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By Kenneth Anderson

Francis Fukuyama
After the Neocons:
America at the Crossroads

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The neoconservative influence on American foreign policy has not had an enthusiastic response outside the United States. Its failure to bring peace and democracy to Iraq has now resulted in a spate of critiques in America itself, even from within the policy establishment. The highest-level defection has been that of Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), the paean to the triumph of capitalism that became a canonical neoconservative text of the 1990s, articulating the transition from the Clinton administration to that of George W. Bush. In his new book, *After the Neocons*, Fukuyama argues that key neoconservative tenets were systematically violated in making the case for the war in Iraq, and, further, that the broader attempt to combat terror is ill-served not only by the war but also by the neoconservative project of democratic reform in the Middle East. The failure of these projects, he argues, is a phenomenon less of the Middle East than of the disoriented modernity of Muslims in the West – Western Europe particularly. In conclusion, he offers a replacement for neoconservative foreign policy, something that he calls “realistic Wilsonianism”.

The arguments over Fukuyama’s new book have not just been among conservative think-tank intellectuals. Soon after publication the White House itself entered the brawl, sending emails citing contradictions between Fukuyama’s past statements and the positions taken in his new book, particularly his support in 1998 for the forcible overthrow of Saddam Hussein. As Tod Lindberg, Editor of the Hoover Institution’s *Policy Review*, put it, the Bush administration has been “more influenced by Mr. Fukuyama’s work than by that of any other living thinker”.

On the sidelines, liberal commentators and reviewers in the United States have watched with a mixture of righteousness and glee the long-awaited conservative crackup over the ideological basis of the Bush administration’s foreign policy.

The End of History and the Last Man began as an article written while Fukuyama was at the Rand Corporation, the quintessential Cold War think tank. Written in the flush of victory and the collapse of Soviet Communism, it argued that the world was at a historical moment in which history itself – at least “history” in the sense of fundamental arguments over political ideology – was essentially over. Liberal democracy, market capitalism, and the welfare state had won, both because they were right in principle and because they had been proven right in practice, while their twentieth-century totalitarian, collectivist competitors – Communism, Nazism and Fascism – had all been seen off. The End of History was, then, a disquisition on the end of alternatives to liberal democratic capitalism, at least those alternatives that sprang from the modernizing project. The book did not consider the possibility of a challenge from outside the realm of modernity as understood in the West. Islam is mentioned only in passing.

Much of the anger directed at Fukuyama by neoconservatives and by Bush administration intellectuals since the publication of *After the Neocons* arises from the perception that he intended *The End of History* to be a universal pronouncement, applicable across the span of world history, not limited merely to the ideologies of modernity. In his new book Fukuyama makes no retraction; he claims rather to have been misread. His argument was never meant to be universal, he says, and it is the fault of the neocons for not recognizing the limits of what a policy of promoting democracy and liberalism in the Middle East can – and cannot – get you.

In the years after the publication of *The End of History*, the neoconservatives in foreign policy held the line that the basic institutions and values of democracy, human rights, liberalism, free markets and the emancipation of women were accepted worldwide and not open to question. Fukuyama himself moved on: in *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity* (1996), he fleshed out certain of the cultural values that made liberal capitalism work; in *State-Building: Governance and world order in the 21st century* (2004), he addressed the problem of failed states; and in *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the biotechnology revolution* (2003), he considered how to avoid yet another modern dystopia.

During the early Bush years, as liberal and conservative thought in America became increasingly polarized, Fukuyama and other conservative thinkers continued to set the tone of the administration. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the world, as we now know, intellectuals with a very different idea were also at work. They too had a global political vision; but theirs was a dream, not of the end of history, but of a rebirth, a resumption of the long march of Islam, stalled by centuries of Western expansion but reinvigorated by contemporary global demography. The true challenge to neoconservative foreign policy came, not from liberals on the Potomac, but from armed theocrats in the Old World. The Islamist project is a paradoxical vision of history simultaneously old and new, premodern in its deployment of ancient Islamic doctrines but postmodern in its highly selective use of them. It borrows notions from the heart of Western thought – multiculturalism, anti-colonialism, resentment – but in the service of a radical alternative to secular liberal capitalism. Like Fukuyama himself, Islamists have an end-time ideology – in their case

not a secular, democratic, civil society writ global, but the worldwide umma, as prescribed in the Koran. For a crucial period of time, the Islamist vision was almost invisible to the West, even as it was under elaboration; articulated in another language, in Arabic rather than English, its audience was not in think tanks in Washington but among the resentful leftovers of modernity in immigrant communities in the cities of Europe.

