orientation in U.S. foreign policy was not an historical accident.

The analysis this thesis provides is important because this movement has had such a profound influence on American foreign policy. This thesis is also important because it suggests more broadly how is it possible for a group that was once on the policy fringes to come to power. Answering this question through the prism of neo-realism will help to identify the conditions under which a seemingly non-liberal movement such as neo-conservatism can succeed in a liberal democracy.

### ***Literature Review and Research Gap***

A number of articles and books have dealt with the ideological foundations of the neocon movement, the development of its belief system, and its world outlook. Many others analyze the development and growth of the movement and present a year by year synopsis of influential neocons who have risen to important government positions and who have the ability to influence foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> Most of the work done on neo-conservatives, however,

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<sup>8</sup> Documentaries on the "Neocon ascendancy in the Bush administration," op ed. pieces on daily newspapers, books and articles have flooded the market especially after the 9/11 attacks.

either has not dealt directly with the question of how they came to power, or has provided ad hoc accounts of their success that leave many questions unanswered. This literature review will provide a short overview of both these groups in order to acquaint the reader with the state of the literature on the movement and suggest the added value of this analysis to the academic debate regarding the ascendancy of the neocons.

Shadia Drury, in her book *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, provides an insightful and interesting analysis of the political thought of the philosopher Leo Strauss and the influence of his writings on the ideas of present-day neocon thinkers. She states that despite its name, neo-conservatism is not conservative at all but rather a reactionary counter-revolutionary movement.<sup>9</sup> Francis Fukuyama, in his book *America at the Crossroads. Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy*, makes a powerful indictment of his former ideological comrades, while providing a thorough account of the development of the neocon movement from the 1930s until the Iraq invasion in 2003.<sup>10</sup> Anne Norton, too, in her 2004 book *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*, provides an account of the philosophical underpinnings of neo-conservative thought, explains the rise of individual neocons and the widespread acceptance of the ideas of the movement, which is increasingly legitimate in the eyes of the American public.<sup>11</sup>

Books written by neo-conservatives themselves, either about the movement in general or about specific policy issues, such as the *Neocon Reader*, edited by Irwin Stelzer<sup>12</sup> and *An End to Evil* written by David Frum and Richard Perle,<sup>13</sup> summarize the development of the movement and explain its increasing popularity with the American public. Even books openly critical of neo-conservatives, such as *Devastating Society: The neo-conservative*

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<sup>9</sup> Shadia Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, MacMillan, 1999: XII - XIII.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *America at the crossroads*, Yale University Press, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the politics of American Empire*, Yale University Press, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Irwin Stelzer (ed.), *The Neocon Reader*, Grove Press, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil*, Random House, 2003.



*Assault on Democracy and Justice*, edited by Bernd Hamm,<sup>14</sup> merely take issue with many, if not all, of the most important neocon assumptions. However, when it comes to explaining the growing influence of the movement on U.S. foreign policy, they, like the other authors, only give an overview of the movement's philosophy, while tracing the lineage of influential neocons who occupy important governmental positions. Another article written specifically about the rise of neocons by Mark Benson of the Asia Research Center entitled "The Rise of the neocons and the evolution of American foreign policy,"<sup>15</sup> is only a descriptive account of the growth of the movement, which, similarly to the others, does not shed light on the reasons for the neocons' rising influence over American foreign policy.

It is clear from this brief overview that the existing literature has only analyzed the movement with regard to its philosophical underpinnings, its growth, and its institutional development over their years of activity. However, a key question remains: *how did the neocons come to power? What were the conditions that allowed for the flowering and embracing of this movement by the Bush II administration?* America is a fragmented country, which has a fragmented polity and government. The entire U.S. system of checks and balances was built upon the idea of the separation and fragmentation of government powers so as to prevent any single individual or group of individuals from gaining a monopoly of control over the entire federal policymaking apparatus. Also, it is puzzling why the more radical – that is blatantly interventionist and militaristic group - came to power and not the first one.

In order to account for this research gap, there have been some, albeit unsystematic, explanations for the rise of the neocons. One is that they were well-organized, well-structured, well-financed and used their power to spread their message, write papers, create

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<sup>14</sup> Bernd Hamm (ed.), *Devastating Society. The Neoconservative Assault on Democracy and Justice*, Pluto Press, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Benson, "The rise of the 'Neocons' and the Evolution of the American Foreign Policy," Asia Research Center, 2005.

foundations to influence the public and policymakers and defeat the democrats in elections and public debates. A second explanation follows that they were able to ‘neocon’ Bush’s foreign policy and took advantage of the fear and uncertainty surrounding 9/11 to implement their foreign policy agenda. The third and final explanation states that neocons were able to build on some traditional conservative American instincts such as America comes first view, that it should be able to act unilaterally based on American exceptionalism, and a dislike of international organizations. A careful analysis of the above-mentioned accounts will show why they are insufficient explanations for rise of the neocons to power and why a structural realist account can fill this explanatory gap.

Andrew Bacevich’s book, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, suggests that by the end of the 1990s neo-conservatives had become establishment figures through “house organs like the *Weekly Standard*, in essays published by influential magazines such as *Foreign Affairs*, through regular appearances on TV talk shows and at conferences sponsored by the fellow-traveling American Enterprise Institute, and via the agitprop of the Project for the New American Century.” He suggests that through their institutional infrastructure neocons were able to let their message permeate the American psyche and gain more political power. Because of this ability, he states, “ideas that even a decade earlier might have seemed reckless or preposterous now came to seem perfectly reasonable.”<sup>16</sup> The ability of the neocons, therefore, to organize their ranks and sing from the same sheet, enabled them to be successful and win public policy debates, especially in the area of foreign policy.

Garry Dorrien, too, in the book *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana*, similarly explains the ascendancy of the neocons as a function of organizational strength. The author states that “on the basis of this vision they [neocons] merged alliances

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, Oxford University Press, 2005: 89.

with Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, strengthened the foreign policy wing of the American Enterprise Institute at other neocon think tanks, established the Weekly Standard magazine and the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) and divided between John McCain and George W. Bush in the Republican primaries.”<sup>17</sup> He concludes that this tactic was successful because “the neocons did stunningly well in the appointment derby.”<sup>18</sup> Such explanations follow that the main reason for the success of the neocons in attaining power is related to their tactics and battle-hardened spokespersons who could influence both the public and policymakers. The neocons’ ‘take-no-prisoners-approach’ enabled them to win the war against seemingly weak democrats and other factions within the conservative movement.

Nevertheless, there are many groups with influential journals who publish and travel to many different conferences, and who have supporters in high office, but who have not attained a similar level of power. Pat Buchanan, for example, a former presidential candidate and Director of Communications for the Reagan White House, begun publishing a new journal, the *American Conservative*, in 2002 to spread his group’s conservative vision and opposition to the Iraq war, but he cannot gain an audience with anyone with influence.<sup>19</sup> His group was also well organized, had an appealing message and was constantly on TV such as CNN’s popular talk show “Crossfire” and many other news outlets. Despite the populist appeal of his message and his ability to present it both to the public and policy makers, his message was not heard.

There are more examples like that of Pat Buchanan<sup>20</sup>, but it is clear that accounts of the growth of neo-conservatism based on the development of the movement, its institutional

<sup>17</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana*, N. Y.: Routledge, 2004: 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>19</sup> The American Conservative, “Mission Statement,” <http://www.amconmag.com/aboutus.html>, October 7, 2002

<sup>20</sup> Lou Dobbs dedicates his daily show on CNN to the “middle class squeeze” and the need to rebuild the American dream by, among other things, having a restrictive trade policy. Representative Tom Tancredo (R – CO), now a presidential candidate for the Republican nomination, has been a vocal opponent of immigration, which is a position that has many supporters and resonates with a significant portion of the public. Both personalities have had a difficult time getting their message heard despite their ability to talk directly to the public.

strength, and its gifted spokespersons are incomplete. They cannot explain why the neocons, and not another similarly well-connected group with gifted writers and an appealing philosophy, were able to ascend the ladder of power. Since many other groups possessed some of the organizational framework and ability that the neocons have, but only the neocons made it to power, then it follows that something else, other than the organizational superiority, can account for the rise of the neocons.

A second argument follows that neocons were able to pursue their goals not only because they were well-organized with high public profile, but also because, according to Halper and Clarke's book *America Alone: the Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*, "unlike previous Republican Presidents such as Nixon and Reagan, Bush did not enter the White House with a fully scripted playbook."<sup>21</sup> This line of argument often suggests that the neocons were able to take advantage of the foreign policy inexperience of the President and were able to 'neocon' Bush - who is seen as an 'empty vessel.'<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the neocons, unlike other groups, had been thinking in apocalyptic terms for a long time and "in the tumultuous days following 9/11, the neo-conservatives were ready with a detailed, plausible blueprint for the nation's response."<sup>23</sup> The combination, therefore, of Bush's inexperience and the tragic events of 9/11 - to which only the neocons had a ready-made response - created the conditions for the neocons' ascendancy to power.

This account, however, does not explain why neocons and not other factions within his administration – Rice's clear eyed realism<sup>24</sup> or Bush Senior's real politik - were able to steer the President. Why was this 'empty vessel' filled with neocon ideology and not something else? Why was Secretary Powell not as successful as Vice President Cheney in

<sup>21</sup> Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone The neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*, Cambridge University Press, 2004: 131.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Pugh, "The aftermath of War," *Global Society*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, 2006: 223-230.

