

Leo Strauss as the Mastermind behind U.S. invasion of Iraq?

A Study of the Influence of Philosopher Leo Strauss on American Foreign Policy

by

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## **Introduction: How Did the Relation between Leo Strauss and American Foreign Policy Become a Debate?**

On June 7 2003 the New York Times published an opinion article by Jenny Strauss Clay, the daughter of a political philosopher named Leo Strauss. With an undertone of grief and furor, She criticized those who dragged her father from “his 30-year-old grave” to direct a “‘cabal’[...]of Bush administration figures hoping to subject the American people to rule by a ruthless elite.” The issue she referred to was the growing criticism on Strauss for his connection with the neoconservatives in the Bush administration’s “cabinet” for the war in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Yet who is Leo Strauss? Indeed, most of the public was unaware of this scholar, not to mention his ideas. He was a professor immigrated from Germany to the U.S. in the 1930s and spent most of his career at the University of Chicago as a professor of philosophy. Strauss's work was not frequently discussed as those of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt were. He was well respected by his students and many in the related disciplines but no higher popularity was achieved. It was nonetheless a blazing fact that 30 years later considerable criticism of Strauss had reached a point where his daughter felt compelled to respond through a major news outlet. How exactly was Strauss related to Bush’s war in Iraq? Before answering this question we need to examine another concept that served arguably as a bridge between Strauss and American foreign policy—neoconservatism. The reason for this idea to be “neo” lies in the fact that its founders were ex-liberals—the Trotskyists—at the City University of New York in the 1930s. Being the

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<sup>1</sup> Clay, *The Real Leo Strauss*

proponents of the New Deal but not necessarily of the Great Society, neoconservatives were in moderate support of government spending at home, which made them resemble liberals. Yet they were in line with conservatives when it came to traditional values and morality. They questioned the counter-culture movement and cultural pluralism by arguing that these liberal ideals of tolerance were “empty” in essence. “Mugged by reality,” they launched a movement against the New Left and the counterculture since the 1960s, which led to their migration to the Republican Party. The “godfather” of the neoconservative movement was Irving Kristol, an ex-Trotskyist, who was the co-founder and co-editor of the conservative magazine *The Public Interest* and the founder and publisher of the conservative magazines *The National Interest* and *Encounter*.<sup>2</sup> Together with the efforts of his fellow neocons they reached political prominence during Reagan and George W. Bush Administration. While their political proposals in the 1960s were domestically pro-New Deal and internationally anti-Détente, the policy focus gradually shifted to foreign policy, manifested by anti-Communism during the Reagan Administration and militant tendency during the second Bush Administration. Witnessing the rise of neoconservatism, it is hard to imagine that this idea suffered from a drain of intellectual reasoning at its early stage in the 1960s. The neoconservatives, led by Kristol, injected new vibrancy into conservatism.<sup>3</sup> Yet his ideas were not wholly original: in his autobiography Kristol identified Strauss’s ideas as his chief influence in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

Another fact linking Strauss to American politics was that many members of the second Bush administration either studied with Strauss or with the students of Strauss. They are Paul

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<sup>2</sup> Gewen, *Irving Kristol, Godfather of Modern Conservatism, Dies at 89*.

<sup>3</sup> Weisberg, *Neo-Neo-Cons*.

<sup>4</sup> Kristol, *Neoconservatism, the Autobiography of An Idea*

Wolfowitz, Gary Schmitt, Abram Shulsky, Francis Fukuyama, Zalmay Khalilzad, and personnels of lower rankings. Moreover, many of Strauss's students were influential neoconservative public intellectuals such as Walter Berns, Harry Jaffa, William Kristol, Carnes Lord, and Fukuyama who achieved prominence in both fields. They bolstered the idea of American Exceptionalism that saw the U.S. as the "city upon a hill" which should be the exemplary political regime for the world to look upon. They urged the "moralization" of American foreign policy, emphasized the outside threats faced by American people, which sold the idea of preventive war against terrorism in Iraq.

Such evidence, however, was not enough to settle the debate on whether Strauss's ideas are directly linked to the invasion. While Strauss's students were directly involved in the policy-making process, it remained a question whether they were necessarily Strauss's followers—the Straussians—or whether they really understood Strauss's ideas. In addition, as the literature review will suggest, the attempt to connect certain policy decisions in foreign affairs to the ideas of a philosopher who seldom comment on foreign policy is but unconvincing. Therefore, the focus of the research turns to the realm of ideas—to examine the relations between people's thoughts. This is the puzzle that the study intends to solve: what is the relations between Strauss's ideas and neoconservative ideas on foreign policy? On the one hand, regarding Strauss's role as active, the thesis asks what are the direct and indirect influence casted by Strauss's ideas on major neoconservative intellectuals? On the other hand, regarding the role of Straussians as active, the thesis poses the question: what are the intellectual enterprises and political proposals that neoconservatives intend to develop by employing Strauss's ideas as an inspiration, if not justification?

The answer found through the research is that while Strauss's teaching was not intended to be politicized or to be related to the advocacy of wars, his followers believed in the relevance of Strauss's ideas for politics. Strauss provided inspirations for the assertion of American nationalism: his philosophical reasoning of the importance of virtue in classic philosophy and concerns about the vanishing discourse of morality in modern society accommodated the persisting call for return to American "tradition" in the Cold War era. While Strauss stressed the problem—damage of moral degradation on the survival of society—Straussians in the post-Cold War era saw the solution—military build-up and even wars as a way of restoring social virtue for the good of patriotism. While Strauss was concerned about the problem—the consequence of the separation of rationalism and traditionalism in the modern era—Straussians offered to solve it by conflating Realpolitik with moral idealism in domestic and foreign policy. Therefore, while one finds what is likely to be neoconservative inspiration when looking into Strauss, the role of his followers in shaping his ideas to accommodate their own enterprise and agenda should not be overlooked.

### **Research Design: The Methods for Selecting Primary Texts and How to Approach Them**

The purpose of the research is to examine Strauss's ideas and to find out how his ideas were interpreted and inherited by the students of Strauss. While the process involves grasping the key ideas of Strauss, it pays equal attention to the writings of neoconservative Straussians and the evolution of the historical context which helps understand their ideas.

The research is mainly text-based analysis. It looks into the original texts of Strauss and neoconservative intellectuals who are considered to be influenced by Strauss. For the part of

Strauss's texts, the research selects Strauss's works which are most frequently discussed in terms of their relations to American foreign policy. Because of Strauss's famous complex and "esoteric" writings style, the research also draws help from several selected works on both Strauss's ideas and the historical context that influenced him. For studying Straussians, the research looks at the writings of selected intellectuals. It looks into the works of the first-generation neoconservative Irving Kristol and later-generations neoconservatives Walter Berns (he was in Kristol's generation but expressed his foreign policy ideas only since the 1980s), and Francis Fukuyama. While the later generations were more concerned with political issues of the post-Cold War world, Kristol focused his discussions and reflections on neoconservatism in the Cold War context. Nevertheless, the influence of his ideas on later Straussians could not be dismissed.

Some might argue that Fukuyama no longer identify himself as a neocon by the time he wrote the book *America at the Crossroads* which is studied as his major work on American foreign policy in the research. However, as the paper proceeds, it is clear that his ideas were still in line with major neoconservatives and Straussians. In addition, it is important to point out that some might suggest focusing on the neoconservatives in the Bush administration such as Paul Wolfowitz, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the influential editor William Kristol, as well as to suggest focusing on the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) which promoted militancy in American foreign policy. Yet the problem with those texts is the lack of discussions of the philosophical foundation of their proposed foreign policy—they are policy-focused discussions. Unlike these neocons such as Wolfowitz and William Kristol, the selected Straussians were concerned more about the philosophical rationale that determined the ways neocons interpreted

political issues, which helps to examine the links between Strauss's ideas and neoconservative foreign policy proposals.

Apart from the studying the text, the author also believes that the context in which the ideas were developed—the major historical events of their times, how their ideas were received in the public, and their ties to neoconservative institutions—is indispensable for reaching a profound understanding of the evolution of ideas. Therefore, the thesis also studies the biographies of Strauss and Straussians. It would help to identify the ways in which the thoughts of the influential individuals or groups evolved. For example, while there are chapters of books devoted to the life of Strauss such as in *Leo Strauss and the Conservative Movement in American* and *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, there is a biography of the Straussian group written by the Anne Norton who was the student of the Straussian Joseph Corpsey and lived for years in the Straussian circle.

The paper begins with a review of existing answers to the puzzle, finding out the most compelling arguments, and taking the approach of the favored group of studies. Secondly, it discusses the ideas of Strauss and Straussian intellectuals including Irving Kristol, Walter Berns and Francis Fukuyama and the influence of their historical context. It concludes by summarizing results of the study.

