The Rise and Demise of American Unipolarism: Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy 1989–2009

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This essay will analyze the 'unipolar turn' in neoconservative foreign policy thinking from 1989–2009. Its core premise is that the touchstone of neoconservative foreign policy in these years was the preservation of America's so-called unipolar moment—its post-Cold War status as the single pole of power in every region of the world. This, rather than the export or promotion of democracy, constituted the central organizing principle of neoconservative foreign policy in this period. However, the consensus around the concept of unipolarism began to fracture in the mid-2000s as leading neocon thinkers began to grapple with the American failure in Iraq and the rise of other great powers, which challenged their assumptions about the reach and depth of American power.

Introduction: Neoconservatism and the Post-Soviet World

1 With the implosion of Soviet communism in 1989, and the collapse of Moscow's hegemony in Eastern Europe, the United States found itself in an unprecedented position: for the first time in its history, the country was the world's sole superpower. For fifty years, US policy makers had been habituated to a bipolar Cold War order in which the Soviet Union had competed with the United States for influence and power across the developing world. Before World War II the United States was a hemispheric power, but not a superpower, and only one of several great powers in the world.[2] For many policymakers, America's newfound status presented a quandary, albeit one that was not unwelcome: what should the new organizing principle be for US foreign policy in a world without a peer competitor, in which the United States seemed significantly more powerful in military, economic, and political terms than all of its closest rivals? When President Bill Clinton took office in 1993—the first President whose tenure fell fully outside the Cold War—his national security team held the "Kennan Sweepstakes"—so-called after George Kennan, the chief architect of America's Cold War policy of containment—to develop an alternative foreign policy slogan that encapsulated the full scope of US interests in the post-Soviet world (Brinkley 114). This met with only limited success, and throughout Clinton's tenure, his administration presented multiple frameworks for understanding post-Soviet foreign relations, but was unable to stick with any single one consistently.[3] A much firmer answer to the question of 'What next?' was offered by a new network of neoconservative activists and intellectuals, which coalesced around the concept of American unipolarism. This network would eventually shape US foreign policy in significant ways during the George W. Bush years (and even had some limited success in the Clinton years pressuring the Democratic President from outside the administration). This group was the second generation of neoconservative thinkers in the United States. The first generation, active for the duration of the Cold War, had been led by renowned former leftist intellectuals such as Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz, and had advocated the aggressive containment of Soviet communism. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc this generation of neocons lost its defining purpose, but a

second, younger generation emerged to take its place. This generation of neocons advocated a dramatically different strategy to that of the first: rather than a defensive strategy premised on the imperative of containing a countervailing superpower in a bipolar world, the second generation of neocons advocated an offensive military posture dedicated to preserving and extending America's newfound "unipolar moment" by taking preventive action to preclude the emergence of rival powers, unilaterally if necessary (Krauthammer, "Unipolar Moment" 24). In essence they sought to remain—in Charles Krauthammer's provocative formulation—"the *single pole* of world power," which could be the "decisive player *in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses"* (24, emphases added). For these neocons, the new strategic touchstone for US foreign policy in the post-Soviet world would not be deterrence, the containment of threats, or the promotion of democracy, but the active preservation of America's supposed unipolarity. The neocons' commitment to American unipolarism culminated in the 2003 invasion of Iraq; however, that event also catalyzed the fracturing of the consensus around unipolarism. This essay will argue that the disastrous aftermath of regime change in Iraq challenged neoconservative assumptions about the reach and depth of American power. Leading neocon thinkers began to demonstrate a greater awareness of the limits of American power and the rise of other great powers. By 2006, they were forced to grapple with America's relative decline, and what leading neoconservative, Robert Kagan, described as the return of international competition among great powers (*Return of History* 3–4).