<sup>23</sup> Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone The neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*, Cambridge University Press, 2004: 138.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Mazarr, "George W Bush, Idealist," *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 3, 2003: 503-522.

persuading the President to listen to him? This explanation does not shed light on the specific conditions that made their assessment of the situation seem more reasonable than that of other rival assessments. Furthermore, although the neocons might have been better prepared than other factions within the administration in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks, there was still time for others to regroup. The 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) was released one year after 9/11, which provided enough time to craft a position and provide a view that could have been used as an alternative to the neo-conservative vision. Similarly to the first explanation, this one also does not shed light on how the neocons came to power since it does not explain what was specific about neocons, which the other factions within the administration did not have, that enabled them to move the President on their side.

Thirdly, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge in their book the *Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*, state that “the reason why the neoconservatives proved so influential was not because they deceived their fellow conservatives but because they succeeded in translating some of conservative America’s deepest passions into a theory of foreign policy.”<sup>25</sup> According to the authors, neocons were able to build upon traditional American instincts of distrust toward international organizations and willingness to act alone to provide a conservative platform from which to launch their ideology. They state that the neocons’ authoritarian, America first vision, especially popular with conservatives, enabled them to tap into deep-seated feelings and gain the trust of conservatives around the country.

The authors, however, do not say why this particularly aggressive stand proved successful out of the many American passions to hit on. There is the isolationist position of Pat Buchanan and the populist stances of Lou Dobbs or Ross Perot who also have resonance in society. Furthermore, they seem to ignore the many factions of conservatives who denounced the neocons and worked against their policies. Many members of Bush I

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<sup>25</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*, Penguin Press, 2004: 224.

administration, for example, in op ed. pieces and other articles were strong critics of Bush's II policies. This account, like the others, does not explain why neocon voices were able to break through the multitude of options available to U.S. foreign policymakers. This third and last explanation, like the previous two, does not identify a particular trait of neocons that could enable them, and just them, to ascend to power.

All these explanations have their unique weaknesses, and they also fail to answer many of the same questions: why were the neocons unable to attain a similar degree of influence under the Bush I administration? Bush I publicly rebuked the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, the precursor to the 2002 NSS, which had been secretly co-authored by Wolfowitz and Cheney.<sup>26</sup> What happened in the 1990s that transformed them from a fringe group of thinkers into a foreign policy powerhouse? The above-mentioned explanations cannot shed light on why neocons did not come to power earlier, nor can they explain why this specific flavor of neo-conservatism came to power. These accounts fail to explain why other groups that were as well-financed and well-organized as neocons did not manage to attain power, they fail to identify something specific about neocons that enabled just them to attain power, and lastly they fail to explain the ability of neocon principles to resonate with the public and policymakers. To account for this explanation gap, this thesis aims to analyze the rise neo-conservatism using a different theoretical framework. Drawing on the logic of structural realism, it may be possible to understand the conditions that favored the rise of this particular ideology in U.S. foreign policy.

### ***Overview of the Argument***

This thesis provides a structural realist account of the rise of neocons to power. The thesis puts forth an explanation of their rise based on the changes that the structure of the international system underwent after the fall of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. The

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<sup>26</sup> After portions of the material were leaked to the New York Times, President Bush ordered then Defense Secretary Cheney to rewrite the guide.

end of the bipolar system removed many of the inhibitions that had been put upon the exercise of American power and, for the first time, created an environment that allowed the U.S. to use its military and economic muscle as it saw fit without running the risks of military confrontation and nuclear war associated with the Cold War. A careful reading of neocon writings during and after the Cold War indicates that many of their ideas have changed while the international environment changed considerably.<sup>27</sup> Under these conditions, neocon thought provided a platform for the use of such unprecedented power and filled the vacuum of ideas after the end of the Cold War and especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Not only did it fill an ideological vacuum, but neo-conservatism, through its emphasis on human rights and democracy provided a legitimizing platform for American interventionism abroad.

In the post-Cold War period, the constraints on American power were very minimal allowing room for the neocon agenda to emerge. As Charles Krauthammer asked “What are we to do? What is a unipolar power to do?”<sup>28</sup> His answer was that America has to be assertive and create stability in an unruly world; it has to patrol the ‘jungle’ and ensure that America remains the unchallenged leader of the unipolar world. The main reason, however, that the U.S. could patrol the ‘jungle’ and punish those who refused to play by America’s rules, was that there was no other power to compete with it and provide a counterbalance. The main reason that neocon ideology gained a platform was that the implementation of their ideas did not run the same high risks that they would under the bipolar system and the benefits seemed to outweigh the risks. Lastly, the main reason they gained legitimacy was because they claimed to provide a gift to the world: democracy.

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<sup>27</sup> A comparison of Kirkpatrick’s “Dictatorships and Double Standards,” and Kristol and Kagan’s “National Interest and Global Responsibility” shows how the ideas of the two generations change with the changing of the international system. Kirkpatrick wants to be interventionist and change regimes in favor of the U.S., but the existence of the USSR makes her dubious of such possibility while the absence of the USSR makes Kristol and Kagan proponents of such policy.

The absence of a real competitor, in the eyes of the neocons, meant they could solidify America's position as the leader of the unipolar world. For that reason, they proposed a 'neo-Reaganite' vision of 'benevolent hegemony'<sup>29</sup> to maintain the 'unipolar moment'<sup>30</sup> and make it into an era. Such views could be accepted as normal only under a system of international relations in which there was no major competitor to the U.S. and the risks of implementing such policies were low.

The incorporation of neocon thought into official U.S. foreign policy was not, as some have argued,<sup>31</sup> a historical accident connected to the election of a specific group of people who managed to neocon the foreign policy of the greatest power on earth. This was instead the result of changes in the structure of the international system that created the right environment for the flourishing of neocon thought. After the end of the Cold War, more pragmatist and realist thinkers retreated, prescribed a return to normalcy by, among other things, cutting the defense budget and sharing in the peace dividend.<sup>32</sup> The neocons, however, did not see the world in the same way. While their fathers created the Committee on Present Danger, the sons wrote books on *Present Dangers* (note the change from danger to dangers) to make the case that while the world was different, it was still dangerous; it still needed to be patrolled; it still needed America. It was in the presence of such vacuum of competing ideas and in an international environment that could not stop America from using its power that the neocons managed to enter mainstream American thought and rise to power.

### **Methodology**

Before I start analyzing the neocons' rise to power, it is important to explain the logic behind the selection of the writings analyzed below. This thesis analyzes the main texts

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "Democratic realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World." 2004 Irving Kristol Lecture, American Enterprise Institute Annual Dinner, Washington, D.C., February 10, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, 1990/91.

<sup>31</sup> O'Huallachain and Sharpe (eds.), *Neo-Conned: Just War Principles; A Condemnation of War in Iraq*, HIS Press, 2005.



written by neo-conservatives about themselves and their movement as well as texts written about the movement by critics and sympathetic writers. The analysis of these texts will be conducted in the background of the theoretical framework developed in chapter two in order to understand and contextualize their statements and explain how they came to power. The thesis will rely upon “content analysis” and “comparative text analysis” in order to identify the philosophical underpinnings of neo-conservatism and situate it in a larger theoretical framework in order to understand why this specific way of thinking became predominant in the Bush II administration.

Because the analysis is heavily influenced by and reliant upon written work on neo-conservatism, the selection of books and articles is an important aspect of the research design. The books and articles chosen fulfill either one or more of the following criteria: they are recognized as establishing the philosophical foundations of the movement, they are recognized as providing an objective account of the movement’s development, they are written by the ‘founding fathers’ of the movement and provide the theoretical framework for an analysis of the movement. These writings provide a representative picture of the aims of the neo-conservative movement and avoid works that are intended to be polemical rather than informative and objective.

Once the analysis of neocon writings is completed, the thesis will then do a ‘pattern-matching’ to establish that neocon goals were incorporated into U.S. foreign policy. In order to accomplish this goal, I will analyze official U.S. documents such as the 2002 NSS and neocon documents such as the one entitled “Rebuilding America’s Defenses” and identify the neocon principles that have been incorporated into official U.S. policy. The thesis will also engage in a process-tracing to chart the neocons’ rise to power and the reasons behind this

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<sup>32</sup> One of the many who asked for a return to normalcy was also Jeane Kirkpatrick one of the prominent neo-conservatives in Reagan’s Administration.

rise. At the end of this analysis, we should be able to identify the structural causes behind the neocons' success.

### ***Thesis Structure***

This thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter analyzes the neocon movement with an emphasis on its signature foreign policy objectives. This chapter provides a brief historical overview of the development of the movement, analyzes the differences between the generations of neocons - since this latest generation which is in power has profound differences with its progenitors - and concludes with a discussion of the rise to power of the latest generation of neo-conservatives. The purpose of this part of the thesis is to familiarize the reader with the basic tenets of the movement and expand the puzzle by showing the neocons' astonishing movement from the margins to the center of power. Lastly, this chapter lays the groundwork for the structural realist account of the neocons' rise as it identifies the main neocon principles which will then be analyzed in light of the new structure of the international system after the Cold War that enabled them to come to power.

The second chapter presents Waltz's theory of structural realism showing how his theory can be used to explain the neocons' rise to power. Waltz's explanation of the logic of anarchy, his definition of system, structure, units and the agent-structure relationship are analyzed in order to show that structural realism is an appropriate theoretical framework for explaining and understanding the neocons' ascendance to power.

The third and final chapter builds on the previous two chapters by explaining how structural realism, based on the movement's character and philosophical foundations, can explain the growing influence of neo-conservatism on contemporary American foreign policy. The purpose of this final chapter is to show that the new structure of the international system played a paramount role in creating the conditions that facilitated the legitimization of neo-conservatism, allowing it to form the core of U.S. foreign policy.