### **Literature Review: Three Perspectives on the Relevance between Leo Strauss and Neoconservative Foreign Policy**

As the debacle of the Iraq War gradually unfolded itself, neoconservative ideology was called into question. The field of political science witnessed a surge of scholarly works on



neoconservative foreign policy. While most agree that neoconservatives casted great influence on U.S. foreign policy during the Reagan and the George W. Bush Administration, there is little consensus on what the relations are between Leo Strauss's philosophical ideas and American foreign policy. The answers occupies a full spectrum. On one side of the spectrum, scholars including Shadia Drury, Nicholas Xenos, and Aggie Hirst argue that there is a rather direct heritage of Strauss in the thinking behind military buildup and the War in Iraq. The decision of invading Iraq, according to Drury, was shaped by the teaching of Strauss through the policy designed by Straussians in Bush's Cabinet. On the other side of the spectrum, scholars including Justin Vaisse and Peter Minowitz see Strauss in little, if not no, relevance to neoconservatism in domestic and foreign policy. They pointed to the ambiguousness of Strauss's political ideas and stressed that he was primarily a philosopher who contributed little to the discussions on the concrete political issues. Nevertheless, the views of many situated on certain point in the middle. Historians including Mario Del Pero, Jean-Francois Drolet, and James Mann accentuated the role of the Straussians in transforming and reproducing Strauss's original ideas in the process of practical policy application. They did not support the argument that Strauss was the "godfather" of neoconservative foreign policy, nor did they contend that neoconservatism took off in American politics without the intellectual inspiration from Strauss.

The key issue that divided scholars thus seems to be the ranking relations between the significance of Strauss's ideas and his followers' appropriation of those ideas. Some asserted the centrality of Strauss in the construct of neoconservative ideology while others contended that Straussians, along with other neoconservatives, were the protagonists in the process of policymaking. While those who see direct links between Leo Strauss and the invasion of Iraq

prioritized the influence of Strauss's ideas, their opponents who rejected Strauss's influences on U.S. foreign policy doubted the political strength of abstract philosophical ideas in shaping foreign policy.

Among these diverse views, the scholars who pointed to both the agency of ideas and practitioners, in my opinion, stands out as being the most reasonable in their assessment. While the ideas could not carry themselves to the White House decision-makers' table without active individuals who also tended to uphold their own interpretations, the original ideas were nonetheless crucial for comprehending the rationale of individuals which, in the case of Reagan and Bush Administration, were in the position of designing and implementing U.S. foreign policy. In addition, the approach taken by the third group involved historical analysis that gave importance to the process of idea being represented and reproduced over times, which is indispensable for investigating into the connection between ideas dating back to the 1930s to policy practice as recent as the 21st century. Therefore, the third approach is most likely to produce a balanced and reasonable findings of the relations between Strauss's ideas and the direction U.S. foreign policy headed. The rest of the literature review are contributed to the detailed discussion on the approaches that are briefly outlined above.

### *The Three Camps*

The **first** group of scholars argued that direct links could be drawn from Strauss to U.S. politics and foreign policy. They argued that Strauss was a bearer of anti-democratic and fascist thoughts which he brought to neoconservatism. A relatively early work on the subject that provoked many debates in academia is *Leo Strauss and the American Right* published in 1999, in which Shadia Drury argued that Strauss provided intellectual backup to an elitist strain in

American political leadership which emphasize militarism and Christian fundamentalism.<sup>5</sup> In an interview produced in late 2003 Drury listed Strauss's ideas including natural order, noble lies, the criticism of liberalism that, she argued, justified the motive of Bush Administration's war in Iraq. She contended that, firstly, Strauss's book *Natural Right and History* regarded rights as "the right of the superior to rule over the inferior, the master over the slave, the husband over the wife, and the wise few over the vulgar many." The thinking was connected to Strauss's appraisal of Plato's idea of noble lie. Drury argued that Strauss believed in the necessity of elite class's deception of the mass since it was the strong's natural right to dominate the weak. Finally, she argued that Strauss was concerned about the possible success of America's global domination since it would mean the triumph of modernism that represented commerce and material indulgence. Drury then argued that Strauss implied the intoxication of perpetual wars as the solution—"if America fails to achieve her "national destiny", and is mired in perpetual war, then all is well. Man's humanity, defined in terms of struggle to the death, is rescued from extinction." This was the reason for waging wars on the moral ground instead of spreading market-fundamentalism.<sup>6</sup> In summary, by focusing on the policy results promoted by neoconservatives, Drury concluded that a direct connection can be established between Strauss's critics of modernism and decisions in U.S. foreign policy.

On the one hand, Drury did well in provoking the potentially controversial aspects of Strauss's thesis. On the other hand, she largely reduced the complexity of Strauss in order to produce the provocation. Would Strauss endorse the rule of the strong over the weak, the lies by elites to the public, and the benefits of war on "man's humanity"? For the first two, my next

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<sup>5</sup> Drury, Leo Strauss and the American Right

<sup>6</sup> Postel, *Noble Lies And Perpetual War: Leo Strauss, The Neo-Cons, And Iraq*.

section will argue in detail that Strauss's thesis was rather abstract and philosophical. The notion of perpetual war, however, appears to me a far more salient topic in the writings of neoconservatives than in Strauss. While Strauss barely mentioned wars, many Straussians backed military buildup and wars, in which Drury's comments would fit.

Similarly, Aggie Hirst contended that direct links existed by elaborating on several ideas including "friend-enemy dichotomy," "tyrannous regime" and justice which were considered as Strauss's central ideas and were reflected in the writings and rhetoric of Straussians. According to Hirst, firstly, Strauss's emphasis on the moral friends and evil enemies—the analysis that assumed irreconcilable contentions existed between societies of different moral values—was applied by Straussians to the Bush Administration's War on Terror. Hirst quoted Strauss—" [Strauss] states that in society, 'the just man is he who does not harm, but loves, his friends and neighbors, i.e., his fellow citizens, but who does harm or who hates his enemies, i.e., the foreigners who as such are at least potential enemies of his city.'" <sup>7</sup> Secondly, Hirst argued that Strauss resurrected the concept of tyranny and regime—"the regime refers, for Strauss, to the modes of life within a society, the premises and values upon which society rests, the very foundations of society." <sup>8</sup> Strauss criticized the use of "dictatorship" instead of tyranny to describe the authoritarian regimes for that tyranny had morally pejorative implications while dictatorship was a value-free term. The West should uphold its sense of moral superiority when it came to making sense of the authoritarian regimes. Thirdly, one idea that solidify Strauss's stance on the previous thoughts was the denial of the existence of universal justice. Justice did not exist in real life since the root motive for implementing justice was to protect personal

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<sup>7</sup> Hirst, 651

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 652

interests. Yet a faux justice is necessary for society as a belief and a value for the good of human souls and community solidarity.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the West had to insist on its own justice instead of seeking for a universal one.

Therefore, while Drury discussed natural order, Plato's noble lies, and criticism of liberalism as the inspiration of neoconservative foreign policy on Iraq, Hirst pointed to friend/enemy dichotomy, regime, and the denial of justice. Though different in the specific work of Strauss that they referred to, both arguments were developed from their perceptions of Strauss's thesis: the interrelated crises due to the foundationlessness of modern society. In particular, both emphasized on Strauss's proposal to guard "our" moral and value against "others'."

Another work titled *Cloaked in Virtue* by Nicholas Xenos presented similar thesis but focused specifically on the influence of Strauss's idea on esoteric writing and the rhetoric of American foreign policy. He argued that Strauss's idea of esoteric and exoteric teaching were a justification of using rhetoric of virtues and morality to cloak the real disapproval of liberal democracy. Strauss believed that the influence of a philosopher was often subversive to the polity he was in. Strauss philosophers address the public to convince them that they are not subversive at the same time that they are embedding another kind of message to those who will understand. The persecution is true not only in ancient greek cities but also modern times. There was an inconspicuous form of tyranny in modern times that was equipped with "technology" and "ideology" that forced its subordinates to believe in science and the "conquest of nature." In addition, he contended that the foreign policy rhetoric of U.S. government inherited the tactic of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 49

employing notions of morality including bad regime, friend-enemy dichotomy, and emphasis on the individual leaders in justification for external military interventions. In the conclusion Xenos claimed that the Straussian neoconservatism was essentially part of an anti-liberal ideology that employed the elements in the liberal discourse which disguised the anti-liberal core.<sup>10</sup>

In summary, these scholars' arguments showed some strength in pointing out the possible heritage of Strauss in U.S. foreign policy in terms of its guiding philosophy. They argued that Strauss's keen interest in absolutist moral principles and the assertion of incompatibility between societies of different moral principles dictated the direction of neoconservative foreign policy in the Bush era. Therefore Strauss's concerns on modernity and damages caused by lack of moral principles is not completely unrelated to the promotion of morality—democracy—as an “ethic” of U.S. foreign policy. Nevertheless, there are enough reasons for doubting the soundness of their arguments. The largest problem lies in the gap between Strauss's philosophical ideas and the concrete foreign policies. Strauss did not express thoughts on actual foreign policy issues. Instead, he focused on interpretation of ancient Greek and Jewish texts and explicitly expressed his disapproval of politicizing his philosophical ideas.<sup>11</sup> Even though certain lines can be drawn to connect policy with philosophical thinkings, it is no more than speculation to assert that there is a causal relation. The call for restoring moral virtue is a widespread tendency in the U.S. political culture throughout its history. The emphasis on friend/enemy dichotomy manifested in neoconservative writings can be traced to many causes, such as xenophobia, American exceptionalism, and nationalism instead of Strauss. In addition, there is the poorly explored gap between ideas of an intellectual and the policy results of practitioners. The first implication of the

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<sup>10</sup> Xenos, *Cloaked in Virtue: Unveiling Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy*.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 1 in Strauss, *Natural Right and History*.

gap is the difficulty in demonstrating that what people think determines what decisions they make. It is especially evident in a political environment where decisions are made based on personal and group interests besides individual's ideas. For example, one may well argue that political figures outside the neoconservative circle can take advantages of the appeal of neoconservative ideas to promote policies that serves personal interests such as improving personal political profiles. The second implication of the gap between thoughts and policy was the problematic assumption of the role of influential Straussians in the arguments of these scholars. By contending that Strauss's ideas directly relate to concrete actions in foreign affairs, these scholars' assumed that Straussians were merely vessels of Strauss's ideas—people who think exactly the way Leo Strauss thought. Yet in reality, even those who proudly claim themselves as Straussians do not receive inspirations solely from Strauss. Individuals are influenced by personal experiences and historical backdrop of the era. Straussians interpreted Strauss according to their own understandings and the process of reproducing and developing upon original ideas can bend and even redirect them. Therefore, the argument and approach of the first group is too problematic to follow.