The Arrival of the Unipolar Moment

5 It was Krauthammer, the syndicated neoconservative columnist, who first proclaimed the arrival of America's "unipolar moment" in 1990.[1] With a Realist's appreciation of military power and material interests, Krauthammer claimed there was "no prospect in the immediate future of any power to rival [the United States]" ("Unipolar Moment" 24). There was "no lack of second-rate powers" such as Germany, Japan, Britain, and France but none had the combination of "military, diplomatic, political, and economic assets" required to be the unipolar power (24). Washington was "unchallenged" and, now freed from the constraints of superpower rivalry, it would be the decisive player in every region of the world (23). For Krauthammer, this balance of power was something to be celebrated and preserved as long as possible because "the alternative to unipolarity is not a stable static multipolar world. It is not an eighteenth century world in which mature powers […] jockey for position in the game of nations. The alternative to unipolarity is chaos" (32). Reinforcing his Realist outlook, Krauthammer eschewed the humanitarian intervention associated with the Clinton years: "Foreign policy is not social work" he wrote ("How the Doves"). He derided moral ideals as "impossible guides to foreign policy" and candidly argued that objective was to figure out "which son-of-a-bitch to support and which to oppose" ("Clinton Doctrine"). Krauthammer's Realism revealed the superficiality of the neoconservatives' supposed commitment to democracy promotion. In later years, the neocons would be characterized as "devout Wilsonians" (Bacevich 75) advocating "military power to achieve the final triumph of American ideals" (83). This widespread depiction was largely the result of the fact that some neocons evinced a strong rhetorical interest in democracy promotion (see Halper and Clarke; Dorrien; Heilbrunn; Vaïsse; Hurst). In practice, however, ethical considerations were rarely their priority. Though Krauthammer is a self-described

neoconservative, his seminal 1990 article proclaiming the arrival of the unipolar moment did not contain a single reference to democracy let alone promoting it abroad. For other neocons, too, democracy promotion was never more than a secondary or tertiary concern—always subservient to the imperatives of unipolarity. One of Krauthammer's early supporters was the neoconservative scholar, Joshua Muravchik. Based at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Muravchik believed that Krauthammer's article had summed up America's post-Cold War condition so well it was as though no response was necessary; Krauthammer had said all that needed to be said.[2] On the surface Muravchik's own work appeared to prioritize high ideals in foreign policy. The title of his 1991 monograph, *Exporting Democracy*, certainly implied this. Yet the rhetoric was misleading, for Muravchik explicitly rejected the idea that America should export democracy by military force: "The term 'export' can be a kind of straw man," he acknowledged (117). "Democracy is not a product that we can sell or barter. Nor can the United States control the political future of other nations" (117). America should not "take it upon itself to subdue other countries solely to democratize them. […] Peace ranks with democracy as one of the highest desiderata and must not be violated except for the most compelling reasons" (117). In his 1996 book, Muravchik was even more explicit, claiming "[r]arely should force be used for values alone. It should be reserved for situations when our security is at stake" (*Imperative* 163). On the question of American power, however, he was unequivocal: to the question "how much military power do we need?" he answered, "enough to preserve our position as the sole superpower. That is, to assure that no other nation or plausible combination of nations can match our strength" ("Losing the Peace" 41). Robert Kagan's writings echoed this. Ostensibly, he called for a moralistic alternative to pure balance-of-power realism. Yet he did not desire a crusade for global democracy but something more pragmatic, to be achieved in the long-term primarily through non-military means and with room for maneuver that did not compel the US to support democratic movements if doing so would conflict with geopolitical imperatives. Explicitly eschewing the indiscriminate promotion of democracy, Kagan advocated

> [t]he *prudent* support of democracy, using all the many tools at [our] disposal, most of them *well short of military force*. […] America can also practise the *patient* support of democracy – not forcing change when it is impossible, but waiting for conditions to ripen. ("Books in Review" 56, first and last emphases in original)

Thus Kagan claimed on the one hand that democracy would be "the polestar" of post-Cold War foreign policy, yet at the same time, he said, it should not be followed in an "uncompromising" fashion, "in every country in the world at all times regardless of the cost or risk," and would be pursued mostly through measures short of military force, though he did not offer any examples of where (56). This tepid and largely rhetorical commitment to democracy promotion was typical of neoconservatives in the immediate post-Cold War years, and continued after 9/11 too (Frum and Perle 113–14; Kaplan and Kristol 27). As Krauthammer put it: "We will support democracy everywhere, but we will commit blood and treasure *only in places where there is a strategic necessity*" ("Democratic Realism," emphasis in original). Ultimately, then, it was not high ideals but power—specifically, the imperatives of 'unipolar' power—that constituted, according to Zalmay Khalilzad, "the prism for identifying threats and setting priorities" in the post-Soviet world (viii, 21).