## Chapter 1 – Neo-Conservatism at a Glance

### 1.1 *The Growth of an Idea*

Many neocons - they embraced this name after it was coined in 1972 by Michael Harrington<sup>33</sup> - started out as Trotskyists, and their early roots can be traced in the 1920s and 30s when a young group of Jewish intellectuals studying at City College of New York (CCNY) debated the issues of the time such as Communism and the rise of totalitarianism across Europe. This early group was profoundly liberal in its worldview and also deeply anti-Communist. Influenced by Trotsky's writings, they saw Stalin's USSR as an experiment of government social engineering gone terribly wrong. With the advent of the Cold War, they witnessed their worst fears and long held beliefs about Stalin's Russia come true. It is in these moments that they attained their Cold War fighter status in the eyes of the public.

In order to understand neo-conservatism fully, it is necessary to understand its core domestic agenda. Because their early beginnings were as universalistic liberals, neo-conservatives embraced the New Deal Programs and FDR's Democratic Party in its attempts to get the country out of the Great Depression. In the 1960s, however, as government programs expanded under President Johnson's Great Society programs and "war on poverty," they became increasingly alienated from the Democrats.<sup>34</sup> Opposed to big government social programs, they were uncomfortable with policies that were implemented by the Democratic administration. The neocons, contrary to the mainstream Democratic Party, believed that government should not partake in large-scale social engineering because, no matter how good its intentions, it would have negative side effects.<sup>35</sup> They believed that government programs caused dependency and aggravated poverty by providing hand outs for the poor rather than fighting the root causes of the problem.

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<sup>33</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana*, N. Y.: Routledge, 2004: 7.

<sup>34</sup> Gillian Peele, *Revival and Reaction: The Right in Contemporary America*, New York: Oxford University Press 1987: 36.

<sup>35</sup> George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Their writings in their journal *Commentary*, articles by James Wilson (“Broken Windows”) and books by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (*The Negro Family*) all took aim at the welfare state and the presumed negative effects of government-run social programs.<sup>36</sup> Their belief that the welfare state created rather than alleviated poverty and dependency went against the doctrine of the Democratic Party at the time. Irving Kristol proclaimed that the welfare state has to be “consistent with the basic moral principles of our civilization and basic political principles of our nation.” According to him and many others in the movement, the policies implemented by successive Democratic administrations have “perverse consequences” for the social class they are supposed to benefit. Kristol argued that the welfare state bred “social pathologies – crime, juvenile delinquency, illegitimacy, drug addiction, along with a once functioning public school system.”<sup>37</sup> Differences regarding social policy programs therefore created the first visible rift between the neocons and the Democrats.

Another important factor in this alienation was the counterculture movement of the period (1960s and early 1970s) that was increasingly associated with the anti-Vietnam war movement. The countercultural movement and the expansion of the welfare state were identified by the neocons as some of the main causes of the social upheaval of the time. The social liberation movement was seen by the neocons as a one of the reasons for the “steady decline in our democratic culture, sinking to new levels of vulgarity.”<sup>38</sup> Believing in order, hierarchy and respect for tradition, they saw the counterculture movement as a threat to the social fiber that held U.S. society together. The nomination of George McGovern as the Democratic presidential candidate (he won one out of fifty states) in 1972 seemed positive proof of the party’s embrace of the countercultural movement leading to further alienation on

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<sup>36</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *America at the crossroads*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006: 18-20.

<sup>37</sup> Irving Kristol, “A conservative welfare state,” In *The Neocon Reader*, Irwin Stelzer (ed.), Grove Press, 2004: 146.

the part of the neocons. It is clear that in the domestic arena the issues that separated the neocons from the Democrats were the redistributionary policies pursued by the Democratic Congress and administrations and the party's apparent embrace of the countercultural movement.

Regarding foreign policy and America's position in the world, neocons believed that American power could be used for good in the world, that the U.S. should be engaged in the international field and not retreat from the world like McGovern proposed in his "Come home America" acceptance speech.<sup>39</sup> Tom Barry and Jim Lobbe, writing for *Foreign Policy in Focus*, stated that "neo-conservatives have a profound belief in America's moral superiority ... and were instrumental in the late 1990s in helping to fuse diverse elements of the right into a unified force based on a new agenda of U.S. supremacy."<sup>40</sup> In an international arena, where it is difficult to identify good from bad, America was a beacon of freedom and its role as a superpower could and should be used to advance the cause of freedom, especially in the context of the Cold War. This core belief was one of the sources of the neocons' uncompromising stance towards the USSR because they saw it as an inherently evil regime that could not be reformed or coopted, but only destroyed.

Viewing themselves as "liberals mugged by reality"<sup>41</sup> they thought that their old party had the wrong policy stand and the wrong international outlook; 'it was not they who left the Democratic Party, it was the party that left them' as it moved farther and farther to the left. Policies supported by the Left were seen as ceding the moral high ground that America had enjoyed in its international endeavors. Neocons believed that America was a moral country and a force for good in the world, while the counterculture was undermining the moral

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<sup>38</sup> Irving Kristol, "The neoconservative persuasion," In *The Neocon Reader*, Irwin Stelzer (ed.), Grove Press, 2004: 35.

<sup>39</sup> George McGovern, "1972 Democratic national Convention Acceptance Speech," <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/shownomination.php?convid=16>, last date accessed March 23, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Tom Barry and Jim Lobbe, "The men who stole the show," *Foreign policy in Focus*, Special Report 8, 2002, <http://www.fpiif.org/pdf/papers/SRmen.pdf>.

foundation of the country, thereby threatening its very institutions and democratic way of life. This battle against the forces of counterculture led to a situation in which “culture had become the terrain of politics, [and they were] prepared to fight the culture wars.”<sup>42</sup>

Differences in foreign policy and their belief that the Democrats were not anti-Communist enough and were pursuing policies detrimental to the country was a second reason for the separation between the future neocons from their party. Nevertheless, even as they left the liberal side and became neo-conservatives, some of their liberal traditions followed them. As Todd Lindberg, writing for *Policy Review* states that “neo-conservatism begun as a dialogue with liberalism, and in fact emerged out of it – something old style conservatives would not say about themselves.”<sup>43</sup> It is this liberal past that distinguishes them from other types of conservatives in their battle for the soul of the country. What distinguishes them from paleo-conservatives, for example, is their willingness to use the power of the state to stop the ‘erosion’ of democracy.

Differently from other conservatives, who have an aversion towards a big government, the neocons see the growth of the state as something that is inevitable and that should therefore be managed for good purposes. Their comfort with the growth of the government, as long as it is for the ‘right’ reasons, is part of their liberal left over because bona fide conservatives have a natural aversion towards big government under almost any circumstance. Neocons need a big state because it is the best tool they have to export American ideals abroad. They also differ from ‘traditionalists’ as they do not yearn for some nostalgic past and are more forward looking. They are fully modern and ‘resigned’ to the idea

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<sup>41</sup> Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea*, New York: Free Press, 1995.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the politics of American Empire*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006: 42.

<sup>43</sup> Todd Lindberg, “Neoconservatism’s Liberal Legacy,” *Policy Review*, Oct./Nov. 2004. Hoover Institution.

that modernism is here to stay; they just want to curb its excesses.<sup>44</sup> Lastly, differently from some conservative fractions, neocons are neither isolationist nor protectionist.

## **1.2 Differences Between the Generations**

In the review above I treat the movement as if it were monolithic in order to provide a succinct summary of its development. As every other movement - with neo-conservatism being more of a persuasion – there are differences between neocons, which spring from their positions, their interests and their views on particular issues. Critically, and of most interest to the thesis, differences among neocons result also among the different generations of the movement. The latest generation of neocons (neo-neocons) is profoundly different from its forefathers in many respects. These differences are seen across many fronts that cut through many policies – most of all foreign policy. Since the neo-neocons are in power today, understanding their positions and worldview is important to understand the impact that they have had on the formulation of U.S. foreign policy.

Although it could be argued that there are three or more generations of neocons, for the purposes of this thesis I will identify and analyze two – the founding fathers and the present day neocons. The main differences between these two groups in the area of foreign policy can be identified in their outlook of the world and America's position in it. The first generation of neocons was characterized by the following beliefs/assumptions about the world and America: **1)** evil is real and recognizing it is the first step towards defeating it, **2)** evil governments need to be confronted by the U.S. government, which is the defender of liberty and universal values, **3)** regular diplomacy, economic incentives, appeals to decency (as it was done with Nazi Germany) do not work with dictatorial regimes, which are inherently rotten and evil, **4)** a strong America abroad can be constructed only through the construction of a strong America at home with an emphasis on authority and moral values, **5)**

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<sup>44</sup> Irving Kristol, "The neoconservative persuasion," In *The Neocon Reader*, Irwin Stelzer (ed.), Grove Press, 2004: 35.

ever since the Vietnam retreat, America has been confronted by a string of crises which can only be resolved through decisive political and military action (the U.S. should not shy away from its role in the world), **6)** all these issues can be adequately addressed only if the U.S. is under the direction of strong leadership with a clear vision and moral purpose for the country.<sup>45</sup>

The younger generation of neocons, often sons and daughters of the earlier generation, grew up under very different circumstances having never traversed the liberal-to-conservative transformation that their founders went through. They came of age in a political environment that was increasingly accepting of the original neocon positions and an administration (Reagan) that gave them a place at the policy table. Although it was Reagan that gave neocons a real taste of power, they also held power under the Nixon Administration, which in many ways served as a formative experience for current neocons. Differently from their fathers, they did not teach at universities, they did not grow up in difficult economic circumstances and did not break into the establishment – they were born into it. The neo-neocons are much more assertive than their ‘founding fathers’ and focus almost exclusively on foreign policy issues. Their transformation was neither gradual nor ‘natural’ and as a result some of the positions they advocate and views they hold are stronger and bolder compared to the first generation.