The **second** group of scholars argue that Strauss is almost in no way related to U.S. foreign policy. While the name of Strauss does appear in many academic writings on U.S. neoconservatism, it does not frequently appear in writings on neoconservative foreign policy. Indeed, many did not discern the links thus did not discuss the issue. For the few who do articulate their disagreement on alleged links between Strauss of foreign policy, they often wrote in response to specific works.

A book titled *Straussophobia* by Minowitz was a response to various accusations of Strauss including him being the mastermind of neoconservative foreign policy in Chapter 7. Minowitz went after the evidence in Drury's argument in detail and pointed out that the original texts of both Strauss and Straussians are either misquoted or interpreted with strong bias that serves tracing most of the negative policy results to Strauss. After all, the texts discussed by Strauss's detractors are mainly Strauss's readings of Greek philosophy classics. The critics by Drury, according to Minowitz, merely reflected the recent tendency of politicizing philosophy and persecuting ideas that can be considered politically wrong. Minowitz offered a strong counter-argument of Drury by pointing to her lack of objectivity and potentially cursory research conduct.<sup>12</sup> However, it is not sufficient to prove the nonexistence of Straussian elements in neoconservatism. By refuting Drury, Minowitz mainly achieved to question the labels—arguably stigma—placed on Strauss while the argument for irrelevance was not fully substantiated. Many scholars simply did not mention Strauss in the intellectual origins of neoconservatism. For example, Justin Vaisse did not mention the name of Strauss in his book *Neoconservatism* except a brief discussion that listed the reasons for decentering Strauss in the epilogue of his book *Neoconservatism*. They were, firstly, that Leo Strauss influenced only several neoconservatives. He pointed to the fact that Paul Wolfowitz took only two classes with Leo Strauss. Secondly, Strauss remained aloof from his time and seldom commented on policy issues. Vaisse claimed that promoting American democracy abroad would be more foreign than any neoconservative thoughts for Leo Strauss. Thirdly, William Kristol told Vaisse in an interview that Strauss was

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<sup>12</sup> Minowitz, *Straussophobia: Defending Leo Strauss and Straussians Against Shadia Drury and Other Accusers*.



compatible and consonant with neoconservatism but not necessary for understanding it. Instead, Vaisse introduced Irving Kristol as the intellectual father of neoconservatism in America.<sup>13</sup>

However, all points are doubtful. Firstly, apart from the fact that Wolfowitz chose University of Chicago as a graduate student partly for his curiosity in Strauss, his mentor Alan Bloom at Cornell University was a student of Strauss. According to Anne Norton, Wolfowitz was the student of yet another Strauss's student Joseph Cropsey. Secondly, it remains unclear if Strauss would endorse promoting American democracy. One key difference that divided Strauss and the German philosopher Carl Schmitt was the attitude toward the "enemy." Although they both agreed that people in different culture or regimes could not overcome fundamental differences such as moral standards, Schmitt gave the solution of "respect your enemies" while Strauss contended that people in one society should believe that the enemies were morally wrong thus no respect should be spared.<sup>14</sup> Whether Strauss would endorse democracy promotion requires thorough discussions but it is not as a distant idea for Strauss as Vaisse claimed. Thirdly, William Kristol is a self-proclaimed Straussian who founded *Weekly Standard* and a major creator of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) that promoted neoconservative foreign policy. While he might consider Strauss not "necessary" for understanding neoconservatism, he was a shaper of neoconservatism that was closely related to the second Bush Administration. Thanks to his influence on neoconservatism, the relevance of Strauss became necessary for examination. As for Irving Kristol, he identified Strauss as one of his two chief influences. The concepts and discussions such as relativism, modernity's crisis, morality are argued in similar ways with that of Strauss.

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<sup>13</sup> Vaisse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement*.

<sup>14</sup> Drolet, The Cryptic Cold War Realism of Leo Strauss, 13. *International Politics*.

To summarize, the strength of the second group comes from the emphasis on the distance between Strauss's philosophical enterprise and policy practice. However, was Strauss really a completely reclusive philosopher who only thought and talked about vague ideas as these scholars assumed? Many authors argued for the other way around. Drolet and Del Pero mentioned how arguments on relativism and modernization was linked to U.S.-Soviet rivalry of ideology, which are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs. Moreover, the end of the Cold War did not mean the end of the East-West rivalry, nor did it mean the end of the Cold War mindset that points to confrontation and fear of an evil counterpart. Therefore, while Strauss did not decide the policy direction in Bush's War on Terror as the first group suggested, it would be unreasonable to exclude Strauss from the discussion of U.S. foreign policy.

The **third** camp argued for a moderate role of Strauss's thoughts in shaping American foreign policy. They stress both the significance of Strauss's ideas and how his influential followers interpreted him overtime. They stress the active role of Straussian intellectuals more than the Strauss's fierce criticism but less than the scholars who reject the relevance of Strauss. By doing so, they take into account the lasting influence of Strauss while regarding the his students as active appropriators of Strauss.

In an article published in response to the critics of Strauss, Jean-Francois Drolet argues that Strauss's philosophical system invites more interpretations than the first camp suggests. He rejects the arguments linking Strauss's ideas directly to Bush's War in Iraq and contends that Strauss's influence was rather profound in terms of facilitating the shaping of the overall socio-cultural environment that favors the "re-nationalisation" of America and "its incremental departure from the socio-economic and geopolitical pacts of the post-war period since the

1970s.”<sup>15</sup> Drolet pointed out that Strauss's discussions of liberal democracy reflects, indeed, American politics of the time that was epitomized by the the post-War social milieu, the Cold War, and anti-communism. According to Drolet, “Strauss believed that the same crisis of moral relativism that had facilitated the collapse of Weimar was looming over post-war America and threatened to undermine its will to fight a long protracted struggle against communism.”<sup>16</sup> Thus the Strauss’s thesis could be argued to have potential political impact. He criticized relativism, arguing that cultural relativism in modern society would lead to lack of hard-line and superior moral principle thus the degeneration of society. Despite the abstractness of his ideas, Drolet contended that they were related to the anti-communist thinking in the Cold War context. Meanwhile, Drolet argued that Straussians also played a key role by pushing through the the “rhetorical instrumentalization of ethnocentric moral universalisms with which neoconservatives buttress their Hobbesian view of international relations to sublimate class conflicts and generate domestic support for their imperial crusades.”<sup>17</sup> He suggested that Strauss’s ideas, to some extent, became rhetorical tool for neoconservatives to justify their realist stance on international relations. In this way, the complexity of the between the role of Strauss and that of the Straussians was shed a light upon.

A book chapter by Mario Del Pero, aiming at breaking down the historical and intellectual foundations of neoconservatism, reached similar conclusion. Pero argued that the frequently advocated “tenet” in post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy—“a balance of power that favors freedom”—was essentially self-contradicted. (page) Del Pero contends that neoconservatism

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 1

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 23

developed in the Cold War, including moralization of foreign policy (the objections to “tyrannous” regimes and the promotion of democracy) and the rejection of global interdependence due to the “realist” concerns (doubts on the “evil” dictators and on the United Nations) led to the peculiar conflation of realism and utopianism—the conjunction of “realist anti-utopianism” and “utopian anti-realism”—in neoconservative foreign policy. On the one hand, the moralization of foreign policy was the incarnation of America’s missions as the city on the hill. On the other hand, America needs to watch out the threats to national security and its general well-beings on the world stage. Although the name of Strauss is not mentioned in his writing, the above-mentioned causes all pertain to Strauss’s thesis. Same as Drolet, Del Pero contributes lengthy discussions to the “journey” from Strauss’s philosophical ideas to neoconservative foreign policy guidelines. He quoted William Kristol and Robert Kagan’s claim on the importance of moral purpose and need to believe that moral goals and national interests were always in harmony. They argued that “remoralization of America at home [required] remoralization of American foreign policy. For both follow from Americans’ belief that the principles of the Declaration of Independence are not merely the choices of a particular culture, [but] universal, enduring, ‘self-evident’ truths.”<sup>18</sup> In this way, Del Pero illustrated how the vague idea of moral importance in society was transformed to the emphasis on moralizing foreign policy while the belief that national interest and morality were always aligned was added to their proposal. While pointing out the complex, if not contradicted, intellectual process of ideas, Del Pero nevertheless expanded on the historical background that facilitated the prevalence of

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<sup>18</sup> Kristol and Kagan, *Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy*.

neoconservatism which, in the case of the War on Terror, was the fear of foreign aggression and the discontent with the enemy's illegitimate regime.