The ascendancy of the Islamist alternative is the test for both liberal and neoconservative thinking. And After the Neocons can be seen as an oblique response to it, one that attempts to set American foreign policy on a new course. The history of neoconservatism it offers, both internally and in its relation to other American approaches to foreign policy, is fair-minded and sober. Fukuyama is helpful, for example, in gently dismissing the tendency of the American Left today to discern conspiracies around those who studied several generations back with the University of Chicago's Leo Strauss, a classicist whose dense theorizing on the questions of truth and relativism is only tangentially related to contemporary political theory. Richard Hofstadter's "paranoid style" in American politics is not limited to the Right, a truth amply demonstrated by arguments prevalent in the Left intellectual blogosphere today that purport to reveal Straussianism as the Da Vinci Code of the Bush administration.

As a positive political doctrine, Fukuyama says, neoconservatism is one of four principal approaches to American foreign policy. The other three are: first, realism in the mould of Kissinger, which emphasizes power and stability, and tends to downplay the internal nature of other regimes; second, liberal internationalism, which hopes to transcend power politics and move to "an international order based on law and institutions"; and finally, in Walter Russell Meade's term, "Jacksonian" nationalism, tending to a security-related view of American national interests and distrust of multilateralism.

What characterizes neoconservatism in comparison to the others in this schema? Fukuyama answers by laying out a number of interconnected propositions that, as he says, form neoconservatism's fundamental ideological base. It arose, he argues, as a highly specific moralizing doctrine for promoting American security in the ideological struggles of the Cold War. In the late Cold War, it played idealist antagonist to Kissingerian realism. More precisely, it opposed the Kissingerian realism embraced by Nixon and Ford, a doctrine that preached accommodation to the "inevitable" appeal and spread of Communism. This doctrine of "declinism" was endorsed both by the endlessly cynical Nixon and hopelessly naive Carter, and only decisively rejected (to the amazement and derision of most of America's elites, whether cynical or naive) by the great hero of the neoconservative movement, Ronald Reagan.

Fukuyama's next point is that although neoconservatism is about "security" in the broad sense of preserving America, both its power and its ideals, it is not about power alone, or the maintenance of state-to-state realist stability. It is, rather, a belief in the power of ideas, ideals and ideology as necessary conditions of victory in the Cold War, an understanding that Pope John Paul II was as necessary to the victory over Communism as Nato's battalions were. Finally, he says, neoconservatism asserts that the internal affairs of states – their attachment to democracy, human rights and liberal values – are overall

indicators of external state behaviour; predictors, even if imprecise ones, of their tendencies to war and peace. And neoconservatism conjoins simultaneously a belief in the universal validity and appeal of fundamental American ideals with an equally firm belief in American exceptionalism.

After the Cold War, neoconservatism asserted the special legitimacy of American power. It was unapologetic about using this for moral and idealist purposes. Sometimes these purposes directly involved US security interests, such as in the case of the Cold War itself. Sometimes, it was asserted, force could be used in defence of basic propositions of international order, such as the defence of Kuwait in the first Gulf war. In the neoconservative view America was also entitled to act internationally from morality alone, when its security was not directly at stake. Thus it was primarily neoconservatives who made the case, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, for armed action in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Rwanda, East Timor, Kosovo and, today, Darfur.

Fukuyama points out that neoconservatism shares with American realism an abiding scepticism regarding international institutions, at least those, such as the United Nations, that go beyond a certain minimum state-centred multilateralism, while invoking high-minded visions of global governance and the decline of sovereignty. Neoconservatives adopt the realist critique that, whatever countries may say in relation to international institutions, they do not, in fact, act on their own pronouncements. Neocons also go a step further, into the realm of ideals, and argue that democratic sovereignty, and America's democratic sovereignty in particular, is an ideal also, one with its own moral legitimacy, and that insofar as international institutions seek to undermine that sovereign democracy, they are wrong in principle.

Fukuyama has one final proposition about neoconservatism, one crucial to his argument that the Iraq war was a betrayal of neoconservative principles. This is based, though, more in the experience of domestic politics than international relations. It is what he characterizes as a profound "distrust of ambitious social engineering projects". The untoward consequences of ambitious efforts at social planning, he writes, are a "consistent theme in neoconservative thought that links the critique of Stalinism in the 1940s with . . . skepticism about the Great Society in the 1960s".