The neo-neocons assumptions/beliefs can be characterized as follows: **1)** American global supremacy and hegemony is benign; other countries not only need U.S. supremacy, but want it, **2)** if the U.S. were to fail to live up to its international obligations and responsibilities, international chaos and anarchy would ensue, **3)** military power is a very effective, if not the most effective, tool to implement the foreign policy objectives of the U.S. because it can be used to transform the international system by transforming the parts that

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make it up, 4) the supremacy that the U.S. enjoys militarily and economically needs to be maintained at any cost by discouraging potential competitors from emerging and by removing potential threats before they fully materialize, 5) lastly, the neo-neocons are staunchly opposed to realism, be it the power politics of Kissinger or Powell's caution because realism does not allow for a transformation of the global order and unmatched American supremacy that neo-neocons favor.<sup>46</sup>

This overview of the guiding principles of the two generations of neocon thinkers clearly shows the differences between the two groups. The neo-neocons are more assertive and bolder than the first generation, they are more open to the use of the U.S. military to achieve America's foreign policy objectives. They are more interventionist than the early generation as they support policies such as regime change and preemption. The first generation was comprised of well-rounded social scientists who paid more attention to nuances and domestic issues than does the current generation. Although there is a strand of current neocons who focus on domestic issues such as Gingrich and Bennet, they are out of power and their influence in comparison to the foreign policy strand of neocons is weak. The neo-neocons are ideologically more fervent, politically more assertive and generally bolder than the earlier generation. This second generation, however, is precisely the one that got into power. The Nixon administration provided their formative years, the Reagan Administration provided them with a chance to help form U.S. foreign policy, and some neocons were influential members of the Bush I administration. It was the election of George Bush II, however, that allowed the neo-neocons to ascend to power and become one of the most influential groups in post 9/11 U.S. foreign policy circles.

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism. How Americans are Seduced by War*, Oxford University Press, 2005: 73 – 86.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

### **1.3 Neo-neocon Foreign Policy Objectives**

As the previous section has argued, the neo-neocons are different from the founding fathers of the movement in many aspects and especially in the area of foreign policy. The present section is therefore fully devoted to the neo-neocons' foreign policy goals and objectives. It is important to understand their stances regarding foreign policy because it is their core proposition and the area where they have been most influential in previous administrations and especially in the Bush II administration. A clear understanding of their foreign policy positions is vital for testing my hypothesis as to why they gained power.

The first generation of neocons claimed that its ideas were vindicated after the fall of the USSR because they had always argued that the U.S. "stood for western values in the battle against Communist totalitarianism" and that Communism was doomed to failure.<sup>47</sup> For the first time, they could argue that their narrative, which they had been promoting for a long time, was right. Nevertheless, the Cold War 'victory' achieved was not the end, because the new challenge was to ensure America's continued pre-eminence on the world stage. It is at this point that the neo-neocons take over the battle flag of their forefathers to ensure that America does not retreat and that it pursues the 'right' policies, which will assure its continued dominance and maintain its role as the world's only superpower. It is at this moment that the battle of publications begins in order to influence both public opinion and policymakers in Washington.

One of the first and most influential of such articles "Towards a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy" was published by William Kristol in 1996. In it he praises Reagan's attack on the "tepid consensus" of the 1980s that brought back morality in foreign policy. In this article, Kristol states that in the new international system the U.S. enjoyed "strategic and ideological predominance" and that the main goal of the foreign policy of the United States

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Durham, "The Republic in Danger: Neo-conservatism, the American Right and the Politics of Empire," *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 1, January-March 2006: 43-52.

should be to “preserve and enhance” that predominance. Besides investing in the armed forces and increasing their budgets, Kristol also claims that “American foreign policy should be informed with a clear moral purpose, based on the understanding that its moral goals and its fundamental national interests are almost always in harmony.” He ends by saying that the goal of this new policy should be “benevolent global hegemony.”<sup>48</sup>

The idea of a moral foreign policy is reiterated by Robert Kagan in his article “Power and Weakness,” in which he states that Americans see the world as divided between good and evil and the U.S. has always been on the side of good. Fighting evil though requires the “possession and use of military might”<sup>49</sup> in order to defend America’s liberal democratic order. The proposition that moral superiority can be defended only through military superiority and willingness to use such power, has clearly taken shape as the basic foreign policy tool that neo-neocons support. This idea is put forth even more forcefully by Gary Schmitt, director of the Project for the New American Century, who states, “the unavoidable reality is that the exercise of American power is key to maintaining what peace and order there is in the world today. Imagine a world in which the U.S. didn’t exercise this power.”<sup>50</sup>

These visions of the U.S. as a force for good and democracy in the world coupled with the willingness to promote these ideas through military power, were brought together by William Kristol in his testimony in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2002 regarding the upcoming Iraq war. In it he put forth the view that America should actively use its power to shape the international system to its liking to ensure its position on top of the unipolar system. Kristol stated that President Bush II “has chosen to build a new world, not to rebuild the old one” and such a policy is an “unequivocal rejection of the status quo ... from

<sup>48</sup> William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “Towards a neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996. <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=print&id=276>.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Kagan, “Power and Weakness,” *Policy Review*, June 2002. <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3460246.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Schmitt, “Power & Duty: U.S. Action is Crucial to Maintaining World Order,” *L. A. Times*, March, 2003.

the pseudo-sophisticated ‘realism’ of the first Bush Administration or the evasive ‘multilateralism’ of the Clinton years. The Bush Doctrine rests on a revived commitment to the principles of liberal democracy and the restoration of American military power.”<sup>51</sup> The belief, therefore, that America is a morally superior country that should spread its ideals abroad even through force, is a recurring theme in neo-neocon thought.

Kristol and Kagan reiterated these neo-neocon beliefs in their article “National Interest and Global Responsibility,” which appeared in the 2004 book *The Neocon Reader*, featuring some of the most influential neocon thinkers from different generations. In this article, the authors state that in the 1990s the United States was engaged in “moral and strategic disarmament” and that the trend should not only be stopped, but reversed. They also see the end of the Cold War not as an opportunity to return to normalcy, but as an opportunity to produce a “fundamental change in the way our leaders and the public think about America’s role in the world.” This change, according to Kristol and Kagan, is that the leaders of the U.S. no longer wait for the next menace to knock at their door, but rather should “shape the international environment to prevent such a threat from arising in the first place.” In order to implement such policies, the definition of national security should be broadened to include not just power, but also “appreciation of beliefs, principles, and perceptions.” Such a widening narrows the opportunity to do business with regimes that might be ideologically opposed to the U.S. To that end, they propose and defend the view that when it comes to dealing with evil regimes that do not accept the U.S. rules of the game, the policy should not be coexistence but regime change.<sup>52</sup> They can be seen as promoting an interventionist U.S. that aggressively tries to shape the structure of the international order to its liking, eliminating

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<sup>51</sup> William Kristol, “Testimony of William Kristol,” [www.newamericancentury.org/defense-20020207.htm](http://www.newamericancentury.org/defense-20020207.htm), February 7, 2002.

<sup>52</sup> William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “National Interest and Global Responsibility,” In the *Neocon Reader*, Irwin Stelzer (ed.), Grove Press 2004: 59-69.

from the world stage those actors (states) that refuse to play by the rules of the game (American rules).

Other neo-neocons, not affiliated directly with PNAC, have expressed similar support for international endeavors to export American values at the barrel of the gun. Of these, Max Boot, senior fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations, has been the most forceful proponent of American interventionism. In his article “The case for American Empire,” he states that America was attacked on September 11<sup>th</sup> not because it was too interventionist, but because America had too small a role in the world. Therefore, he concludes that “the most realistic response to terrorism is for America to embrace its imperial role.”<sup>53</sup> Such views gained the support of one of the early neocons, Norman Podhoretz, who described the Cold War as WWIII and the war on terror as WWIV. In his article “How to Win World War IV” he states that this new war on terrorism could be the beginning of the end for totalitarianism in the Muslim world, and if the U.S. embraced its “imperial mission,” it would ensure that new, reformist governments would emerge in the region that would also be friendly to American interests.<sup>54</sup>

Charles Krauthammer is perhaps even more adamant in his belief that since America is at the center of the unipolar world, it has to work to shape the international system because “the extremist rage against the United States is engendered by the very structure of the international system, not by the details of our management of it.” He puts forth the idea that the U.S. should be unilateralist and guided by its own “independent judgment” in deciding about not only its own interest, but also the global interest. America, Krauthammer contends, should be willing to use military power when it is necessary to maintain its predominant

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<sup>53</sup> Max Boot, “The case for American Empire,” *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 7, Issue 5, October 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Norman Podhoretz, “How to Win World War IV,” *Commentary*, 2002.

position in the current unipolar system. He concludes his article by saying “history has given you and empire, if you will keep it.”<sup>55</sup>

#### **1.4 The Neo-neocons' Ascendance to Power**

The final section of Chapter One provides a brief overview of the increasing influence individual neo-neocons have had in policy formulation and implementation in Washington's power circles in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As previously mentioned, neo-conservatives have had varying degrees of influence in different administration. Nevertheless, their fullest influence has come in the Bush II administration, which has implemented some signature neocon projects such as the regime change in Baghdad. For that reason, the analysis of the neo-neocons' ascendancy to power will cover only the period of the Bush II administration

Books such as *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*<sup>56</sup> and *Bush at War*<sup>57</sup> provide a detailed account of the individual neocons who occupy important government positions and that have been influential in shaping the administration's vision of the world. Lewis Libby (now a convicted felon for lying to federal investigators) became the Vice President's chief of staff, Richard Perle was appointed head of the Defense Policy Board, John Bolton was appointed undersecretary of State and later U.S. ambassador to the UN, Stephen Hadley was named deputy national security advisor and replaced Condoleezza Rice when she became Secretary of State, Elliot Abrams (found guilty for lying to Congress about the Iran contra affair) was appointed the National Security Council, Zalmay Khalilzad was made ambassador to Afghanistan and later to Iraq, Douglas Feith was appointed undersecretary of defense for policy, and finally Paul Wolfowitz became deputy secretary of defense and then head of the World Bank where he fought poverty, especially his girlfriend's for which he was forced to resign. By holding such key positions and already having an

<sup>55</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment revisited – United States World Dominance,” *The National Interest*, winter 2002.

