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**MANIFESTATIONS OF NEOCONSERVATISM IN US
MIDDLE EAST POLICY DURING THE PRESIDENCY OF
GEORGE W. BUSH (2001-2009)**

Abstract: US dominance in the post-Cold War world order was disrupted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This laid the groundwork for revising US Middle East policy mechanisms, tools, and emphases in terms of regional implementation, based on the political-ideological beliefs and approaches of neoconservatives. The unilateral and practically contradictory policy of "The Vulcans", proponents of imperialist and "pro-Likudnik" tendencies that embraced a global "war on terror" and promotion of democracy through hard power, failed in post-war Iraq's reconstruction period and was severely criticized. However, despite all this, the principles of neoconservatism remain viable as an expression of "American exceptionalism", manifesting itself predominantly in the Middle East.

Keywords: *neoconservative, USA, Middle East, Iraq, promotion of democracy, Wilsonianism, rogue state, al-Qaeda, terrorism, "the Vulcans", interventionism.*

Introduction

Neoconservatism dates back to the 1930s-40s, emerging from a combination of liberal-idealism, Marxism, and political realism, eventually becoming known as "democratic imperialism". The neoconservatives' political-analytical views and ideas materialized after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and were fulfilled due to its advocates engaging in the policy-making process, including the hardline Republicans in the White House and Pentagon. This article covers the manifestations of neoconservatism in US Middle East policy in the late 20th and early 21st century, particularly during the presidency of George W. Bush in 2001-2009, analyzes the tough approaches of the neoconservatives when designing regional policy, illustrates the impact of neoconservatism on US Middle East policy under G.W. Bush and presents criticism of the

Bush administration's policy's failure to "reorganize" the Middle East during the 8 years of his presidency (2001-2009).

In this context, the author, building upon a combination of academic literature, relevant primary sources and periodical press, has tried to develop certain provisions on the issue in question set out in the relevant works of American, European and Russian political scientists and thinkers.

The origin of the neoconservatism

At the turn of the 21st-century, neoconservatives greatly contributed to the elaboration of US foreign policy and national security.

There is still no clear definition of neoconservatism in political science. It is the "chimera" of present-day world politics¹ (in Greek mythology, this **was** a monster considered to be a lion in the forepart and a goat in the middle with a tail that ends in a Dragon's head).² Opponents of neoconservatism argue that this "chimera" represents the inconsistent unity of US military supremacy and the idealistic views of Wilsonianism. With regards to the latter, to some followers it is assumed as a label that is used to describe neoconservatism.³ As noted by M. Boot, a neoconservative principles advocate, the neocons are the hard Wilsonians or the Wilsonian idealists who believe that the United States should use its power to spread American values, the most important one being liberal democracy, which provides security to the United States.⁴ In other words, neoconservatism is a combination of the military imperialism of Theodore Roosevelt in regard to foreign policy and the idealistic imperialism of Woodrow Wilson. It also refers to a selective use of democratic peace principles with strategies based on realism.⁵ Regarding the connection between neoconservatism and realism, according to Gerard Alexander, neoconservatives are realists who emphasize the balance of threat more than the balance of power.⁶

¹ Stephen McGlinchey, "Neoconservatism and American Foreign Policy", E-International Relations, June 1, 2009, <https://www.e-ir.info/2009/06/01/neo-conservatism-and-american-foreign-policy/>.

² Chimera, Britannica, www.britannica.com.

³ Max Boot, "Think Again: Neocons", Foreign Policy, no. 140 (Jan. - Feb., 2004): 21, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

⁴ Ibid, 24.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John Dumbrell, "The neoconservative roots of the war in Iraq", in *Intelligence and national security*

Given its broad and sometimes contradictory approaches to domestic and foreign policy development, it would be difficult to call neoconservatism purely an ideology or a movement. Therefore, the followers of neoconservatism consider it a collective worldview that unites the masses⁷. The godfather of neoconservatism, Irving Kristol, due to its lack of demarcating boundaries, described it in the best manner known so far: "persuasion".⁸

The rise of neoconservatism occurred in the early 2000s, due to shifts in the emphases of Middle East policy implementation. To understand the Middle East policy developed during the presidency of G. W. Bush, it is necessary to identify the origins of neoconservatism and its distinguishing features.

While the classical American conservatives⁹ have normally represented big business, the neoconservatives, were not from high society. Their first generation (former City College of New York Trotskyist students¹⁰ Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glaser as well as Norman Podhoretz, Seymour Martin Lipset and others) were from Jewish immigrant families and were initially the followers of left-wing ideologies. The first manifestations of neoconservative anti-Stalinist left ideas can be found in journals like "Commentary" and "The Public

policymaking on Iraq: British and American perspectives, ed. James P. Pfiffner and Mark Phythian (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 31.