The previous half-dozen of his propositions hang together as the lessons of victory in the Cold War. To what extent, he asks, are these lessons the right guide to the US to war in Iraq and, more generally, the "war" on terror? Are they not rather a case of fighting the wrong war, the ideological equivalent of the oft-noted tendency of generals to pursue the tactics used in the previous conflict, all too often with disastrous results? His final proposition focuses attention on an inconsistency within the neoconservative world-view: the belief that engineering democracy in Iraq could be achieved simply by the external device of forcibly removing the dictator and that it could be pursued without unanticipated negative consequences.

According to Fukuyama, a misinterpretation of neoconservative principles led the Bush administration to refight the last war – ie, the war on Communism – mistakenly believing

that the Iraq war would fundamentally have the same result, a release of pent-up social and cultural demand for democracy, capitalism, civil society and the rule of law. It should have been clear that the social and cultural pressures for democracy and so on in Eastern Europe were the result of very long-term conditions simply not present in the Arab Middle East. Thus, in releasing the grip of the dictator, the US opened the door for forces of sectarian, tribal and other causes of violence and, potentially, civil war. These were not in the lexicon of anticipated consequences because neoconservatives had mistakenly drawn their template from the fundamentally Western cultural examples of Europe and modernity. This aspect of Fukuyama's argument has occasionally been unfairly characterized as racist, a lesser-breeds-without-the-law view of the Arab world. What it is really is realist, urging caution on moralist action. It entails the recognition that liberal democracy emerges from particular long-term social and cultural matrices and cannot simply be enacted through elections, and a further recognition that democracy itself is a fragile social condition even where it exists, and that its underlying conditions can be destroyed far more quickly than they can be created. It is a conservative critique of neoconservatism that points to a contradiction within neoconservative moral assumptions. It is, perhaps, not precisely realist, in the sense of citing narrow national interest or state stability; it is, rather, the position of a moral realist.

Fukuyama's view of these things, it may be noted, itself shows inconsistencies. In *The End of History* he was something of a Hegelian triumphalist. In the present book, he displays Burkean caution, if not outright pessimism. It may be his discomfort over having changed his mind that accounts for the peculiar fact that Burke, despite hovering above nearly every substantive critique Fukuyama makes of neoconservative triumphalism, barely figures in the actual text of *After the Neocons*.

What does Fukuyama's farewell to his former companions in arms mean for the debate over the Iraq war? On the Left, many have abandoned their traditional Wilsonian idealism to revel in a mean-spirited realism usually associated with the Right, opposing the Iraq war not just on the legitimate grounds that it was not likely to achieve its aims and risked creating something worse – but in the course of this, culpably downplaying the evil that Saddam did. Recall how during the 1990s, it was taboo in liberal circles in the United States, Canada, or Western Europe even to suggest that the Balkan wars might be the result of centuries-old ethnic hatreds. That was wicked conservative realism voiced by morally indifferent Republicans such as Brent Scowcroft, and denounced with eloquence by progressive internationalists such as Michael Ignatieff and Samantha Power. I made speeches to this effect myself when I worked for Human Rights Watch – insisting, with Kantian moral certainty, that wars are never ascribable to ancient ethnic hatreds (Yugoslavia), and that there can be no peace without justice (Sierra Leone), and that impunity always rebounds (Chile). The progressive position was that ascribing the Yugoslav wars to ancient ethnic hatreds rather than the manipulations of present-day politicians was an immoral and cynical ploy to avoid getting involved. Today, on the other hand, a card-carrying liberal realist such as the Democratic Party's Kos Moulitsas can write, "It's clear that in the Middle East, no one is sick of the fighting. They have centuries of grudges to resolve, and will continue fighting until they can get over them". Meanwhile Saddam Hussein seems to be being reinvented on the Left as merely another

minor bad guy in a courtroom that offers him insufficient procedural protections. That Iraq today is worse than Iraq yesterday may of course actually be true, although it seems to me in fact far from so.

Or it might yet turn out to be true. But the downgrading of human rights idealism and the embrace of Kissingerian realism in the matter of Iraq is ill-becoming to American liberals. It is as though they had been long constrained to worship at the church of pious Wilsonianism, and were now suddenly freed to go out into the streets for a carnival of realism, suddenly freed to expound on the virtues of containment, stability and national interest.