<sup>56</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*, Viking Penguin 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, New York: Simon & Shuster, 2002.

agenda in place, the neo-neocons were very effective in transmitting their ideology to the foreign policy documents that the Bush II administration produced.

The 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America (NSS) - the most important document the U.S. government produces regarding foreign policy<sup>58</sup> - is a document that reflects the neo-neocons' ideas and vision of America's place in the world. The NSS is in line with the previously mentioned Defense Policy Guidance, which claimed that America should strive to be the only superpower in the world, written in 1992 by Wolfowitz and Libby under the Bush I administration, who returned in the Bush II administration. It is also in line with the plan issued in 2000 by PNAC entitled "Rebuilding America's Defenses." Most of the proposals put forth in the NSS had been previously initiated in neo-neocon-affiliated think tanks. Tom Barry, writing for *Foreign Policy in Focus*, stated that, "many of PNAC's conclusions and recommendations are reflected in the White House's National Security Strategy document which reflects the 'peace through strength' credo that shapes PNAC strategic thinking."<sup>59</sup> Many of the ideas presented in this strategy such as "proactive counter-proliferation," preemptive attacks, building defenses that are beyond challenge, and ensuring continued and unchallenged world supremacy are ideas that had been put forth throughout the 1990s by the neo-conservatives.

"Rebuilding America's Defenses," released by PNAC, proposed that America should deploy missile defenses, should increase military spending by 15-20 billion dollars annually, modernize its armed forces to ensure America's continued superiority, increase the U.S.'s security perimeter by deploying bases abroad, deal decisively with countries like Iran, Iraq and North Korea, and lastly engage in military missions to maintain the "Pax Americana."<sup>60</sup> The NSS, on the other hand states that the U.S. should deny its enemies the possibility to

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<sup>58</sup> Based on the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, the President is required to submit the National Security Strategy to Congress to discuss the nations' foreign policy interests worldwide and its military capabilities.

<sup>59</sup> Tom Barry, "A Strategy Foretold, Foreign Policy in Focus," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, October 2002.

strike first by maintaining a forward posture, it should be willing to act preemptively, it should invest in its armed forces so that they are beyond challenge, and require bases beyond “Western Europe and Northeast Asia.”<sup>61</sup> It is clear that many of the proposals put forth by the PNAC in 2000 were incorporated into the 2002 NSS. The emphasis on military supremacy, on unilateral action, and on preemption, among others, were policies that neocons had lobbied previous administration for a long time, which became official U.S. policy under Bush II.

The NSS broke with the public diplomacy employed by previous Presidents<sup>62</sup> and according to Max Boot was a “quintessentially neo-conservative document.”<sup>63</sup> This was the first time that a national security doctrine included the concept of preemption, which had long been advocated by the neocons. This document stated that given the new security environment, the Cold War tactics of deterrence were obsolete. Therefore, the goal of the U.S. should be to “defend, preserve, and extend” peace. In order to achieve this goal, the administration was willing take unilateral action when needed.<sup>64</sup>

The positions the neo-neocons held were instrumental in shaping the administration’s policy and in setting the tone of debate in Washington. They brought with them the ideas they had developed in their think tanks and fought hard to make them the official policy of the U.S. As the analysis of the NSS showed, they were very effective, since many of their proposals were transformed into official policy. They were also very influential in making the case for the Iraq war since many of their arguments, as put forth in the NSS, were used as justifications for the war.

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<sup>60</sup> Project for the New American Century, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century,” <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>, September 2000.

<sup>61</sup> President of the United States, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>, September 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: the Neoconservatives and Global Order*, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004: 142.

<sup>63</sup> Max Boot, “Think Again: Neocons,” *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2004.

<sup>64</sup> President of the United States, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>, September 2002.



### ***1.5 Preliminary Conclusion 1***

This chapter has provided an account of the development of neo-conservatism from its humble beginnings to today's powerhouse. From the analysis at hand, it is clear that the neocons' core beliefs (especially regarding their foreign policy) have made it into the mainstream. The discussion of their long break with the Democratic Party was an important part of the story since it influenced the worldview of the first generation – liberal left overs – and it explained some of the differences between the neocon generations summarized above. Seeing the differences between the generations of neocons was important in identifying and understanding the slow evolution of their foreign policy frame. Lastly, this chapter gave an account of the neo-neocons' ascendance to power and their success in influencing the official U.S. National Security Strategy.

At this point, we know both what the neocons stand for and the influence that they have had on the administration of Bush II; what we do not yet know is how they managed to attain such power, which is the question that chapter 3 explores head on. The next chapter, however, will develop the theoretical framework of the thesis by analyzing Waltz's systemic theory of international relations, which will be used to explain the neocons' ascendance to power. Once this framework is fully developed, I will proceed to the third chapter to provide an account for how a movement such as this attained such influence over the foreign policy of the U.S.

## Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework

This chapter summarizes and analyzes Waltz's theory of structural realism with particular emphasis on his explanation of the logic of anarchy, his definition of system, structure and units, and finishes by discussing the agent-structure relationship. The reason for analyzing Waltz's systemic theory is that it will be used to generate explanations regarding the neocons' ascendance to power. Now that we know what the neocons stand for and have seen their remarkable rise to power, I will use Waltz's theory of structural realism to provide an answer to this thesis' research question.

### 2.1 The Logic of Anarchy

Kenneth Waltz's *Man the State and War* claims that the best way to understand a state's behavior in the international system is through the third image, the constraints of the system. In an international system that is based upon self-help, a state's first and foremost concern is its own survival; all other interests come second, since for the realization of all those interests, the survival of the state is a necessary condition.<sup>65</sup> An analysis of this theory will provide the background against which the conditions of the international post Cold War system will be scrutinized in order to identify the structural changes that created the permissive conditions for the rise of neocon foreign policy in the US.

In his landmark *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz argues that because some states are willing to use force to maximize their utility, all states have to be ready to use force in order to defend themselves and their interests. The international imperative, Waltz proclaims, is "take care of yourself." States are the main actors of the international system and their actions and behaviors, in a self-help environment, make up the international political system. This self-help environment emerges as soon as states begin to coact with

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<sup>65</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Man the State and War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959: 160.

each other. This logic of anarchy requires states to implement policies that will allow for their survival, which inadvertently reproduces the system.<sup>66</sup>

In order to develop his argument, the author uses the metaphor of the stag hunt in which five hungry men have to cooperate in order to survive. This cooperation is made harder by the fact that although almost all of them might agree on the importance of cooperation to capture a stag, the possibility of the defection of one (to capture a hare, for example) makes such cooperation difficult to achieve in practice, for it is rational for one to defect if he or she believes that the others may defect. For this situation of distrust to be replaced by harmony and cooperation, one must be both perfectly rational and at the same time assume that everyone else is rational too. Therefore, Waltz states that the “sources of conflict are ... in the nature of social relations” and for this reason one cannot rely on anyone else but himself. The anarchic system of international relations poses an obstacle to inter-state cooperation and any rules that emerge are fragile and always in danger of extinction since the structure of the self-help system does not favor their existence or entrenchment.<sup>67</sup>

According to Waltz, a state behaves like individuals did in the state of nature because, as Rousseau puts it, the “most important of its cares is the care of its own preservation.”<sup>68</sup> If we take the state to be the principal unit of the international system, and assume that it exists in a situation of anarchy, the will of the state, although perfectly good for its development, could be seen as negative by the world at large and other states in particular. “Despite the intent, each country’s formulation of its goals will be of particular rather than general validity,”<sup>69</sup> says Waltz, which makes war among nations inevitable. The will of a state, even if it is perfectly good, can cause negative and violent reactions from other states that see the growth and strengthening of one state in terms of its own relative loss. Therefore, Waltz

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<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979: 102-104.

<sup>67</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Man the State and War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959: 168.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

concludes that the cause of conflict among states is not just their unruly or greedy behavior, but rather the system of which they are a part.

Neo-conservatives, like Waltz, see the international system as an anarchic one whose most valued currency is power, especially military power. However, they believe that America has to take a leading position in world affairs in order to manage this anarchy according to its interest and make sure that its position vis-à-vis the other states is not weakened or threatened. Because they see the world in such terms, they do not value stable alliances and prefer to strike first rather than give the benefit of the doubt to the adversary. It is important to mention, however, that although neorealists and neocons see the world similarly, they propose different solutions to its problems. Waltz sees unipolarity as both unstable and unsustainable, while the neocons see it as both desirable and functional. Although they reach different conclusions, Waltz's logic of anarchy fits well the neocons' vision of the world as a dangerous place in which a state is secure only if it is strong and deals with its threats decisively and at the right moment.