9 The emphasis on unipolarism as the organizing principle for US foreign policy facilitated an intellectual and political alliance between neocons such as Wolfowitz, Khalilzad, and Libby, and other conservative nationalists, such as Dick Cheney (and later Donald Rumsfeld), who shared an expansive conception of America's national interest as global unipolarity, though eschewed the ideological rhetoric that some of the neocons employed, and their supposed commitment to democracy promotion.[3] The first instantiation of the convergence between neocons and other conservative unipolarists came in the form of the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance document (DPG). The DPG was written for then-Secretary of Defense, Cheney, who was keen to use the regular defense review as a chance to define a new post-Cold War security strategy for the United States. Cheney gave the task to his chief aides (all neocons): Paul Wolfowitz, I. Lewis Libby, and Zalmay Khalilzad—all of whom would be active in the neoconservative-led network during the Clinton years and serve subsequently in the George W. Bush administration. The DPG offered a blueprint for the United States to remain the single pole of power in every region of the world. After winning the Cold War, Washington's "first objective" was to "prevent the re-emergence of a new rival" be it in the Middle East, Europe, Eurasia, the former Soviet Union, East Asia or South West Asia ("Excerpts"). In the Middle East, especially, the US should ensure that it remained "the predominant outside power" in order to "preserve US and western access to the region's oil" ("Excerpts"). The document jettisoned the Cold War paradigm of containment and deterrence in favor of acting, where necessary, in an offensive manner to prevent the emergence of rival powers rather than merely contain them: Washington, it claimed, should "dete[r] potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role" and be strong enough to account sufficiently for the interests of all the advanced industrial nations in order to "discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order" ("Excerpts"). In other words, the US position should be unassailable to the extent that potential rivals would be convinced that even attempting a challenge was futile. The United Nations did not merit a single reference in the document. Instead, the United States would be the guarantor of the global order and should act unilaterally "when collective action cannot be orchestrated" ("Excerpts"). Like Kagan, Krauthammer, and Muravchik, the authors of the DPG argued that coalitions would only be "ad hoc assemblies, often not lasting beyond the crisis being confronted" ("Excerpts"). Finally, while the objective of preventing a rival was categorical and unambiguous, not a single section of the extensive excerpts of the DPG leaked to the *New York Times* was dedicated to the issue of democracy promotion. Brief references affirmed that democracy should be encouraged where possible but actual intervention would be undertaken "selectively," on the basis of whether a particular situation "threaten[s] […] our interests [or] those of our allies or friends" ("Excerpts"). The leaked DPG was greeted censoriously both at home and abroad. To dampen down Congressional and media criticism a re-draft was ordered with the most provocative language expunged but, ultimately, few substantive changes (see Cheney). Behind the scenes, however, Cheney praised Khalilzad's initial draft: "He said to me, 'You've discovered a new rationale for our role in the world,'" Khalilzad recalled (qtd. in Mann 211). Other neoconservatives agreed. "What's wrong with the Pentagon paper?" Krauthammer asked, in response to the criticism. "It's an impressive blueprint for the new world order" ("What's Wrong"). Recognizing the interface between that document and his unipolar paradigm, Krauthammer observed that the DPG "starts with the fact that this is a one superpower world. […] It then offers a

program for keeping things that way" ("What's Wrong"). William Kristol, the increasingly vocal and influential son of Irving Kristol, later said in an interview for the PBS program *Frontline* that Wolfowitz—to whom he gave most credit for the document—"was ahead of his time" because he "saw very early that the fundamental choice was American leadership or increasing chaos and danger." Richard Perle, another neoconservative who would serve under G. W. Bush, concurred in his interview with *Frontline*: It was "common sense" that the US should inhibit the emergence of a rival superpower. It was simply a question of preventing another Cold War scenario, but unfortunately "people were already out there spending the peace dividend and there was not much interest in hearing about a new challenge," Perle claimed. Muravchik argued that even if the Bush administration had simply purged provocative rhetoric from the original leaked document, as Wolfowitz and Libby insisted it had, "the attentive public came away with the impression that the Pentagon's original capacious strategy had been dropped in favor of a narrow focus on national self-defense" (*Imperative* 136–37). This in itself was symbolically damaging.