⁷ Patrick Corscadden, "The Neoconservative Influence on US Foreign Policy and the 2003 Iraq War", E-International Relations, June 14, 2014, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/06/14/the-neoconservative-influence-on-us-foreign-policy-and-the-2003-iraq-war/>.

⁸ Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion", Washington Examiner, August 25, 2003, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/the-neoconservative-persuasion>.

⁹Seymour Martin Lipset, "American Exceptionalism: A Double Edged Sword", The Washington Post, 1996, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/americanexceptionalism.htm> (Accessed August 17, 2020). As noted by S. M. Lipset what Europeans have called "liberalism," Americans refer to as "conservatism": a deeply anti-statist doctrine emphasizing the virtues of laissez-faire. Ronald Reagan and Milton Friedman, the two current names most frequently linked with this ideology, define conservatism in America. American classical conservatism is founded upon the maintenance of common Christian and ideological values, advocacy of American exceptionalism, respect and the preservation of Western culture and American traditions, republicanism, business, and anti-communism.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourgois, "The PNAC (1997-2006) and the Post-Cold War 'Neoconservative Moment'", E-International Relations, February 1, 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/02/01/new-american-century-1997-2006-and-the-post-cold-war-neoconservative-moment/>□

Interest” already in the 1930s and 1940s. The first generation of neoconservatives were comprised of socialists, social democrats, and liberals of the Cold War era, who, according to Ted Boetner, “supported both the strong anti-communism policy of Presidents Truman and Johnson and the welfare state”.¹¹ However, as T. Boetner continues, in the late 1960s, many neoconservatives “found themselves at odds with the new socio-political realities especially the emerging counter-culture”.¹² This was mainly due to changes in the American domestic life in the 1950s and 1960s (including the reduction of various inequalities within American society, namely granting equal civil rights to the black population rejected by the American conservative society, banning the compulsory prayer from schools, etc.) combined with skepticism among American society typical of the bipolar world order dictated by Cold War realities. The proponents of this persuasion considered these shifts to be steps undertaken by the Democrats against American society.¹³ Thus, the neoconservatives that adhered to “the belief in an anti-communism and a liberal interventionist foreign policy (Cold War liberal consensus), departed from the left and moved to the right”.¹⁴ This was the reason that neoconservatives politically realigned themselves and abandoned many of the principles of liberalism. Therefore, Irving Kristol defined a neoconservative of this time as “a liberal who had been mugged by reality”.¹⁵ He believed that, as a result of this realignment, the historic mission of neoconservatism and its political commitment should be to transform American conservatism (first and foremost the Republican Party) into a new type of conservatism capable of governing modern democracies.¹⁶

Regarding the second generation of neoconservatives, according to Kislitsyn it acquired “one characteristic feature - the strengthening of dynastic and even more family ties”. The representatives of this generation were the main ideologues of the modern “neocons” - William

¹¹ Ted Boetner, “Neo-Conservatism and Foreign Policy”, (Master Thes., Durham, University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository, 2009), 16, <https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1115&context=thesis>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Corscadden, “The Neoconservative Influence”.

¹⁴ Boetner, “Neo-Conservatism and Foreign Policy”, 17.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kristol, “The Neoconservative Persuasion”.

Kristol (son of Irving Kristol), Robert Kagan, (son of neoconservative historian Donald Kagan) John Podhoretz (son of Norman Podhoretz) and so on¹⁷. Contrary to the first generation, these neocons were no longer, for the most part, former liberals that converted to conservatism over time. They were fully fledged conservatives defending a “Neo-Reaganian” American foreign policy and advocating for American “benevolent hegemony” or **Pax Americana**.¹⁸

The distinctive features of neoconservatism (utilizing the example of Middle Eastern policy)

As for its distinguishing features, Francis Fukuyama in his "After the Neocons. America at the Crossroads" best illustrates the distinction between other political theories and schools of thought and the neoconservative persuasion.

First of all, the neoconservatives are in favour of direct interference in the internal affairs of other states in order to introduce democracy and fundamental human rights¹⁹. According to Brian Schmidt and Michael Williams, neoconservatives believe that democracy was the most powerful ideology in the world, and thought that by introducing democracy in Iraq, the United States would be able to do the same in other countries in the region, acting as a liberator.²⁰

The formation of neoconservatism was influenced by the 28th US president Woodrow Wilson, one of the 20th century's prominent representatives of the American liberalism, and the author of the post-WWI "14 Points", who put forward the basic principles of collective security based on a liberal foreign policy.²¹ As noted by S. V. Kislitsyn,

¹⁷ Sergey Kislitsyn, "Foreign policy ideology and practice of American neoconservatism", (PhD diss., Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2019), 91.