## **2.2 System, Structure and Units**

An important part of the theory of structural realism is the definition of the system, structure, units, and the differences among them. According to Henry Bull, the international system comes into existence when states take the behavior of other states in their calculations and foreign policy decisions.<sup>70</sup> That means that a state is no longer free to take decisions according to its own interest only, but must incorporate into its thinking the way these decisions will be perceived and reacted to by other states in the international system. Thus, it is clear that the concept of system comprises the structure of the system, the units operating in the system and the interactions among these units. According to Waltz, this international system was not designed by any single unit, but is the result of human interaction and

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<sup>70</sup> Barry Buzan et al, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: Chapter 3, <<http://www.ciaonet.org/book/buzan/>>. (May 22, 2007).

evolution of institutions. The position of units vis-à-vis one another influences their interactions and power relations because depending on the distribution of power among the units, some will be better able to pursue and defend their self-interest than others.

Waltz defines his concept of political structure in chapter 5 of his *Theory of International Politics* as a three-part one comprising (a) the organizing principle of the system, (b) the differentiation of the units of the system, and (c) the uneven distribution of capabilities among the units partaking in the system.<sup>71</sup> The first two parts, according to Buzan, Jones and Little, are related to government and its method of organization while the third is related to the structure of the system and the power inequalities in international relations. Other IR theorists have grouped the first two parts and called them “deep structure.”<sup>72</sup> The term refers to the lasting characteristic of both the organizing principle and the functional differentiation of units to be fixed, not prone to change, and self-reproducing.

When one analyzes the first part, it is clear that there can only be two options: anarchy or hierarchy. Because there are multiple governments claiming sovereignty over defined territories and populations, there will always be anarchy since these governments do not recognize any higher power among them. The lack of a supranational government to safeguard the system and protect against individual defection is key to the concept of anarchy.<sup>73</sup> Without this supranational government, states are stuck in the stag hunt game (see above), where the temptation to defect, given the knowledge that others are tempted to defect, is ever present.

Regarding the second part of functional differentiation, there are two possibilities: the units can either be similar or different in terms of the governmental functions that they perform. If the units are similar, they define themselves in terms of sovereignty and accept no

<sup>71</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979: p 82.

<sup>72</sup> John Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Towards a Neorealist Synthesis." In *Neorealism and its Critics*, R. O. Keohane, (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979: 88-89.

higher form of authority. According to Waltz's logic, similar units produce anarchy because if all units are similar and sovereign they will perform similar actions, pursue similar goals and claim full sovereignty. Under the system of anarchy, Waltz continues, states are prone to pressures of competition.<sup>74</sup> The development of technology or military doctrine in one country, if successful, pushes the other country to copy it in order not to be left behind. The Greek phalanx, for example, once proven lethal in the field of battle, was emulated by most city-states of the time as far away as Asia Minor. These pressures lead states to copy the successes and avoid the failures of one another and as a result produce similarity that results in having like units in the international system.

Since it seems that Waltz closes the possibility of change in the first two parts, short of a system change, which he states has not happened for the past five hundred years, one should look at the unit level, specifically the distribution of capabilities among units, to explain and understand behaviors in the international system. It is the (uneven) distribution of capabilities that can explain change in Waltz's international system.<sup>75</sup> This distribution is part of a system level and not the domestic level because it reveals how units stand according to each other as "capabilities are attributes of units, the distribution of capabilities across units is not."<sup>76</sup> The distribution patterns of capabilities across states, therefore, explains how units are ranked and act in relation to each other. The author continues, "so long as one leaves the structure unaffected it is not possible for changes in the intentions and the actions of particular actors to produce desirable outcomes, or to avoid undesirable ones. Structures may be changed, however, by changing the distribution of capabilities across units."<sup>77</sup> If structure can condition both the expectations and actions of the units and this structure can be transformed if the distribution of capabilities among states is changed, then a change in the

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<sup>74</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979: 93 and 96.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 108.

structure of international relations as a result of a power shift might be able to explain a major shift in foreign policy of a particular country.

This thesis makes the case that once the USSR dissolved, and America became the only remaining superpower in the world, the structure under which units interacted with each other was changed as one of the major units was out of the game. The position of units vis-à-vis one another changed considerably with the U.S. being much more powerful than many of its closest competitors combined. This preponderance of power enabled the U.S. to be much more assertive internationally at a low cost or no cost at all. The new structure of the international system changed the power relations among states, and since the U.S. was the superpower in a unipolar world, created a more receptive environment in America to the neocon proposals.

It is precisely structure, after the fall of the USSR, which changed in the international system and allowed the U.S. to be more proactive in the international field. The structure changed because the USSR collapsed economically and politically, which increased and solidified America's position vis-à-vis the other units in the system. This newfound freedom to act required a justification, a legitimization of American interventionism, which neo-conservatism offered through its ideology of the spread of democracy and human rights across the world. Thus Waltz's might give us a special insight into how the neocons gained legitimacy in the eyes of the American public and policymakers. This is due to changes in the structure that made the neocons' propositions both less dangerous and more feasible, at least initially. It is important to remember, however, that Waltz's theory is a theory of permissiveness, it is not deterministic, it does not say that states will behave a certain way; it says they are more likely to behave in some ways than others given certain systemic constraints. This is the point that the thesis makes also; under the new systemic constraints, the neocons were more likely than other groups to come to power.

## 2.3 Agent-Structure Relationship

Establishing a connection between structure and agency augments the argument of this thesis since I claim that changes in the structure of the international system created the conditions for the neocons' ascendance to power. "Structure is based on the fact that units differently juxtaposed and combined behave differently and in interacting produce different outcomes."<sup>78</sup> Waltz argues that his system is made up of the interacting units and the system wide structure, which enables one to think of the system.<sup>79</sup> His conception of structure is highly connected to the idea of agency (the units of the system) because, according to Waltz, agents "are constrained by the structure of the system to act in a way that reproduces the structure of the system."<sup>80</sup> An important corollary of this conception of the relationship between agency and structure is stated by Waltz when he writes that "structures may be changed ...by changing the distribution of capabilities across units."<sup>81</sup>

As one tries to grasp the relationship between these two concepts, it is hard not to think of Marx's statement that "men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>82</sup> It is precisely the environment after the Cold War, an environment of seemingly boundless opportunities and fears of an uncertain future, that allowed the U.S. public to see the neocons as more legitimate and as a source of answers to the foreign policy issues of the time. After the end of the Cold War the distribution of capabilities changed, which in turn changed the structure of the system from bipolar to unipolar. Since Waltz argues that when units are positioned

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<sup>78</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979: 81.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>80</sup> Barry Buzan et al, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993 Chapter 3.< <http://www.ciaonet.org/book/buzan/Buzan03.html>>. (May 22, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>82</sup> Karl Marx, "Letter to Joseph Wedemeyer," March 5, 1852.



differently they behave differently, it is reasonable to expect a change in the behavior of the United States after 1991 since its major adversary, the USSR, dissolved.

As stated above, agents are constrained by structure, so when structure changes, agents' expectations and beliefs about themselves and the world might change, which creates an opening for new groups with new proposals that under the new structure might gain plausibility and respectability. When one adds to the mix the U.S.'s increase in relative capabilities, then the possibility of embracing a new ideology that suits the new structure increases. This was precisely the environment in which neocons managed to attain power and influence U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. did not have to become interventionist and extended all over the world after the Cold War, but the new juxtaposition of the units in the new structure of the system made it easier to do so and facilitated the neocons' ascendancy.

#### **2.4 Why Structural Realism?**

I argue that an analysis of the developments and changes in the structure of the system of international relations since the fall of the USSR in 1991 is helpful for understanding why the neocons came to power. By using IR theory, specifically Waltz's theory of structural realism, it may be possible to understand why this particular movement and foreign policy persuasion, became so influential in the U.S. after the Cold War. Such an analysis is appropriate because the latest generation of neocons has become increasingly and almost exclusively preoccupied with international relations and America's predominant position in the world arena. Articles by William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Charles Krututahmmer, and others, show a preoccupation with the present "unipolar moment" and how to maintain it.<sup>83</sup> Their thinking is influenced by an analysis of the balance of power and desire to maintain America's predominant position and the unipolar system. Documents published by the Project for the New American Century, the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United

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<sup>83</sup> Kagan's book *Present Dangers* and Krututahmmer's article "In Defense of democratic Realism," are a clear indication of the neocon's preoccupation with power politics.

States (which used the phrase “a balance of power that favors freedom” five times<sup>84</sup>) and other think tanks closely associated with the neo-conservative thinking emphasize military power, the structure of the international system, and inhibiting potential competitors from ever emerging.

Michael Mastanduno and Ethan Kapstein argue in their book *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies After the Cold War*, that the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a profound structural shift in the international system as it changed from bipolar to a unipolar one.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the standing of the agents in relation to each other changed as the U.S. became the most powerful state in the system and the successor states of the USSR fell further behind. Since there was change in the structure and “international structure provides opportunities and constraints that shape state behavior significantly, even though they do not determine it entirely,”<sup>86</sup> it is plausible to expect agents in this new structure to behave differently. In such a new structure and distribution of capabilities “neorealist, or structural, theory leads one to believe that the placement of states in the international system accounts for a good deal of their behavior” states Waltz.<sup>87</sup>

The transformation of the international system into a unipolar one, with America as the last remaining superpower, freed the U.S. from the inhibitions that the bipolar world imposed on its foreign policy endeavors. Such a deep and dramatic change made interventions less costly and oppositions less vocal and powerful. “States respond to the particular features of the international structural environment”<sup>88</sup> and when that environment is profoundly transformed, states’ behavior follows suit. Under this new structure, the U.S.