Unipolarism in Practice

13 Every case that the neocons and their allies collectively examined during the Clinton years was approached through the framework of the imperatives of unipolarity. The signature issue for the unipolarists was Iraq. Kagan summed up their rationale in 1997: "A successful intervention in Iraq would revolutionize the strategic situation in the Middle East, in ways both tangible and intangible, and all to the benefit of American interests" ("Saddam's Impending Victory" 25). It would also serve as a demonstration case for anyone tempted to challenge the American-led world order. As John Bolton commented, "[w]e can be certain that other rogue governments will be watching [our treatment of Iraq] closely." In January 1997, a new neoconservative advocacy network led by William Kristol, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), released a public letter to President Clinton calling for regime change in Iraq. The ousting of Saddam was justified on the grounds that it would "secure the interests of the US and our friends and allies around the world" (PNAC, "Letter"). Those interests were defined as "the safety of American troops in the region, of our friends and allies like Israel and the moderate Arab states, and a significant portion of the world's supply of oil" ("Letter"). 'Democracy' did not merit a single reference. A second letter, sent in February 1998 under the auspices of the Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf and signed by many neocons and other conservative unipolarists, called for the US to pursue regime change in order to "prevent Saddam Hussein from attaining a position of power and influence in the region" (Committee for Peace and Security S1179). The neocons were also staunch advocates of National Missile Defense (NMD). According to Kristol and Kagan, NMD was the "*sine qua non* for a strategy of American global pre-eminence" ("National Interest" 17). Missile Defense would enhance US freedom of action by nullifying all other ballistic missile programs in the world. The system would therefore enable Washington to take preventive military action without fear of retaliation (at least in the form of a ballistic missile attack—the neocons did not consider asymmetric or irregular warfare). During the 2000 Presidential campaign, Kagan praised Bush's "bold" NMD plan, claiming that it would have a transforming effect on the international environment "in terms of our own power and our ability to maintain primacy" (American Enterprise Institute). In the Balkans the same geopolitical rationale prevailed—protecting the imperatives of

unipolarity. Neocons who opposed the interventions in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999)—such as Krauthammer and Francis Fukuyama, who had associated himself with PNAC—did so because they did not believe that a civil war on the European periphery constituted a challenge to the US position as the guarantor of stability in Europe. For them the only reason to intervene was humanitarian—and this was not sufficient to warrant military intervention (Krauthammer, "Why America Must" 15–17; Fukuyama, "Letter" 8; Krauthammer, "World Imagined" 22–25). Neocons who did support Nato's Balkan interventions did so because they saw the conflicts there as serious challenges to the credibility of the Nato alliance, which was the cornerstone of American leadership in Europe and a building block of the US-led world order. In the case of Bosnia, the neocons and their allies criticized Clinton's first-term vacillation on the grounds that (in Perle's words) "the deeper […] more lasting effect [would be] to shatter British and French confidence in the United States as the leader of an institution (Nato) which is nothing if it's not led by the US" (qtd. in Hunt). Wolfowitz concurred: the most serious consequence was "the appearance of American weakness and inability to lead" (31). For Kagan, the US response to Bosnia was "intimately bound up with the larger question of America's role in Europe and its relationship with its key European allies and NATO" ("America, Europe, Bosnia" 27). In the case of Kosovo, Kristol and Kagan affirmed the primary issues: "Nato's future and American credibility are at stake" (qtd. in Editors, "All Necessary Force" 10). PNAC claimed that if Nato failed to take action, it would look impotent on the global stage and, as leader of the alliance, American resolve and ability would be called into question: it "[would] be the end of Nato as an effective alliance," PNAC warned ("Memo"). Reflecting on the intervention after 9/11, Kagan claimed that in Kosovo "preserving the cohesion and viability of the [Nato] alliance […] was among the primary aims of the American intervention, just as saving the alliance had been a primary motive for America's earlier intervention in Bosnia" (*Paradise and Power* 49). There was, then, a sharp discrepancy between the neoconservative perspective on the Balkan conflicts—the purported geopolitical challenge to American unipolarism—and the humanitarian principles that animated many pro-intervention liberals. Humanitarian principles were not the key driver behind neoconservative support for the interventions.

The Fracturing of Unipolarism

18 If the highpoint of neoconservative influence came with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, that event also marked the beginning of the demise of the concept of unipolarism as the key organizing principle for US foreign policy amongst neoconservatives and their supporters. In 2006 the Project for the New American Century ceased its activities. That same year, three of the most well-known neocons, Krauthammer, Fukuyama, and Kagan, offered reappraisals of America's place in the world, which collectively shifted the neoconservative center-of-gravity away from the aspiration to unipolarism; the influence of non-American agency now tempered their views on America's relative power. For Krauthammer, the change was abrupt. In the aftermath of 9/11, he had strongly reaffirmed his commitment to the unipolar thesis. In a 2002 retrospective examination of his original 1990 article, he wrote