¹⁸ Bourgois, "The PNAC (1997-2006)".

¹⁹ Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy*, (Moscow, KHRANITEL (Conservator), 2007, 28.

²⁰ Brian C. Schmidt & Michael C. Williams, "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists", *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 203.

²¹ Kislitsyn, "Foreign policy ideology and practice of American neoconservatism", 55, Here are those 6 principles : 1) democratic states should be the basis of peace, 2) free trade, socio-economic exchange have a modernizing and civilizing effect on the state, 3) international law u international organizations should contribute to the strengthening of the global world, 4) a stable world must be based on the principles of collective security, 5) these conditions are possible because the world is progressing, 6) American values and

"the connection between neoliberalism and Wilsonian ideas can be summed up in two points: the importance to spread democracy as an American national interest and the ideas of American moral leadership".²²

However, in terms of building a democratic world, the roles of international law and organizations, and the approaches of neoconservatives, were different²³. From this point of view, John Mearsheimer describes the Bush doctrine as "Wilsonianism with teeth", referring to its idealistic direction²⁴. Neoconservatives are convinced that many issues concerning US national security depend on the number of democratic countries in the world. At the same time, however, they are certain that military power and its display are crucial to world politics. In fact, on a practical level, we are dealing with an irreconcilable contradiction: spreading democracy through the use of force.

An example of promoting democracy by use of force is the US policy in Iraq, which deviated even from the Westphalian system that served as the basis for the formation of the principles of international law, and was a transition from traditional American "isolationism".²⁵

The next feature emphasized by Fukuyama is the division of the world into the camps of "good and evil" and the belief that US military could be used to spread American ideals. This provision, which is a cornerstone of neoconservative moral values, was expressed as a red line in George W. Bush's speeches, in which he noted that the liberation of the Iraqi people from tyranny is God's will.²⁶ This was not in line with the official *casus belli* of the Iraq campaign represented as the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, which had been declared as the official cause of the Iraqi campaign. In general, the neoconservatives, referring to the concept of "American exceptionalism",

principles are universal, the United States is at the forefront of progressive development and has a special responsibility to inspire the rest of the world to convey ideas.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ John Mearsheimer, "Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq war: realism versus neo-conservatism", *Open Democracy*, May 18, 2005, <https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A0037.pdf>,

https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/morgenthau_2522jsp/.

²⁵ Alison Mitchell and Carl Hulse, "Threats and Responses: The Vote; Congress Authorizes Bush to Use Force Against Iraq, Creating a Broad Mandate", *New York Times*, October 11, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/11/us/threats-responses-vote-congress-authorizes-bush-use-force-against-iraq-creating.html>.

²⁶ Kislitsyn, "Foreign policy ideology and practice of American neoconservatism", 91.

believed that weak states, instead of acting against the United States, should, on the contrary, seek to unite with it.²⁷

Its third important feature is “skepticism about the ability of international law and institutions to solve serious security problems”. This feature, as F. Fukuyama states, was relevant to the Cold War-era arms race and manifested itself while “by-passing or undermining the United Nations Security Council”²⁸ before the Iraqi campaign. The latter showed that the US was more inclined to act “unilaterally to defend its interests if it feels the necessity to do so”, even in the case of the highly debatable extent of the existing terrorism threat to the United States of America.²⁹ As for B. Schmidt B and M. Williams, “in their advocacy of American hegemony, neoconservatives express their theoretical antipathy to traditional balance-of-power politics. A hegemonic order led by the United States is viewed as clearly superior to a balance-of-power order”³⁰. Therefore, the neoconservatives oppose the traditional “balance-of-power” order to a certain extent. They renounce the practice of ironing out problems through multilateral diplomacy and are considered to be proponents of unilateral foreign policy with a subjective interpretation of international law (this is what we witnessed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the case of interpreting the UN Charter's 51st article to ensure legal justification to intervene Afghanistan and Iraq). This was the reason for the development of a unilateral policy as a pillar of the Bush doctrine, aimed at the self-defense of US national security. Consequently, the role of international organizations was being pushed to the background. In practice, this meant rejecting international treaties that had already been signed (the Kyoto Protocol, The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, etc.). According to the famous neocon John Bolton’s work “Is There Really 'Law' in International Affairs?”, “international law is not law; it is a series of political and moral arrangements that stand or fall on their own merits, and anything else is simply theology and superstition masquerading a law”.³¹ Thus, given that unilateralism was one of the

²⁷ Schmidt and Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War”, 196.