Fukuyama has a great deal to say about the neoconservative run-up to the Iraq war. In this he is consistent: he opposed it from the beginning. Perhaps his Burkean instincts, deriving from the work he had done since 2000 on the rigours of state-building and the profound difficulties of creating from scratch conditions for democracy in the world outside Eastern Europe, began to kick in. Neoconservatives who applauded *The End of History* seem not to have read his books on nation-building and international development.

Fukuyama is largely right, it seems to me, in his critique of naive neoconservatism and its belief that the liberation of Eastern Europe would repeat itself in Iraq. But it is not necessarily correct to credit these neocons with the administration's policy in Iraq. They were a crucial part of the coalition for war within the Bush administration. But essential figures, and leading proponents of the war, notably Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, are better described, using Fukuyama's chosen category, as conservative Jacksonian nationalists. Traditional conservative realists like Scowcroft and Kissinger said no to the neoconservative venture; while the conservative Jacksonian nationalists said yes. This was a crucial difference. Neither can be characterized as idealist or moralist.

And there is a piece missing from Fukuyama's account of the Bush administration's war coalition. It is the transformation of at least some of these realists – or Jacksonian nationalists – into fully fledged neoconservatives, that is, the convergence of realism and idealism. A case in point is Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State, who started out as a realist protégé of Scowcroft but emerged as an ardent proponent of what we may characterize as the Bush doctrine, holding that the pursuit of democracy and universal values is itself a realist strategy. This school of thought argues that old realist doctrines of containment, accommodation, stability and narrow national interest are what got us into the current predicament; and that only a greater vision can get us out. Idealism – and this is a phrase which has appeared repeatedly in conservative defences of the Iraq war – is the new realism. On this view, which should be distinguished from naive neoconservatism, war for regime change and democratic transformation becomes, in the instrumentalist calculus of realists, a calculated bet on the possibilities of political transformation, one magnified by the perceived threat of transfer of WMD technology. Different people may weigh the probabilities differently, make different estimations, arrive at different bets, including the bet on doing nothing much at all. It was on this basis that I, for one, supported and continue to support the Iraq war, and it seems to me an

argument that Fukuyama conspicuously fails to address. It is not that Fukuyama slays a straw man – there were indeed plenty of naive neoconservatives, presumably now much chastened by events – but there are also plenty of not-so-naive realist-into-idealists for whom the outcome of the bet remains very much undecided.

Fukuyama has a second argument against the Iraq war and against transformative politics as a strategy in the war on terror. Drawing on such writers as Olivier Roy, he argues that democratic regime transformation in the Middle East will not address the problem of Islamist extremism and terrorism, because they are phenomena not principally of the Middle East, but of Muslims in the West confronting the loss of identity. Even assuming that the transformative strategy managed to stabilize Iraq, he argues, the social precursors of terrorism are not to be found there. They are drawn from places we cannot attack with military force – Hamburg, London, the Parisian banlieues. Thus the phenomenon of Islamist terror is not a regional, political or even sociological problem; it is, rather, the accumulation of individual psychologies, massed together in shared and yet still highly individual narratives of resentment, exclusion and the search for Muslim social and economic integration, and particularly Muslim middle-class integration, within European pluralist modernity. Even if the birthplaces of the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi Arabia and Egypt, this argument runs, their jihadist spiritual formation was in Western Europe. The Bush administration launched, on this account, a war that missed the point, targeting the wrong region and the wrong country.

I would not wish to deny the strength of Fukuyama's psychological observations. They are an indispensable part of any deep understanding of the esprit de corps of the terrorists. They are a powerful prescription, in my view, for deep-seated ideological changes in Western societies and their states, though perhaps not the changes that Fukuyama has in mind. The changes they indicate the need for, I would argue, involve the explicit abandonment of the doctrines of multiculturalism in Western societies, doctrines that have so damaged and weakened them. They are an argument for a vigorous reassertion of traditional liberalism, above all its guarantees of free expression, even for blasphemy, and of a traditional liberal refusal to tolerate the intolerant.

At some point, Europe and America will have to defend more vigorously – in the face of the cultural challenge of Islamism and other violent fundamentalisms, their broadly liberal inheritance (in America, liberal pluralism, to be precise, rather than liberal secularism, descended from European anticlericalism). The core of that defence is a clear attitude to religious extremism. Islam – “moderate” Islam – must take its place alongside other religions. That is to say, it must dwell within the cage of tolerance, an iron cage that insists without apology that religions tolerate the liberal secular order of public life. Muslim communities in the West must know that the larger society will not compromise its demands that all respect the values of a liberal society; they must also know that they will be protected with force against the demands of extremists from within their own community.