Besides Del Pero, other scholars also discuss the sophisticated intellectual influence of Strauss on his students. For instance, James Mann investigates into the educational background and the career of Paul Wolfowitz in the second chapter of book *Rise of the Vulcans*. He finds that while the teaching of Strauss offered an intellectual backup to aggressive foreign policy and high level of suspicion towards authoritarian regimes, the thinking of Wolfowitz was also significantly informed by his doctoral study with nuclear strategist Albert Wohlstetter who was also considered being influenced by Strauss. In his doctoral thesis Wolfowitz wrote about the possible exacerbating consequences that would happen if Israel successfully developed its nuclear program. He worried that the Arab states would then strive to match Israel's nuclear capacity that would destabilize the security status quo in the Middle East. With his expertise on nuclear issues in the Middle East, Wolfowitz, as a Straussian, developed his specific concerns and inclinations in foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, by giving a historical attention to the development of Straussians' thinkings while recognizing the profundity of Strauss's influences, the third camp takes a method that allows them to develop relatively comprehensive and balanced arguments on neoconservatism as an intellectual school as well as a political movement.

### *Conclusion*

This section discussed the arguments by scholars that can be briefly divided into three groups. The first camp tends to be dismissive to the arguments that emphasized the role of

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<sup>19</sup> Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*.

Straussians in interpreting Strauss and constructing U.S. foreign policy. The second group of scholars, in contrast, neglected the potential links between Strauss's ideas and the political background of the Cold War and the rise of the Third World of which the legacy persisted till today. Different from the former groups, the third group of scholars considered Straussian thinkings as a school of thoughts that evolve over time. They suggested that we need to regard Straussians not only as disciples but also as independent thinkers who draw inspirations from multiple sources in order for us to develop a critical understanding of the relations between Leo Strauss and neoconservative foreign policy.

While the third group of scholars suggested an approach that is a best fit to the research, there has not been lengthy and comprehensive discussions on the relations between the thinkings of Strauss and those of neoconservatives in terms of foreign policy: Del Pero did not research the original texts of Strauss, Mann's theme was the War in Iraq, and Drolet focused on the influence of Strauss on domestic politics. This paper distinguishes itself for being an effort to understand the both the prominence of Strauss and Straussians in how neoconservatives see the world system and the role of America in it. In this way, the study attempts to fill the gap and to provide better understandings of neoconservative foreign policy.

## **Chapter 1 The Ideas of Leo Strauss and His Significant Life**

### *The Life of Strauss in Context*

Strauss was a German emigre in America born in 1899 to Jewish parents. In 1932 he was granted scholarship by Rockefeller Foundations for research on Thomas Hobbes in Paris and London thus was enabled to leave Germany and latter to teach in the U.S.. At first he taught at the New School for a few years and then spent most of his career at University of Chicago where he taught several generations of students. In the Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion, Strauss identified his youth as "a young Jew born and raised in Germany who found himself in the grips of the theological-political predicament."<sup>20</sup>

Strauss was a Jew born in Germany in the end of the 19th century. According to Strauss, the German story during his youth was "a liberal democracy" being defeated and seized by "the man who had by far the strongest will or single-mindedness, the greatest ruthlessness, daring, and power over his following, and the best judgement of the various forces."<sup>21</sup> The most important effects of this experience on Strauss was the convicted weakness of liberal democracy. He sought to explain the weakness of liberal democracy in his studies of philosophy.

Strauss's intellectual prestige in America was unmatched that when he was in Germany. In Strauss's account, the world was in crisis because of modernity and America was not exempt from it. Yet America had a better chance than others: the great tradition in the ideals of the Founding Fathers, if well preserved, could guard America from the danger of modernity. In fact, a notable legacy of Strauss's professorial life was that he inspired generations of students to reexamine the founding of America.<sup>22</sup> The Zuckerts pointed out that Strauss considered American liberal democracy, "in contradistinction to communism and fascism, derives powerful

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<sup>20</sup> Strauss, *Liberalism, Ancient and Modern*, 225

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Galston, Leo Strauss's Qualified Embrace of Liberal Democracy, in Smith (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 206

support from a way of thinking which cannot be called modern at all: the pre-modern thought of [the] western tradition.”<sup>23</sup> Another prominent student of Strauss Harry V. Jaffa claimed that “Strauss also thought that American politics, at its best, showed a practical wisdom that owed much to a tradition older than Locke” who was considered by Strauss to “represent modernity in its soberest form.”<sup>24</sup>

Strauss’s comments on modernity and his attitudes towards America, whether by coincidence or not, corresponded to the social tendency to recover and reinstall the traditions and values in the post-War America between 1945 and the mid-1950s. The most pervasive change that reflected this tendency might be the renewal of interest and belief in Christian orthodoxy. The percentage of population who went to the church increased by 10 from the 1940s to 1955. Many argued for the “utility” of religion—a “useful sedative” protect the society from acting radically out of “excessive anxiety and agitation.”<sup>25</sup> But the emphasis on religion was not enough to form a political campaign with transformative power in order to bring back traditions to American society—the conservatives had yet found a compelling intellectual backup. While the supporters of religions decried the lost of “moral foundations” and “universally valid principles,” a comprehensive thesis with intellectual strength was needed.<sup>26</sup> Strauss, then, was one of the intellectuals (including Alexis de Tocqueville) picked up by the conservative traditionalists to propel their project of returning to the Christianity s and anti-totalitarianism.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Zuckert, C. and Zuckert, M., *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy*. 77

<sup>24</sup> Jaffa, *The Conditions of Freedom. Essays in Political Philosophy*. 7

<sup>25</sup> Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 89

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, See Chapter 3



It is likely that Strauss's dual experience of, on the one hand, being a Jew in his youth under the self-contradicted liberal democracy of the Weimar Republic and, on the other hand, of being an immigrant intellectual who rose to prominence in American academia to which his fame in Germany could not compare resulted in some overlapping, if not conflation, between his thoughts on Judaism and America, at least on Jewish liberalism and American liberalism.

### *Strauss's Ideas*

Strauss was most frequently discussed for his criticism of modernism in the debate of his impact on American neoconservatism. To summarize Strauss's thesis, the prevalence of modernism brought by the triumph of the Enlightenment Movement and natural science had resulted in growing popularity of liberal relativism which rejected the existence of superior moral principles in a society. This rejection of moral absolutism, according to Strauss, opened an abyss where no moral ground could be found, which would lead society to nihilism. By nihilism, Strauss meant the extremist idea of destroying the modern civilization altogether out of the moral revulsion to modernity. The demise of the Weimar Republic and the prevalence of National Socialism, then Nazism, before and during the Second World War was a powerful illustration.

The starting point might be *Natural Right and History* published 1953 which made his fame among American intellectuals, in which he questioned the validity of natural right in the modern political philosophy and searched for the "real" natural right in the classic political philosophy. The two camps defined of natural right in contradistinction according to Strauss. While natural right in classic philosophy implied the moral law based on the law of nature, modern political philosophy defined moral law according to the law of reason. Strauss contended that in modern natural science and social science had repressed the intellectual discussions on

what supreme moral principles and the best political regime were (as they were found in Aristotle's writings). He contended that "[i]f our principles have no other support than our blind preferences, everything a man is willing to dare will be permissible. The contemporary rejection of natural right leads to nihilism—nay, it is identical with nihilism."<sup>28</sup> What happened to value and morality in a modern society that prioritizes reason is that people found out that the value and moral principles were merely supported by the blind choice. Therefore they could not believe in them anymore. The cause for the realization was the bifurcation of value and reason and the emphasis on reason over value. For Strauss, the cultivation of reason was prompted by the Enlightenment which promised every individual the possibility of knowing and understanding the truth—the possibility of becoming a philosopher—by using human reason. The triumph of the Enlightenment movement—"the victory of modern natural science"—furthered the faith in human reason which objected the truth to be self-evident by which he implied the religious revelation.<sup>29</sup> Yet Strauss contended that "[t]he more we cultivate reason, the more we cultivate nihilism: the less are we able to be loyal members of society."

Another point in *Natural Right and History* was that, Strauss found the cause of transition from liberalism to nihilism to be liberal relativism: the respect for diversity and individuality which considered morality and values in different societies and communities all in equal status. In fact, "[t]here is a tension between the respect for diversity or individuality and the recognition of natural right." The result of respecting diversity is the liberal relativism that opposed any absolutist view of the truths and beliefs. It regards knowledge and morality changing subjects under different cultures, societies, and historical contexts. The flaw of liberal relativism was to

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<sup>28</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 4-5

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 8

assume tolerance as the actual natural right, specifically the “natural right to the pursuit of happiness as he understands happiness.” Yet to implement absolute tolerance was “a seminary of intolerance.”<sup>30</sup> This modern assumption of natural right, according to Strauss, was destined to crisis. While the classic natural right meant the right revealed by the study of the nature, the modern natural right was founded on social contract and conventions as opposed to the nature. Therefore, the modern philosophy's assumption of natural right—and even humanity—was that they were developed in the historical progress. Yet Strauss questioned this idea by asking how one can assert that the historical progress was deliberate. If the progress was haphazard instead of deliberate then how come true principles were discovered by accident?