> When I first proposed the unipolar model in 1990, I suggested that we should accept both its burdens and its opportunities, and that, if America did not wreck its economy, unipolarity could last 30 or 40 years. That seemed bold at the time. Today it seems rather modest. The unipolar moment has become the unipolar era. ("Unipolar Moment Revisited" 17)

Yet just four years later—2006—Krauthammer announced that the United States was "past the apogee" of unipolarity. The unipolar moment had peaked in 2005, the year that would be remembered as the apogee of American power (see "Past the Apogee"). From 2006 onwards, a confluence of events in the Middle East had diminished America's position there, which inflicted damage on the whole unipolar project. The collapse of the 2005 Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, Israel's failure to win decisively after its 2006 invasion of Lebanon, and the bombing of the Askariya Shrine in Samarra, Iraq in February 2006, which ignited the worst wave of sectarian violence in the country, had all reduced the US position in the world's most geopolitically significant region.

20 In particular, it was events in Iraq that were to blame, and more specifically, the Iraqis themselves, Krauthammer claimed: "the root problem is not the United States, and not the tactical errors that we have made in Iraq. The root problem is the Iraqis and their own political culture" ("Past the Apogee"). Alluding to Benjamin Franklin, he asserted "What we have done in Iraq is given them a republic, but they appear unable to keep it" ("Past the Apogee"). Non-American agency had therefore diminished the US position. Moreover, Krauthammer claimed that a regional alliance was forming to oppose the United States. Supported by Russia and China, Iran was "positioning itself at the center of a regional alliance against us" alongside Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria, and Muqtada al-Sadr, the Iraqi Shiite cleric and militia leader ("Past the Apogee"). Tehran apparently sought "to overawe the entire region with the acquisition of nuclear weapons, which would make it the regional superpower" ("Past the Apogee"). Iran in other words, posed a significant challenge to American power, and the United States was no longer "the single pole" of power in the Mid-East as Krauthammer had claimed in 1990. In 2006, Fukuyama renounced neoconservatism entirely. In his book-length valediction, he claimed that "as both a political symbol and a body of thought [neoconservatism] has evolved into something that I can no longer support" (*After the Neocons* ix). The main problem, he claimed, was its overestimation of America's power. This was evident in theory—as a concept "benevolent hegemony […] presupposes an extremely high level of competence on the part of the hegemonic power" (112)—as well as in practice: in Iraq, Bush and the neocons had "failed to anticipate the requirements for pacifying and reconstructing Iraq, and [were] wildly over-optimistic in [their] assessment of the ease with which large-scale social engineering could be accomplished" (6–7). Fukuyama devoted a whole chapter to "Social Engineering and Development"—a facet of strategy that had been conspicuously lacking in the neocons' pre-9/11 analysis, he (rightly) claimed. Now Fukuyama called for a more modest-sounding "realistic Wilsonianism that better matches means to ends" (10). This would require taking multilateral institutions seriously so as to better legitimize American power as well as "a dramatic demilitarization of American foreign policy and reemphasis on other types of policy instruments" (184–85) such as soft power. A more cautious tone was also evident in Kagan's 2008 analysis of the world at the end of the Bush years. Echoing Krauthammer's Realist framework and his focus on the power of nation states, Kagan announced "the return of history":

> the world has become normal again […] international competition among great powers has returned, with Russia, China, Europe, Japan, India, Iran, the United States, and others vying for regional predominance. Struggles for status and influence in the world have returned as central features of the international scene. (*Return of History* 3–4)

The world of 2008 was not a unipolar world, but "a world of 'one superpower, many great powers'" with "new geopolitical fault lines where the ambitions of great powers overlap" (12). There was an ideological component to this too, Kagan claimed: autocratic governments such as China and Russia had developed "a comprehensive set of beliefs about government and society and the proper relationship between rulers and their people" (58). Thus "global competition between democratic and autocratic governments will become a dominant feature of the twenty-first century" (72). Yet the defense of the Western order would not require "a blind crusade on behalf of democracy everywhere at all times, or a violent confrontation with the autocratic powers" (97–98). Kagan envisaged a more restrained response: a "concert of democracies" that was defensive rather than offensive, and where in any case "strategic and economic considerations, as well as cultural affinities, may often cut against ideology" (73). In essence, Kagan now saw a more competitive world in which the United States was constrained by other great powers, and the heady days of preventive war were over.