<sup>84</sup> Mario Del Pero, “A Balance of Power that Favors Freedom. The Historical and Ideological Roots of the Neo-conservative Persuasion,” RSCAS Working Papers, 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Michael Mastanduno and Ethan Kapstein (eds.), *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies After the Cold War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Chapter 1. <http://www.ciaonet.org/book/kapstein/kapstein01.html>. (May 22, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Michael Mastanduno, “Preserving the Unipolar Moment,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No.4, 1997: 5.

<sup>87</sup> Kenneth Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No.2, Autumn, 1993: 45.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Mastanduno, “Preserving the Unipolar Moment,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No.4, 1997: 6.

stands in a category of its own in which it excels military and economic power, in technological advancement, territory, population and resource abundance.

## ***2.5 Preliminary Conclusion 2***

Now that Waltz's theory has been explained and the importance of the agent-structure relationship analyzed, it is possible to see how these concepts can be helpful in understanding change in the international system. Specifically, this thesis is interested in the changes that happened to the system after the collapse of the USSR and the break up of the Warsaw Pact. The framework put forth in this chapter has provided the necessary theoretical tools to analyze the neocons' rise to power. The concepts discussed above will be instrumental in explaining the conditions in the structure of the international system that paved the way for the neocons and their ideology to be embraced by the Bush II administration. This thesis now applies Waltz's theory to the research question, showing how it accounts for the neocons' rise. Specifically, the next chapter will analyze the change in the structure of the international system after the Cold War and show how that change paved the way for neo-conservatism to come to power.

### ***Chapter 3 – A Structural Realist Account of Neocon Ascendancy***

This third and final chapter aims to bring together the information about the neocons and their foreign policy objectives with the theory of neorealism in order to explain the neocon ascendancy to power through structural realism. This chapter first argues that after the fall of the USSR the international system witnessed a major structural transformation. Once the USSR was eliminated from the international arena, the international system was transformed from a bipolar to unipolar, the strength of the U.S. grew exponentially both militarily and economically, and it had fewer restrictions on its use of power abroad. This new environment permitted the emergence of ideologies that enabled the use of this extraordinary power.

Second, this chapter shows how the neocons adapted to structural change, since their main rival, the USSR and world Communism, had disappeared. The result of this change was an ideological transformation among those neocons who attempted to adapt to the new realities and tried to identify America's new enemies. In understanding this analysis, I compare two articles written by Kirkpatrick and Kristol during and after the Cold War to show how the change of the structure of international system affected their views and foreign policy. I conclude that the neocons adapted well to the new structural conditions and produced a plan to preserve and legitimize America's position at the head of a unipolar system.

This chapter concludes that the combination of the structural changes of the international system with the beliefs of the neo-neocons created the permissive conditions for this particular generation of neo-conservatism to attain power. This explanation answers the question of the thesis satisfactorily and fills the explanatory gap of the other explanations mentioned in the introduction of the thesis.

### 3.1 Structural Transformation of the International System

As the USSR gradually weakened and passed into history, as the Eastern block disintegrated and the Warsaw pact disbanded, the international system changed profoundly. The world was no longer divided into two antagonistic blocks with weapons of mass destruction. This “transformation of one of the blocks ... had system-wide implications.” The Cold War had its hot moments but its end was cold (there was no military confrontation) and the result seemed clear: America and its allies had won while the Soviet system failed and was replaced. “The revolution of 1989 transformed the international system by changing the rules governing superpower conflict and thereby, the norms underpinning the international system.”<sup>89</sup> The countries of Eastern Europe embarked on reforms to ‘join’ the European family, while Russia embarked on its own path of reform and modernization. These changes left America the undisputed sole superpower; it was the earth’s biggest military and economic power with an ability to project its force to remote corners of the world.

During the Cold War, the U.S. had to share the world stage with the USSR. After 1991, U.S.’s global primacy was undisputed since its resources vastly outnumbered those of its closest competitors.<sup>90</sup> No other world power had achieved such a level supremacy. Any number of power formations in the European theatre, for example, could still challenge Great Britain in the peak of its power, while the United States after the Cold War was virtually out of reach. “With the waning of the Soviet power, the United States is no longer held in check by any other country or combination of countries.”<sup>91</sup> Its ideas of liberal democracy and market economy had become the staple of reform while its standard of living had become the goal of many countries to strive towards.

<sup>89</sup> Rey Koslowski and Friedreich Kratochwil, “Understanding Change in International Politics: the Soviet Empire’s Demise and the International System,” *International organization* 48,2, Spring 1994: 215.

<sup>90</sup> Bruce Russett, Thomas Hartley and Shoon Murray, “The End of the Cold War, Attitude Change, and the Politics of Defense Spending,” *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 1, March 1994.

<sup>91</sup> Kenneth Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No.2, Autumn, 1993: 72.

The fall of the USSR, furthermore, removed the uncertainties of the Cold War and decreased the costs of American intervention abroad. The risk of nuclear annihilation now seemed remote and constraints to America's will minimal. The inhibitions of the bipolar world are similar to the ones that are imposed on government branches in a system of checks and balances. Under bipolarity, the superpowers check each other, balance and moderate one another's behavior. Under unipolarity, on the other hand, system constraints weaken, and the remaining superpower can act according to its will. The only factor that constrains branches of government in the domestic arena and states in the international arena from acting arbitrarily is the presence of other branches of government or states of comparable capability to check it. When these constraints are removed "the only superpower left in the field is free to act on its whims and follow its fancies."<sup>92</sup> This newfound freedom of action in the international arena, coupled with economic and military supremacy, provided the U.S. with an ability to influence, shape and radically transform the international system.<sup>93</sup>

The importance of the change of structure of the international system is that different structures create incentives for different types of behavior. As previously stated, under a bipolar system a superpower behaves differently than it does under a unipolar system. This structure change has repercussions also for the internal politics of a superpower. If the behavior of a superpower (in this case the U.S.) is likely to differ according to different systemic constraints, then the ideology politicians use to justify their actions to their domestic constituents is also likely to differ. If, for example, under the Cold War system containment was the best strategy then politicians used an ideology that supported and justified the use of this strategy. If, however, the structure of the international system puts no constraints on the superpower, then domestic politicians may formulate an ideology that justifies and

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<sup>92</sup> Kenneth Waltz, "Neorealism: Confusions and Criticisms," *Journal of Politics and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2004: 4.

<sup>93</sup> Kenneth Waltz, "Structural Realism After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000): 29.

legitimizes intervention in the eyes of domestic constituents. Structural changes, therefore, can affect the behavior of the units of the system as well as the discourse used in their domestic levels.

This change of structure after the Cold War left an ideological vacuum because the new constraints (or absence of them) required foreign policy adjustments that in turn required a new ideology justifying them. Such an ideology has the dual purpose of on the one hand explaining to and gathering support from the domestic constituency and on the other hand legitimizing their actions in the eyes of the domestic audience and the international community. At the beginning of the Cold War, for example, anti-communism and ‘defending our way of life’ were the rallying cries that garnered public support for projecting force abroad. When America became the only superpower in the world, with military strength and economic superiority unmatched by any other state or group of states, it understood that it could act and use its unprecedented superiority to maintain its position with little or no risk since the other powers were so weak by comparison. The fall of the USSR, however, did not mean that America had to become extended all over the world, but it meant that if it decided to do so, it would be much easier at reduced economic, political and military costs.

Now we can demonstrate a link between the changes of the structure of the system to the rise to power of the neo-conservative movement. The U.S. needed to fill the ideological vacuum left over from the end of the Cold War, while neo-conservatism needed an agent to carry out its world objectives. The big bang of the 9/11 attacks provided the right domestic political background to prime the American public to accept a change regarding U.S. actions in the international arena. The previous conceptions of invincibility were coupled with a sense of fear and the vision of an enemy that could be anywhere and could strike at any time. 9/11 gave neocons the basis for claiming the U.S. needed to supply leadership in the war on terror and to increase its resources to become an even more globally dominant fighting

machine. The coupling of the changing structure of the international system and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 created the fertile ground for the incorporation of a “preexisting ideological agenda [of the neocons] to be taken off the shelf ... and relabeled as response to terror.”<sup>94</sup>

### **3.2 The Right Message at the Right Time**

The neo-conservatives, as proved in chapter 1, proposed a very forceful U.S. foreign policy in which America works aggressively to maintain its position as the only superpower in the world and takes the necessary steps to dissuade possible competitors from engaging in a race to surpass it. It is at this moment that we can see the connection between structure and agency, because when structure changes, according to Waltz, so do the actions and perceptions of the agents. Charles Krauthammer, for example, sees America as “no mere international citizen. It is the dominant power in the world, more dominant than any since Rome. Accordingly, America is in a position to reshape norms . . . and create new realities. How? By unapologetic and implacable demonstrations of will.”<sup>95</sup> The neocons’ proposals for reconfiguring America’s role in the world are heavily influenced by the structure of the international system, because only after the U.S. was recognized as the last remaining superpower could their agenda be credible. Structural constraints are so important that Anthony Alexander Loh states “if we examine the global and national context in which the ‘movement’ is set forth, we will see that the conditions are favorable for the advancement of this movement. In fact, the neoconservatives are the only ones who have emerged from the ashes of the World Trade Center with a coherent vision for America’s role in the post-9-11 world.”<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: the Neoconservatives and Global Order*, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004: 4.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “The Bush Doctrine,” *Time*, March 5, 2002, <http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/2001/03/05/doctrine.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Alexander Loh, “The Transformation of America,” *In Rethinking International Order in East Asia: U.S., China and Taiwan*, I. Yuan (ed.), No. 52, 2003.