This book covered most of the important issues in the discussions of the relations between Strauss and American politics. The first is what Strauss termed the “theological-political predicament of modernity.” In his essay “Political Philosophy and Crisis of Our Time,” Strauss argued that the “modern project” resulted in a “lost of purpose in the West.”<sup>31</sup> The fact that western society was accustomed to having a universal purpose is the reason for bewilderedness when such faith was lost. Strauss’s criticism of modernity was key to the thesis of Drury, Hirst, and Xenos that Strauss’s attempt to guard against the anti-morality abyss opened by modern liberalism is the philosophical guide for aggressive foreign policy pushing for democracy. Indeed, Strauss’s criticism of modern liberalism originated in his interpretations of ancient Greek philosophers—Socrates, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle—who were critical on democracy. In the editor’s introduction to Strauss’s selected essays *The Rebirth of Classical Political*

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 5-6

<sup>31</sup> Strauss, Political Philosophy and the Crisis of Our Time, 218. In Graham & Carey ed. *The Post-behavioral Era: Perspectives on Political Science*.

*Rationalism*, Thomas Pangle pointed out that the classical political rationalism that these philosophers represented was essentially skepticism to the tendency of categorical support of equality in liberal democratic society. Yet the claims made by Xenos accusing Strauss as a anti-democrat and a reactionary failed to grasp that the criticism on democracy does not equal hostility to democracy. As Strauss wrote, “we are not permitted to be flatterers of democracy precisely because we are friends and allies of democracy.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, Strauss’s concern of liberal democracy was more complex—and even self-contested—than his criticisms suggested. According to Pangle, Strauss, like Socrates, believed in both relentless skepticism and in political virtue while liberal democracy needed to be criticized on both fronts.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, there was a contradiction in Strauss’s thoughts between skepticism that required rationality and virtue that cannot be explained by rationality—“[p]hilosophy has to grant that revelation is possible. But to grant that revelation is possible means to grant that the philosophic life is not necessarily, not evidently, *the* right life. Philosophy, the life devoted to the quest for evident knowledge available to man as man, would rest on an unevident, arbitrary, or blind decision. This would merely confirm the thesis of faith, that there is no possibility of consistency, of a consistent and thoroughly sincere life, without belief in revelation.”<sup>34</sup> The motive for Strauss to preserve the contradicted beliefs was his eagerness to solve Socrates’s question: what is the relation between pursuit of individual happiness and dedication to fellow citizens in the political society? While the pursuit of human or individual happiness involves contemplating what is good for individuals by using human reason, the longing to devoting

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<sup>32</sup> Strauss, *Liberalism, Ancient and Modern*, 24

<sup>33</sup> Pangle, Introduction in Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*.

<sup>34</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 75

oneself to others benefited from, and in turn benefit, the cultivation of virtue. Strauss saw the disharmony between the classical political ideals in American tradition that was sustained by citizenship and statecraft and the individualistic liberal democracy—“the quarrel between the ancients and moderns concerns eventually [...] the status of ‘individuality’.” To summarize, Strauss’s doubts of liberal democracy was mainly on subject of vanishing discussions of virtue and prioritization of individualism.

Second, Strauss worried that liberal relativism—the feature of modern society—was devastating for social solidarity and stability. Strauss blamed liberal relativism for its permissiveness. The fault of relativism was, as mentioned, the lack of founding principles and morality. Liberal relativism, according to Strauss, started at the tolerant attitude to all points of views but inevitably develop into stringent belief that persecute any argument that propose the superiority of certain moral values—to accuse it as immoral. For Strauss the relativism articulated by modern liberalism is flawed for setting the absolutist presumption that tolerance was the superior moral principle. In this way, “liberal democracy imposes, against its own explicit self-understanding, an authoritative conception of the right way of life.”<sup>35</sup>

Although he seldom directly referred to concrete political issues, Strauss was indeed concerned about the Cold War, especially the menace of the Soviet regime. In the 1960s he launched attacks on American scholars in political science by publishing essays implicitly criticizing them of refraining from defending the moral superiority of the U.S. against Soviet tyranny. According to him, “the crisis of liberal democracy has become concealed by a ritual which calls itself methodology or logic. This almost willful blindness to the crisis of liberal

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<sup>35</sup> Shell, “To Spare the Vanquished and Crush the Arrogant”: Leo Strauss’s Lecture on “German Nihilism,” in Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*. 190

democracy is part of that crisis.”<sup>36</sup> Strauss criticized that the political science of today “fiddles while Rome burns. It is excused by two facts: it does not know that it fiddles, and it does not know that Rome burns.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, in his letter to Willmoore Kendall in 1963, Strauss criticized the “idiocy” of Kennedy Administration’s proposed test-ban treaty with the Soviet Union. Strauss worried that the leftist position of Kennedy in his treatment of the USSR was at risk of invoking “an outbreak of mad right wing extremism.”<sup>38</sup> From my reading of Strauss, the “mad right wing extremism” was a reference to the German National Socialist Party. For Strauss, the test-ban treaty was the presentation of both weakness and immorality that resembled the Weimar Republic and the voice of discontent from the right resembled the radical German youth disappointed in liberal democracy.

Then Strauss made his rare remark on the concrete political issues. He pointed out that the modern liberalism was directed to promote its notions of prosperity, freedom, and justice worldwide. Yet the experience of Communism taught the West a lesson: “[f]or the foreseeable future, there cannot be a universal state, unitary or federative.” As far as universal state was concerned, Strauss contended that the blind faith in universal federation which existed yet only nominally were counterproductive—it would “endanger the very progress one endeavors to bring about.” The foreseeable future for the West and the Communists were comparable to the past relationship between Christianity and Islam when they both raised their claims but “had to be satisfied with uneasily coexisting with its antagonist.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Strauss was not supportive to the idea of universal federation as he mocked the liberals—“they would be fully satisfied with a

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<sup>36</sup> Strauss, *An Epilogue*, 327. In *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*. Storing, H. J. (ed.)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 327

<sup>38</sup> Gottfried, 328

<sup>39</sup> Strauss, *Political Philosophy and the Crisis of Our Time*, 220-221.

federation of all now existing or soon emerging states, with a truly universal and greatly strengthened United Nations organization—an organization that would include communist China, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Communist East Germany, although not necessarily Nationalist China.”<sup>40</sup>

One peculiar nature of Strauss’s thinking and writing is seldom mentioned in the studies on Strauss—one can observe significant differences in ideas and even characters when comparing his work on philosophy and his remarks on political issues. Looking into Strauss’s philosophical works, one concludes, as Allan Bloom put it, “Strauss is indeed a friend of liberal democracy when he summons true liberals to counteract the perverted liberalism that forgets quality, excellence, or virtue.”<sup>41</sup> His style of argument was cautious, he preferred keeping some distance between philosophy and policy issues, he was a dedicated and respected teacher. However, Strauss became assertive and even aggressive when he was to comment on politics. He assailed American scholars in political science for not backing America on foreign policy, mocked the UN for including communist countries instead of Nationalist China, and blamed Kennedy for his efforts to establish nuclear test ban to downgrade the tension with the Soviet Union. While it is fair to argue that Strauss’s philosophical ideas are too ambiguous for practical application, including to American foreign policy, it appears likely that his outspokenness in politics did cast considerable influences on his students and followers.

The greatest inspiration Strauss gave neoconservatives was his thesis: the predicament of modernity. The triumph of the Enlightenment and the modern states’ efforts to separate rational thinking from traditional values resulted in the consolidation of the belief in rationalism and

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<sup>40</sup> Strauss, *Liberalism, Ancient and Modern*, viii.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, vi.

despise of moral discussions. Modern society therefore no longer believed in the absoluteness of moral principles. The results of such moral degradation would be horrific: people could react to modern society with moral revulsion in a radical way. The atrocity Nazi Germany, initially supported by liberals seeking to destroy the modern civilization out of moral pursuit, was a compelling proof. Many American ex-liberals shared the fear for moral damage yet their intellectual defense for the fear was not compelling enough to prevail in the public discussion until they encountered the writing of Strauss. Strauss's ideas revitalized the constant conservative and traditionalist concerns of the moral decline and its devastating effects for American society. However, as will be illustrated in the following sections, Strauss's followers appropriated his ideas to suit their already established world view and political proposals. Notably, Straussians developed their own *solutions* to the *problems* Strauss laid out: Straussians took the journey from Strauss's criticism of the diminishment of absolute moral principles toward their solutions aimed at saving the country from the moral crisis. The solutions were thus relevant to yet diverted from Strauss's thoughts. As will be revealed in the remaining part of the thesis, their solution was primarily the conflation of two contested ideologies: idealism and realism.