23 In 2009, PNAC, inactive since 2006, was replaced by a new lobbying organization, again led by William Kristol, the Foreign Policy Initiative (FPI). The FPI mission statement called for "a renewed commitment to American leadership"—but also described a world in which the United States now faced multiple foreign policy challenges:

> They come from rising and resurgent powers, including China and Russia. They come from other autocracies that violate the rights of their citizens. They come from rogue states that work with each other in ways inimical to our interests and principles. […] They come from Al Qaeda and its affiliates […] [and] from failed states that serve as havens for terrorists and criminals. (Foreign Policy Initiative)

American power, in other words, was no longer unipolar.

Conclusions

24 The response of the neocons and their unipolarist sympathizers to the major cases of military intervention in the post-Cold War years testifies to the primacy of interests in their strategy—specifically, the interests deemed integral to the maintenance of unipolarity. Unipolarism, in effect, became the new organizing principle for the neoconservatives and their supporters in the immediate post-Cold War years. 25 It is too shallow to criticize the neocons for not prioritizing the promotion of democracy by force. As Fukuyama acknowledged in 2006 that is a momentous task, which overestimates America's power in relation to often faraway countries with very different civic and political cultures (see *After the Neocons*). Instead neoconservatism should be interpreted and evaluated in this period on the basis that it was dedicated to promoting American unipolarism—the country's supposed position as the single pole of power in every region of the world. Neoconservative foreign policy in this period was a distinctly national enterprise devoted to the preservation of American primacy. 26 However, the limitations of American power were

writ large in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq. Once the capstone of the neoconservative global project, regime change in Iraq also catalyzed the fracturing of the unipolar consensus. As the country descended into virtual civil war, the United States faced a deadly insurgency, and other countries in the region pursued their own agendas in Iraq, leading neocon thinkers began to recalibrate their ideas about the reach and depth of American power. They acknowledged its relative decline, and the ability of other states and non-state actors to constrain and occasionally even derail the United States. Yet the flaws in the concept of unipolarism were apparent before the disastrous invasion of Iraq. Ultimately the pursuit of unipolarity was futile because the United States was never the single pole of world power. The demise of the only other competing superpower created (for some) the illusion of unipolarity; in reality, there were already other poles of power that could constrain US freedom-of-action (Europe, Japan, and China, for example). As a concept, unipolarism was too superficial to cater to the different levels on which international relations functioned in a globalized world. While the US was the most powerful country by far in terms of conventional military resources, national economies were ever more interdependent, and transnational forces unleashed by globalization were eroding the power of nation states from above and below. At a time when globalization and its attendant economic and security challenges were increasingly visible, neocons had drawn the parameters tightly around conventional state-based military issues, and as late as 2000 were re-iterating their support for "the unipolar moment" thesis and the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance as the prescriptions for foreign policy under a new President (see PNAC, "Rebuilding" 4,[2] ii). If the unipolar moment is over for the neocons, the aspiration to a lesser form of American primacy remains. In Donald Trump's "American First" foreign policy, leading neocons saw a major challenge to their vision of American internationalism. Lamenting the rise of Trump, William Kristol admitted in 2016 "If it were a pure foreign policy election, I'd probably swallow hard and vote for Hillary Clinton" (qtd. in Thrush). For Kagan, Trump represented nothing less than the return of "national solipsism" ("Trump"). The United States under Trump would behave, he predicted, not like a superpower, but like "a normal nation" focusing on "a narrower reading of US interests" ("Trump"). While the essence of Trump's foreign policy remains contested (see Cohen; Posen; Parmar), it seems clear that, despite the fact that the President is a Republican, neoconservatives are continuing to challenge some of Trump's key policies (Editors, "Pompeo in Pyongyang" and "Not Taking Sides"; Donnelly and Kristol; Kristol, "Our Trump Problem"; Krauthammer, "You Can't Govern," "To Die for Estonia?," and "Trump's Foreign Policy")—a task likely to keep them busy and active for the foreseeable future given the erratic temperament of the current incumbent.

Notes

[1] Krauthammer claims that he always accepted the term "neoconservative" because it was futile rejecting it when it was so widely used. Interview with Charles Krauthammer conducted by the author, Washington, DC, 6 February 2006.

[2] Interview with Joshua Muravchik conducted by the author, Washington DC, 3 February 2006.

[3] For a full analysis of the distinction between neocons and conservative nationalists see Ryan 52–54.

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