If we keep in mind the characteristics of the neo-neocons presented in section 1.2 and 1.3, such as striving towards U.S. global hegemony, willingness to use military force in foreign policy endeavors and commitment to maintain U.S. supremacy, it is clear that the post-Cold War structural conditions constituted a favorable environment for the neocons to implement their ideology. “The shifting structure of the international system in favor of the U.S. unipolarity make the rise of neo-conservatism particularly timely to fill the ideological vacuum left by the end of the Cold War.”<sup>97</sup> Only after the Cold War could such policies be pursued without running the risk of a global war, and only under such conditions could the U.S. public and policy makers agree to such a new and radical vision. Their desire to implement a ‘neo-Reaganite’ foreign policy by strengthening America’s predominance and investing in its armed forces could only be achieved in a unipolar world where the risk of implementing such policies was low in comparison to what it would be under a bipolar system.

The significance of the end of bipolarity can be seen in the comparison of neocon writings during and after the Cold War. Two such writings that exemplify the importance of the structure of the system for the neocon movement have been written by Jeane Kirkpatrick, “Democracy and Double Standards” and Kristol and Kagan “National Security and Global responsibility” during and after the Cold War respectively. These articles, written by respectable and influential neocons, represent conventional neocon thinking of time and can be seen as representative of the movement’s thinking. Kirkpatrick, in her 1979 article, which helped her secure the ambassadorship at the UN, states that her goal is to provide “a morally and strategically acceptable, and politically realistic, program for dealing with non-democratic government threatened by Soviet sponsored subversion.” After an analysis of Carter’s foreign policy, she states that the U.S. should not try to democratize autocratic

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

regimes because it would lead to anarchy and an increased possibility that the succeeding regimes will not only be hostile to the U.S., but might be more sympathetic to the Soviets. This is the reason she states that the U.S. should avoid “the dangers of trying to be the world’s midwife to democracy when the birth is scheduled to take place under conditions of guerilla war.”<sup>98</sup> After she lists some other reasons for not overthrowing friendly autocratic governments, she reaches the conclusion that for America’s geopolitical interests, it is better to leave many autocratic regimes in place in order to avoid having them replaced by communist governments, which will be hostile to America.

Fast forward twenty-six years to Kristol and Kagan’s 2005 article. At first reading, it might seem the articles disagree with each other. Upon a closer analysis, however, it is clear that the articles are ideologically in broad agreement. It was the structural conditions under which these articles are written that influenced their divergent policy prescriptions. In this article, the authors state that “what is needed today is not better management, but a fundamental change in the way that our leaders think about America’s role in the world.” This is an important departure from Kirkpatrick because she saw America more as a status quo power while they see it more as a revolutionary power that shapes the international system according to its own interest rather than just managing it. Kristol and Kagan contend that the U.S. should not wait for the next danger to arise, but rather should “shape the international environment” to prevent any such dangers from ever arising. The last important point that the authors make is that the best way to deal with tyrannical regimes that pose a threat to American interest is to make “an effort to bring about the demise of the regimes themselves,”<sup>99</sup> that is, to support regime change.

Kirkpatrick was against toppling autocratic regimes that were not hostile to the U.S. because the USSR might have more influence on succeeding governments. For that reason,

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<sup>98</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, “Democracy and Double Standards,” *Commentary*, November 1979.

stability and the status quo were more important than democratization. In 2005, with the Soviet threat gone, regime change is not as dangerous. Kirkpatrick in 1979 was afraid that the new governments might copy the Soviet style of government; Kristol and Kagan in 2005 did not have to worry about that because, according to them, there is only one style around, the U.S. style. It is clear then that the changes in the structure of the international system allowed the neocons to change and adapt to the new reality and bring their ideology ‘up to date’ with modern times. This adaptation made their agenda more appealing helping it gain plausibility and credibility in the eyes of international and domestic audiences.

### **3.3 A Powerful Combination**

This chapter has shown that the new structure of the international system after the end of the Cold War allowed the policies of the neocons to gain widespread respectability that allowed them to ascend to power in the Bush II administration. The new structure of the international system gave the U.S. an asymmetric advantage in comparison to any other country in the world and the use of such power required an ideology to support and legitimize it. The best way to implement America’s new role was through a new strategy and the neocon ideology filled that need. Neo-conservatism preached the right type of geopolitical sermon which fit the structural conditions after the Cold War that allowed America to project unmatched power in the world. The new structure and the neocons’ ability to adapt to it more quickly and better than any other group allowed them to ascend to the highest circles of power.

The neo-conservative ideology supported U.S. primacy in the world as no other ideology could. What they preached was related to what the U.S. could do in a new environment. Their rhetoric about fighting evil and promoting democracy vested this primacy with the veneer of spreading liberty and universal human rights. The new structure of the

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<sup>99</sup> William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “National Interest and Global Responsibility,” In *the Neocon Reader*, Irwin Stelzer (ed.), Grove Press, 2004: 59-69.

international system, American unipolarity, and the neocon ideology fit perfectly together and this fit allowed the neocons to attain power. While other ideologies were concerned with how to constrain American power or use it in concert with U.S. allies and international institutions, the neocons claimed that the unipolar moment should be exploited to the American advantage.

Waltz states that the structure of the international system can change once the distribution of capabilities among the units is changed. After the fall of the USSR, this relative distribution changed and the new structure allowed the units within it to behave differently according to the new rules of the game. Part of this change of behavior of the main unit of the international system (U.S.) is the rise of neo-conservatism. Neo-conservatism found an opening once the U.S. became the one superpower and also refashioned its ideas to fit the new times and the new demands. They showed an uncanny ability to adapt and respond to the new conditions. It was not particular individuals who enabled the neocons to gain power; it was not their domestic policies of reforming welfare, for example, that allowed them to get power. It was their ability to provide a seemingly coherent vision of America's position in the world and fashion it under the guise of democracy promotion that captured the imagination of the American public. The reason that their vision was first heard and then embraced is that their proposals seemed to fit the new conditions of the international system. This is how the neocons came to power.

Their vision of the world as a dangerous place where everyone thinks of his/her own interest and where cooperation is the exception rather than the rule is best explained by Waltz's logic of anarchy. The structural change after the end of the Cold War that allowed a reevaluation of the agents' capabilities and positioning vis-à-vis each other is explained by Waltz's theory. The effect that this new structure has had on the agents' behavior is also part of Waltz's theory. A group like the neocons who saw the world in black and white, in terms

of good versus evil, believed that the world was dangerous. Differently from Waltz, however, they proposed a total U.S. supremacy as a way to deal with this problem. When the structure of the international system changed, and the U.S. became the only superpower, for the first time the right conditions were maturing for the implementation of such an ideology. They adapted to such changes and rejuvenated neo-conservatism to make it ready for the new times. Everything that this thesis has stated ranging from the neocons assumptions and Waltz's theory of structural realism points in one direction: the specific new conditions of the international system were critical to the rise to power of neocon ideology. Structural realism, therefore, best explains the neocons' rise to power.

## Conclusion

This thesis has provided a structural realist account of the neocon's rise to power at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new century. My main proposition and argument throughout has been that neo-conservatism was able to attain such power because of the changes to the structure of the international system after the Cold War. This thesis has shown that once the structure of the international system changed, neo-conservatism obtained a new lease on life. The fall of the USSR created the possibility for the U.S. to be more interventionist at a lower cost and neo-conservatism gave it the ideological justification to do so. This paved the way for this ideology and its proponents to make it to the halls of power.

This structural realist account of the neocons' ascendancy to power is superior to other explanations. It is superior to accounts that state that neocons came to power as a result of their organizational skills because it explains why it was particularly the neocons and not other similarly well-organized ideological groups that came to power. This thesis is also superior to accounts that contend that neocons were able to use the Bush administration as a vehicle to pursue their predetermined agenda because it enables us to understand why it was the neocons and not another faction within the administration or the conservative movement that steered Bush II. Lastly, my explanation is superior to accounts that argue that neocons were able to tap into existing conservative sentiments and translate them into a foreign policy agenda because it explains why they were able to use certain sentiments and not other widely available and popular conservative beliefs.

This thesis has shown that neocons did not come to power as a result of some cabal or some extraordinary individual who captured the imagination of the American people; neither Wolfowitz nor Kristol, for example, are very charismatic people. They did not come to power because a hanging chad in Florida happened to fall on Bush's side. Neocons came to power because they were able to provide an agenda for unlimited use of American power after their

enemy had collapsed and because the new realities of the international system after the Cold War made intervention less dangerous. The passion for and against the neocons during these years has blinded people to this simple reality. The ones who hate them, and there are a lot, want to see the back ally complots to attain power. The ones who support them see their rise as the result of their hard work and as the logical conclusion of a movement that has the right vision for America. The truth is that they came to power because they said the right thing, they said it at the right place and they said it at the right moment. Whether one agrees with them or not, they were the only ones with a message that fit U.S. policy after the Cold War.

There will probably be many other articles and theses written on neo-conservatism analyzing a wide range of issues. There will probably be other accounts of their rise to power, or their fall from grace or of their possible rebirth, since in Washington nothing is truly gone forever. Many other explanations do provide some useful insight and acute observations, but as shown in the literature review, their explanations are incomplete and cannot answer the question of this thesis. For a movement like neo-conservatism, based on the timing of its rise, the programs that it preached before power and policies that it implemented once in power, structural realism provides a more convincing and fuller account of their ascendancy to power.

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