## **Chapter 2 -1 The Ideas of Irving Kristol and His Role as a Cold War Liberal**

### *Life of Kristol and the historical context of his time*

Born in 1920 in New York, Kristol was a journalist and columnist who was the founder, editor, and contributor to various magazines and was regarded as the "godfather" of neoconservatism by many. Not only was Kristol the "godfather" for intellectual thinking, but he



also led the neoconservative movement in the second half of the 20th century. Like many other early neoconservatives, Kristol was a Trotskyist left—a liberal who was let down by capitalism of the 1930s while not having illusions in Stalin’s Soviet Union. He was part of the New York Intellectuals, a left-wing intellectual group, mostly composed of Jews, that was active in the mid-20th century. Gradually, he moved to the right since the 1940s. As an intellectual of his time, Kristol was concerned and outspoken about Communism and the Soviet Union, which provides the subjects for study for the purpose of the research.

Kristol’s effort in shaping a new conservatism with strong intellectual persuasiveness was joined by the Straussians. Harry Jaffa, for example, was a student of Strauss who was a leader of Claremont Institute, a foundation that “combines a generally interventionist approach to dealing with America’s undemocratic enemies abroad with generally progressive positions on racial and immigration questions.” The Institute was also a defender of Israeli Right and critic of “Islamofascism.”

Conservatives adopted Strauss’s as the intellectual inspiration that helped to sustain the conservative movement during the Cold War as the defender of democratic values. Before the generation of Kristol, the “conservatives” of the 1950s defended itself based on endorsement of Christianity and free market against the atheism and planned economy of the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup> In the 1960s, however, Strauss’s followers acquired access to the print media including the National Review and enriched the intellectual discussions of conservatism.

### *Ideas of Kristol*

<sup>42</sup> Gottfried.

Kristol expressed his perception of Strauss in the introduction of his essay collection *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of An Idea*. For Kristol, Strauss was one of the two chief influencers on his thoughts and “Strauss’s work produced the kind of shock that is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”<sup>43</sup> He read Strauss as a philosopher on the side of the “ancients” and who trained his students to think in the ways the classical philosophers thought. Kristol marveled Strauss's uncompromising rationalism in philosophical thinking and appreciated his idea that philosophers were always incompatible to the political system of their times. Kristol defended Strauss in that he was not hostile to liberal democracy and that Strauss placed his philosophical skepticism in a proper distance to his political stance as a proponent of liberal democracy.

Kristol noticeably expressed his ambivalent attitude towards utopianism, an idea inspired by Strauss, in his essay “Utopianism, Ancient and Modern” which probably imitated the title of Leo Strauss’s book “*Liberalism, Ancient and Modern*.” Indeed, the criticism of utopianism for Kristol resembles Strauss criticism of modern liberalism. To begin with, Kristol contended that while the modern project was “quite rational, only it has ceased to be reasonable.” That is to say, liberal societies were “suffused with quite unreasonable expectations, and have therefore and equally unreasonable attitude toward political reality.” He traced the origin of utopianism—Plato’s *The Republic*—by adopting Strauss’s interpretation of it. According to Kristol, Strauss interpreted the intention of *The Republic* as “primarily a pedagogic construction” rather than realistic—the construct for the republic was logical but practically infinitely close to impossible.<sup>44</sup> The modern science, however, was a religion that worshiped rationality, which was

<sup>43</sup> Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of An Idea*, 7

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 188

termed by Kristol “modern millenarianism.”<sup>45</sup> He claimed that “what rendered these [utopian] beliefs less explosive was the liberal individualism that bourgeois society insisted they accommodate themselves to.” Kristol regarded the 20th century fascism “an expression of exactly such an exasperated and irrational rebelliousness against the tyranny—actual or prospective—of a radical-utopian rationalism.” He criticized the modern utopianism for confusing “philosophical dreams with the substantial actualities of human existence.”<sup>46</sup> Kristol’s writing reflected the influence of Strauss as he borrowed Strauss’s interpretation of Plato and saw the 20th century fascism an expression of radical utopian rationalism. Indeed, Strauss did seem to refer to the utopian nature of liberalism when used Alexandre Kojève’s definition of liberalism—“the universal and homogenous state of which every adult man being for all those times when he is not locked up in an insane asylum or a penitentiary.”<sup>47</sup> However, Kristol also importantly took Strauss’s ideas to build his own enterprise. Despite the complexity in the relations between philosophy and politics in Strauss’s thinking, Kristol constructed a simple dichotomy of “philosophical dreams” and “substantial actualities” and provided his solution—“new ideas[...]that will regulate these passions and bring them into a more fruitful and harmonious relation with reality.” That is to know the “crucial distinction between dream and reality”, to make “dreams complement reality instead of being at war with it.”<sup>48</sup> Whereas Strauss interpreted Plato’s *Republic* as a teach of the best regime, indeed a highly improbable one: “the best regime is [...] a ‘utopia’.”<sup>49</sup> While the titles of their work looked alike, Kristol’s critic of

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>47</sup> Strauss, *Liberalism, Ancient and Modern*, vii.

<sup>48</sup> Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of An Idea*, 198

<sup>49</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 139.

utopianism in liberalism became very different from Strauss's concern of liberalism. In short, Kristol termed the idea utopianism as he focused on the question of whether modern liberalism was attainable in reality, whereas Strauss were warning that modern liberalism as an ideal may lead to devastating consequences. In this way Kristol simplified and changed the thesis of Strauss in advocating for a pragmatic and realistic style in liberal politics while not to abandon "dreams."

In a similar way, Steinfels pointed out Kristol's unwillingness to dive into philosophical discussions in his writings—"he poses a problem, hints at an answer, but proceeds no further." In several essays Kristol ended with "references to the decline of religion and the 'death of God'—but there is not attempt to explore the causes of this development or ask whether it is definitive." Unlike Strauss, Kristol tended to avoid exploring the pessimistic yet philosophical vision of the future of liberalism—he asked how "the moral authority of tradition, and some public support for this authority" could be "assimilated into a liberal-capitalist society" instead of whether moral authority and liberalism were fundamentally compatible.<sup>50</sup>

In his essay entitled "Capitalism, Socialism, and Nihilism," Kristol argued that the flaw of liberalism was that it only "[defined] happiness and satisfaction in terms of material production and material consumption of commodities."<sup>51</sup> In liberal society secularism is the necessity and religions are disestablished. Secularism, on the one hand, rejects the existence of after life and defined happiness as temporal while, on the other hand, cannot "come up with a convincing and generally accepted theory of political obligation." Kristol claimed that "[t]he enemy of liberal capitalism today is not so much socialism as nihilism." He then put the New

<sup>50</sup> Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics*, 104

<sup>51</sup> Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of An Idea*, 95

Left into the category of liberalism since “the counterculture of the New Left is being received and sanctioned as a modern culture appropriate to modern bourgeois society.” Kristol claimed that the “libertarian” tradition of capitalism “never really could believe that self-destructive nihilism was an authentic and permanent possibility that any society had to guard against.”<sup>52</sup> In conclusion, Kristol was “ruthless in telling us what the New Left or other intellectual critics of capitalism really want”—the New Left “longs for a moral and political community.”<sup>53</sup> At the start Kristol borrowed the idea of Strauss in questioning the meaning of happiness in modern society and liberalism’s tendency to become nihilism whereas Kristol directed his argument to a criticism on the New Left. Whereas Strauss regarded German Nazism as a devastating result of what was initially a moral complaint of the immoral liberal democracy in Germany without a clear alternative to modernity, Kristol argued that the multiculturalism and “self-realization”—the core value of the New Left—advocated for “a category of freedom which is empty of any specific meaning.” He asked “what if the self that is realized under the conditions of liberal capitalism is a self that despises liberal capitalism, and uses its liberty to subvert and abolish a free society?”<sup>54</sup> While Kristol’s question was in line with Strauss’s criticism of the nihilist tendency of liberalism, Kristol politicized the idea by equating the New Left to Strauss’s nihilism. By claiming that the New Left resembled “the Old Right” which “longs for a moral and political community” but end up being sanctioned by bourgeois liberalism, Kristol subjected the New Left to his “virtue” versus “individual liberalism” dichotomy, therefore consolidated the dichotomy.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 103

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 93

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 104

Kristol's ideas appeared to travel frequently between philosophical and practical realms, which was probably due to the existence of "three spirits operating in the same breast" of Kristol—the "philosophical essayist", "the modern counselor of governments", and "the political polemicist."<sup>55</sup> Firstly, Kristol was concerned about the "large" issues such as modernity, culture, ethics, and politics, which coincided with his interests in Strauss and his writings on gender and counterculture issues. Yet he possessed two other interests, or ambitions, that distinguished him from Strauss—pragmatic political analyst focusing on demonstrable facts and a polemicist who cared more about wielding facts to win a political debate. Therefore his essays often started with a concrete political debate—let it be "exceptional conservatism", the counterculture, or the New Left—continued with an extended discussion on political philosophy—Plato's Utopian, Aristotle's idea of regime, or the Judeo-Christian moral tradition—and ended up with policy comments—to urge the ethics in the operations of corporations and to be aware of the difference between ideal and reality. The three combined, according to Steinfels, was the general feature of neoconservatives. Yet the task of maintaining three stances more than often put Kristol in a delicate position, if not self-contradiction, in his arguments. For example, on the one hand, neoconservatives who sought "guidance in the democratic wisdom of Tocqueville" constantly feel "at home" in the American context. On the other hand, "the steady decline of our democratic culture, sinking to new levels of vulgarity" led neoconservatives to unite with traditional conservatives.<sup>56</sup> On the one hand, Kristol was skeptical of the idea that "self-serving men will coalesce into a common good" and argued that there is "no cheer for the profit motive" which went against the moral teaching. On the other hand, "neoconservatism has great respect