Fukuyama's psychological argument, important though it is, does not dispose of the argument for forcible regime change, nor for the attempt to open possibilities for democratic transformation in the Middle East. The story is not all about Muslims in the

West. The ancillary roles of corrupt, authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes that prop themselves up with religious ideology and of Saudi-financed Wahhabism cannot be discounted. No doubt the push for democracy in the region will produce unanticipated consequences. One that has already been anticipated, by the Egyptian legal scholar Hesham Nasr among others, is the rise of Islamist parties and sharia law among populations which, having seen the failure of socialism and neo-liberalism to better their lives, are willing to give at least parliamentary Islamism a chance. The issue, Nasr points out, is not so much whether they should be allowed to give it a try, but whether, having tried it and perhaps not liking it, they will still have a political system that allows them to give it up. How, he asks, does a society give up God's own legal system?

Fukuyama's last argument, his answer to what post-neoconservative policy should be, is less persuasive than his earlier critique of it. He calls for a new foreign policy paradigm, a hard-headed liberal internationalism that he calls "realistic Wilsonianism". The terminology seeks to combine idealist and realist strands. The deep contradictions of neoconservative foreign policy, he says, can only be addressed by a renewed and invigorated multilateralism. First, he proposes, the United States should "work toward a multilateral world, not give special emphasis to the United Nations". He locates the source of multilateral legitimacy not in UN institutions but in a looser configuration, one more tightly multilateral than US-led coalitions of the willing, but less so than the UN. Second, Fukuyama argues that the goal of foreign policy should not be the "transcendence of sovereignty and power politics but its regularization through institutional constraints".

In practice, what Fukuyama describes is the old, familiar liberal internationalism with a bit less emphasis on existing international organizations. What is hard-headed about this, I wonder? In practice it would be likely to amount to a multilateralism that empowered the middling powers of Europe. This is counsel that will warm the hearts of many in Europe and many on the American Left, but not mine. And it is quite disconnected from Fukuyama's earlier argument. "Realistic Wilsonianism" seems to be born of a desire to find a new paradigm – any paradigm – that will constrain American neo-conservatism from further action. It is not so much a solution to neoconservative contradictions as an effort to quarantine them.

Events since the book was written do not make this prescription any more germane. Today, with the recent conflict in Lebanon, we have entered a new phase of foreign policy in which seemingly nothing but the hardest realism counts. Iran acts through its proxy, Hezbollah; having tested and found Western powers tired and weak, it has discovered what game theorists have long noted, that the world is vulnerable to free-riders, and to those who call the bluff of tough but insincere diplomatic talk. Iran is betting on the prestige of nuclear weapons it has yet to complete; Syria has discovered the difference a year makes in the will of international institutions. The worn-down Bush administration appears to be sleepwalking through its remaining two years with the blessing of its multilateralist partners; it wants nothing more than to pass along any remaining foreign policy crises to the next administration. If Bush does act alone on Iran or North Korea, we may be assured that this time it will not be willingly. No one,

apparently, has any time for idealism; neoconservative arguments over democracy and freedom seem quite dead in the midst of this new Middle East war.

Fukuyama's solution to this can better be described as ineffectual internationalism. This version of idealism seems doomed from the outset to be heroically internationalist in precisely the ways that most ensure its ineffectiveness. The effects can be seen in the current inaction over Sudan. They were chronicled in the New York Times Magazine a few months ago, in a profile of the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The international community will not prevent genocide in Darfur, the article argued, so instead let us get on with preparing criminal trials for those we were unwilling to stop in the first place. But, in this case, why should the ICC bother? Is it not morally corrupt to stand and watch genocide go by, comforting oneself with a stern but vague promise to arrest some people after it is over? This is an example of the vices both of internationalism and realism. In the case of Iraq neoconservatives preferred war. Their search for a quick and painless democratic transformation, which they did not find, was a naive one. But their other belief was not so naive: this is the belief that over the long run, the realist strategy of accommodation and containment of execrable regimes – the pursuit of stability at all moral costs practised by the West for thirty years – would only serve to feed the beast. In *After the Neocons*, Francis Fukuyama has analysed in exquisite and sobering detail where that vision went wrong, where it is internally contradictory, and where it draws on inapt historical parallels to refight the Cold War. His book is sharp and shrewd, although ultimately not so devastating as he believes. The alternative he offers, by contrast, so-called realistic Wilsonianism, merely prefers ineffectual internationalism. Alas, in these difficult times, this is no alternative at all.

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