<sup>55</sup> Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics*, 95-99

<sup>56</sup> Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of An Idea*, 192

for the power of the market to respond efficiently to economic realities while preserving the maximum degree of individual freedom” and the market should rather be directed by “rigging” and even “creating new markets” rather than “bureaucratic controls.”<sup>57</sup>

Contrary to his lament of moral traditions on the decline, Kristol seemed to break away from this thinking in his discussion of foreign policy. In an essay entitled “American Intellectuals and Foreign Policy,” he criticized the intellectual opponents of the Vietnam War for their lack of understanding of foreign affairs and their strong subscription “to a prevailing ideology.”<sup>58</sup> He argued that the “nations of the world do not constitute such a community and propose few principles by which their conduct may be evaluated.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, Kristol understood international relations as the operation of Realpolitik where the intellectual “abstractions” were “irrelevant.”<sup>60</sup> In conclusion, the intellectuals fueled with the commitment to “ideals and to ‘the people’ were ‘bemused by dreams of power without responsibility, even as they complain of moral responsibility without power.’”<sup>61</sup> The “ideal” was closely linked to isolationism throughout American history—“by reason of being intimately conjoined to ‘the American way of life’ and to the American intellectual creed.”<sup>62</sup> Kristol argued that the major goals of American foreign policy were the national security, the moderate promotion of American political, social, and economic institutions, and minimizing the possibility of armed conflict. In line with his arguments of utopianism and realism, Kristol criticized the idealist inclination in the intellectual community when it came to foreign policy. In contrast to those who

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 149

<sup>58</sup> Kristol, *On the Democratic Idea of America*. 71

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 73

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 74

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 89

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 81

claimed that Kristol was not concerned about foreign policy issues, this essay could indeed represent the general foreign policy attitude of neoconservatives and Straussians—attempting to prioritize pragmatic issues especially national security while not abandoning the promotion of American values.

Kristol thesis was further clarified in the essay “Utopianism and American Politics” in which he linked the idealism in U.S. foreign policy to the “quite ambitious ideological ends of a timeless and universal nature.” Kristol criticized this idealism for causing another equally important American political tradition—the “constitutional-juridical thought, found in the Constitution” which was “far more a lawyer’s job of work than a social philosopher’s.”<sup>63</sup> He then blame the neutralization of the rhetoric such as “less-developed” replacing “poor” countries and “military dictatorship” replacing “abhorrent” rules for the authority’s unwillingness to decentralize its “high ideals” in foreign politics, at least in rhetoric. Kristol even went as far as to propose that the U.S. should not care if the two parties in the Vietnam War chose democracy or not—“if such a regime prefers corrupt elections to the kind of overt military dictatorship that more usually prevails in that part of the world, this is its own affair.”<sup>64</sup> Notably, this proposal should not be seen as in line with Strauss’s thinking. Unlike Kristol’s other works, this essay made little reference to the classical philosophical thoughts. While the goal of the Vietnam war, for Kristol, was still about regime—“our intervention was to help establish a friendly, relatively stable regime which could coexist peacefully with the other nations”—the internal nature of the regime was not consequential—“not on how they go about governing themselves.” This would certainly not be agreed by Strauss since this idea resembled Carl Schmitt’s “respect thy

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 131

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 138



neighbor” proposal which was criticized by Strauss—we should not approve the regime that could not pass our moral test. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Kristol stood on the opposite of Strauss: he agreed with Strauss in criticism of the neutralization of foreign policy rhetoric. In fact, the the gist of the essay remained ambiguous. On the one hand, the use of neutral language such as dictatorship and less-developed reflected the utopianism in American politics. On the other hand, Kristol claimed that America’s “instinctive, democratic (and healthy) dislike for dictatorships” was also part of American utopianism.<sup>65</sup> Up to this point, Kristol traveled far from the Strauss’s interpretation of Plato’s *The Republic* discussed in *Utopia, Ancient and Modern*.

## **Chapter 2-2 The Ideas of Walter Berns: the Virtue of Wars**

A book titled *Making Patriots* was published following the 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001. Its author was a prominent professor named Walter Berns at Georgetown University who was closely associated with the neoconservatives. While in the book Berns was making justifications for militant foreign policy like many other neocons of that time, he was a figure from Kristol’s time. Born in 1919, he joined the U.S. Army and fought the Second World War before entering academia. After studying at Cornell University with Allan Bloom, a follower of Strauss, Berns went to the University of Chicago and did his Phd dissertation under Strauss. Berns spoke highly about his graduate years at the University of Chicago as it was the place where he found his academic interest in the American Constitution and other judicial issues.<sup>66</sup>

*Making Patriots* was different from most other publications urging for militancy in the post-9/11 period in that it offered a complete rationale to persuade the public that wars could

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 127-149

<sup>66</sup> Roberts, *Walter Berns, Whose Ideas Fueled Neoconservative Movement, Dies at 95*.

have positive effects on domestic politics whereas others took a propagandist stance that shied away from the questionable link between external wars and the benefits for America at home. Berns expressed his thoughts on the relations between wars and patriotism in his discussion of the Civil War in Chapter 6 and 7. Berns argued that the Civil War was “the most necessary” because what “at stake was the meaning of the Declaration of Independence.”<sup>67</sup> For Berns, the reward of the war was not only the emancipation of slaves, yet also the war fighting sent “a needed message to their enemies” that “they could earn the right to be treated as men and citizens.” The defeat of the South confirmed the citizenship of the black. While the Civil War was generally considered a good war, “bad” war like the Vietnam War, according to Berns, also had positive effects in terms of the integration of people of color into citizenship while racial integration in other aspects of society, such as in universities, performed not as well. Then, by quoting an interview conducted with a black sergeant the American army during the Gulf War, Berns concluded that the sergeant “knew what it means to be an American” through the war. Similarly, he argued in *In Defense of Liberal Democracy* that “people in general needed to know, and could be made to know by means of war and the sacrifices demanded of them in wars: namely, that their country is something more than a civil society the purpose of which is simply the protection of individual and selfish interests.”<sup>68</sup>

What the patriotism Berns referred to was the public-minded citizenship based on the faith in the Declaration of Independence that is “liberty, equality of opportunity, and religious toleration.”<sup>69</sup> To identifying with American patriotism was to identify with the ideals that the

<sup>67</sup> Berns, *Making Patriots*, 4

<sup>68</sup> Berns, *In Defense of Liberal Democracy*, 152

<sup>69</sup> Berns, *Making Patriots*, 138

Declaration of Independence stand for: a set of universal moral principles of American character. Therefore, when discussing the beneficial effects of wars on patriotism, Berns was referring to that of wars on strengthening the faith in America's moral principles.

Berns made the case that what was distinct in American patriotism is that it combined self-interests with "virtue." Yet virtue was vulnerable to the relentless pursuit of individual interest therefore needed to be cultivated. According to Berns, wars are especially efficient for cultivate such altruistic public-minded citizenry.<sup>70</sup>

Berns was not the only Straussian giving favorable comments on war: one of Berns classmates in Strauss's class at the University of Chicago—Harry Jaffa—thought that "[h]ow ever evil a thing war might be, it was yet the place in which[...]men's courage was tested and shown." Jaffa wrote this in his review of book *Young Winston's Wars* which collected Winston Churchill's correspondent during three wars from 1897-1900, in which "two are waged against barbarians." Like Strauss, Jaffa admired the Churchill for his leadership in war. He saw Churchill's early years in wars as situations where civilization was contested with barbarism.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, Kristol shared similar vision of American patriotism with Berns. Kristol used the term "ideological patriotism," meaning that "the United States is a 'creedal' nation" that "was born out of, and was sustained for our two first centuries by, the sensibility of Protestant dissent." Indeed, Kristol did not avoid to articulate the link between patriotism and Protestant traditions—this is the feature of "America's Exceptional Conservatism."<sup>72</sup> Also, William Kristol and Robert Kagan agreed with Berns in their arguments for the benefits of citizen involvement in

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 133-134. Berns attempted to demonstrate the cultivation of virtue as a result of the Civil War.

<sup>71</sup> Jaffa, *The Conditions of Freedom: Essays in Political Philosophy*. 262-265

<sup>72</sup> Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of An Idea*, 373-388

military—“expanded forms of reserve service could give many more Americans experience of the military and an appreciation of military virtues.” Through lowering the “barriers between civilian and military life,” conservatives could better spread the ideas that “citizenship is not only about rights but also about responsibilities” in which the “defense of the nation and its principles” is the most profound.<sup>73</sup>

The common belief shared by them was that military buildup that was directed to respond to outside threat would have domestic moral benefits. The patriotic “virtue”—the responsibility to defend the nation and its principles—was to be cultivated through making more citizens participating in the military and recognize the gravity of security threat and difficulties of protecting the homeland. Strauss was not an advocate for wars, yet he was subscribed to the belief that moral damages would be done if the public would not recognize the superiority of the moral principles that its society upheld, which was indeed his criticism of relativism. The cultivation of reason causes the society to be no longer able to believe in values and morality based on religious revelations. Modern society believed instead in the Military buildup—the increase of civilian involvement in the military—according to Straussians, was the way for the public to gain appreciation of America and American principles. The domestic recognition was the final goal of militant posture, the ultimate fear of Strauss and the neocons was the devastating effects of moral damage. Yet the difference between Strauss and his followers is that, while Strauss focused on explaining the problem and offering a critique of the modern society, his followers were more eager to find solutions not so much to philosophy but rather to the political issues which were perceived as derivatives of the flaws of modernity.

<sup>73</sup> Kagan and Kristol.

## Chapter 2—3 The Ideas of Francis Fukuyama: “*realistic* Wilsonianism”

Fukuyama wrote in his article about the reflection on the Iraq War that he used to identify himself as a neocon, but not anymore after experiencing the process of the war as a government official. Yet in his book *America at the Crossroads*, he opposed the political proposal to abandon neoconservatism in foreign policy completely. Like many neoconservatives, Fukuyama had his own interpretation of the war. While some saw the war as an attempt to secure the long-term peace in the Middle East therefore ensuring the national security of the U.S., Fukuyama considered the war as the implementation of an idealist project. He stated that “what is needed is not a return to a narrow racism but rather a *realistic* Wilsonianism that recognizes the importance to world order of what goes on *inside* states and that better matches the available tools to the achievement of democratic ends.”<sup>74</sup> Fukuyama further explained realistic Wilsonianism as a policy that “would take seriously the idealistic part of the old neoconservative agenda but a fresh look at development, international institutions, and a host of issues that conservatives, neo- and paleo-, seldom took seriously.” The realist side of the policy was to wield “power” and even to “violation of national sovereignty” and “preemption,” whereas the Wilsonian side was to ensure international legitimacy by promoting American leadership in “truly democratic global institutions” which, in turn, could check the hegemonic American power.<sup>75</sup> A common public misconception about Wilsonianism is to equate it to idealism. Fukuyama was a professor at Harvard, he did not confuse Wilsonianism with idealism. Despite the liberal component in

<sup>74</sup> Fukuyama, 184

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 191

Wilsonianism, Wilson's proposal of a world order that values liberalism had a realistic conservative motive: he was fearful of the dissolve of social solidarity and eventually the quagmire of "ineffectual turbulence" brought by revolutions at home if the foreign revolutions "special interest" of American corporations were not checked.<sup>76</sup>

### **Chapter 3 Conclusion: Heritage and Divergence**

For Strauss, the crisis of modernity and of liberal democracy was the withering away of virtue and morals which were the "foundation" of a society. Strauss indeed had strong opinions towards certain political issues—communism and the Soviet Union—yet the focus of his work was developing criticism on decline of discourse on virtue, not as if he pointed to any specific solution to the "predicament" of modernity. In the contrary, Straussians were prone to develop solution-oriented arguments. Irving Kristol and Fukuyama treated liberal democracy as a utopian ideal, which was necessary for society to possess, while some portion of political realism was also needed to balance the idealism. While Strauss was mainly concerned about the consequence of liberalism, Kristol regarded liberalism as a natural science ideal impossible to achieve due to human limits while appreciating political idealism. For Berns, Jaffa, William Kristol and Kagan, military buildup and "moralization" of foreign policy would prevent the "inside" deterioration of moral status at home.

According to Del Pero, Kristol lamented that "American liberalism had fallen under the influence of the insidious French continental tradition pushing it *de facto* toward totalitarianism."

<sup>77</sup> Yet Kristol believed in the resilience of neoconservatism for its distinct American

<sup>76</sup> Gardner, *A Covenant With Power*, 13-28

<sup>77</sup> Del Pero, 44

character—“hopeful, not lugubrious; forward-looking, not nostalgic, whose general tone is cheerful, not grim or dyspeptic.”<sup>78</sup> Kristol’s view of neoconservatism was also a view of America that he tried to promote—a worldview that America, propelled by neoconservatism, could be both moral and realist (or pragmatic). Just as how Strauss championed the integration of Judaic faith and rationalism in the kind of Jewish nationalism that he endorsed, Straussian neoconservatives found it the intellectual backup for articulating American nationalism. This view that comprised of two contesting ideologies was then grafted to neoconservative foreign policy and became what Fukuyama called “realist Wilsonianism.”

The nuance and complexity in Strauss’s thoughts was lost along the way. In particular, Strauss criticized modern philosophy not because it is an immoral discipline: its moral principle is the unlimited tolerance for all cultures and regimes. Strauss argued that tolerance virtually nullified an essential category of discussion that existed in classical philosophy was lost—“the distinctly philosophic question: What is virtue?”<sup>79</sup> To question the truth about virtue is, however, far from striving to find ways to preserve virtue, for that virtue is still not included in philosophic discussion. Indeed, neoconservative foreign policy uphold the necessity of unchanged moral principles—promoting democracy, securing human rights, promoting neoliberal economy—which are essentially the composites of Strauss’ modernity. Therefore Strauss’s crisis of modernity is hardly solved. In fact, Kristol admitted the bifurcation of intellectual ideas and the conservatism in the Republican Party—“most Republicans know nothing and could not care less about neoconservatism” yet “they cannot be blind to the fact that neoconservative policies

<sup>78</sup> Kristol, *The Neoconservative Persuasion, Selected Essays, 1942-2009*, 191

<sup>79</sup> Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, 59

[...] have helped make the very idea of political conservatism more acceptable to a majority of American voters.” Neoconservatism was a “persuasion”—to “convert the Republican Party, and American conservatism in general, against their respective wills, into a new kind of conservative politics suitable to governing a modern democracy.”<sup>80</sup> To some extent, Kristol also admitted that neoconservatism has skipped the philosophical question—“in the longer run, of course, American conservatism will have to face up to a far more profound problem[...]to propose an ideal of moral and spiritual excellence.”

The first part of the thesis discussed about the existing scholarly works on the relations between Strauss and American foreign policy. Through examining the validity and soundness of the arguments of the three camps, it concludes that Strauss should neither be considered as the policy guide of the Bush’s war cabinet nor be completely excluded from the study of neoconservative foreign policy—we need to pay equal attentions to the roles of Strauss and his students. Second, the thesis analyzes the ideas of Strauss and compared them with the writings of his students. It finds that, on the one hand, Strauss should be considered an inspiration for the neoconservatives. The intellectual strength of his argument against the flawed moral outlook in the modern societies helped save and transform the conservatives. As the concern about moral damage in America had been a constantly ongoing theme, Strauss confirmed the validity of the concern by presenting the rationale flowing from liberal democracy to tyranny and other social degradations. On the other hand, neoconservatives were not, or not only, political philosophers: they sought for solutions to the problems clarified by Strauss. They contended that moral goals should be installed in the foreign policy thinking while the vital national interests were of equal,

<sup>80</sup> Kristol, *The Neoconservative Persuasion, Selected Essays, 1942-2009*, 190



if not higher, importance. They did not see a contradiction in this proposal for that the ultimate end of carrying out moral foreign policy was to guard the society from degradation, which was part of America's national interests.

For Strauss and his students, to stress the notion of moral damages was to see morality from a utilitarian angle. That is to say they, for example, argue that the moral degradation is dangerous for the stability of society, that wars cultivate the patriotic virtue of people therefore good for the country, or that the preservation of idealist elements in American foreign policy could reinforce the International legitimacy of American power. According to Batnitzky, the lack of “rational, moral response to the rise of National Socialism” was the political issue that Strauss intended to investigate when he looked into the political-theological predicament— society would destruct itself if it were not guarded by moral principles. The separation of politics and theology led to the separation of rationalism and traditionalism in modern political philosophy, which ultimately accounted for the devastation of humanity in the 20th century. Yet the tendency to conflate what's good for morality and what's good for society is in itself an attempt to conflate realist vision and moral ideals. While moral principles (social virtue) is for the good of itself, it could and should also be good for the society (stability and human happiness). It is like what Kagan and William Kristol proclaimed—“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.”<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, the conflation of realism and idealism is hardly feasible in reality due to their intrinsically contradicted assumptions of the ultimate goal of human societies. Del Pero

<sup>81</sup> Kagan and Kristol.

highlighted the contradiction nicely: the realism is in fact “realist anti-utopianism” while the utopianism is “utopian anti-realism.” The essence of neoconservative thinking of foreign policy discussed in this study is to take on idealistic missions only when national interests are largely secured. This line of thinking appears to be rational at first glance. Yet we notice the national interests are also defined in the light of idealism. For example, the push for regime change in the Middle East is identified as in American interests since “the policy of putting pressure on authoritarian and totalitarian regimes had practical aims and, in the end, delivered strategic benefits.”<sup>82</sup> Yet this is no more than a belief because, first, the debate surrounding the democratic peace theory is largely unsettled. Second, the risk is high for investing in regime change and democratization for its long and expensive commitments and limited possibility of success. To believe in the good cause itself is idealism, to believe in the realistic benefits of the good cause is, however, irrationality and likely to be considered hypocrisy by others. This is what appears to me to be the central myth of neoconservative foreign policy.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

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