²⁸ Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, 29.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Schmidt and Williams, «The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War», 196.

³¹ John Bolton, “Is There Really 'Law' in International Affairs?”, *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 48.

pillars of Bush's doctrine, as noted by Charles Krauthammer, Bush's doctrine is synonymous with neoconservative foreign policy.³²

The fourth feature was the idea of targeted and ambitious social engineering. It should be noted that this very provision distinguishes the first generation of neoconservatives from the post-Cold War period neoconservatives. The neoconservatives avowing anti-communist views during the Cold War rejected the idea of creating a common society through political, social, economic, and cultural total control as it was considered impossible and imaginary.

The theoretical basis for this distinctive feature was put forth by the second-generation neocons that emerged in the 1980s, towards the end of the George. H. W. Bush administration. In 1992, the first post-Cold War foreign policy strategy based on the principles of neoconservatism was elaborated under Wolfowitz's supervision. The document entitled "Defense Planning Guidance (DPG-92)" highlighted the importance of more defense spending due to the new need for the United States military abroad in an "era of fundamental change".³³ In line with this document, US foreign policy should focus on maintaining the sole superpower status the US gained as a result of the collapse of the USSR.³⁴ Subsequently, based on this initial political-ideological thrust, the neoconservatives simultaneously began arguing for a more assertive American foreign policy.

Referring to the aforementioned document, the neoconservatives began advocating a new global order of a "unipolar" world where no nation would challenge the positions and rights of the United States in order to create Pax Americana and achieve the universalization of American values.³⁵ Charles Krauthammer was one of the first people to predict that the end of the Cold War shaped a new era of unipolarity for the US, and, by embracing democracy and unilateralism, it would create a "benevolent Pax Americana" that did not need a balance of power any longer. Both Krauthammer and F. Fukuyama developed the idea that

³²Charles Krauthammer, "The Neoconservative Convergence," *Commentary*, (July–August 2005), <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/charles-krauthammer/the-neoconservative-convergence/>.

³³ Boetner, "Neo-Conservatism and Foreign Policy", 31.

³⁴ Boetner, "Neo-Conservatism and Foreign Policy", 35.

³⁵ Ibid

based on the principles of Pax Americana and the universalization of Western (i.e. American) values, neoconservative foreign policy would depart from the “neo-conservative Cold War absolutism against communism” and move toward a more nationalistic Wilsonian liberalism.³⁶

Therefore, building upon those political-ideological tenets, the Bush administration and, in particular, the president’s inner circle - “the Vulcans” - believed that through unilateral policy, use of force and democracy promotion it would be possible to introduce Western democracy in a region with a variety of different religious, socio-economic and political characteristics, such as the Middle East³⁷, which would make the region much more manageable in terms of realizing the third wave of Pax Americana.

The approaches of neoconservatives to US Middle East policy

As for the elaboration of foreign policy in regards to the Middle East, Patrick Corscadden distinguishes two common principles. The first is the imperialist or pseudo-imperialist approach. In line with that approach, which was put forward by the leading neoconservative think tank *Project for a New American Century* (PNAC)³⁸, the United States was seen as a “force for good,” so it was morally right for it to spread its influence and assert its dominance in international relations. Albeit the neoconservatives did not reject the use of soft power in parallel with hard power, the latter was much more prioritized.

From the point of view of rethinking domestic and foreign policy, there was a shift in the neoconservatives' choice of targets for a permanent struggle. During the Cold War, the target was the USSR, in the first post-Cold war decade it targeted the rogue states, and during the presidency of George W. Bush, the target was global terrorism, primarily represented by al-Qaeda. From this aspect, it can be concluded that in

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Corscadden, “The Neoconservative Influence”.

³⁸ Kislitsyn, “Foreign policy ideology and practice of American neoconservatism”, 112. To understand George W. Bush's foreign policy doctrine, it is important to remember that the guidelines for the neoconservative concept underlying the organization of American national security were put forward in the programming report “Rebuilding America’s Defenses” published by the “American New Age Project” as early as 2000 on the eve of the presidential election.

terms of the preservation and understanding of imperialism or, more precisely, pseudo-imperialism, neoconservatives, emphasized not so much the target rather the management of the fear caused by the target that could be a possible threat to US supremacy.³⁹

The next common denominator is the pro-Likud approach to the Middle East policy, particularly the peace process. The essence of this approach was that the neoconservatives unconditionally supported the Israeli "Likud" party position in the peace process. This stance was best expressed in an article for Foreign Affairs published in 1991, in which Ze'ev Begin, a right-wing "Likud" member, noted that, "on security and historical grounds, it was impossible to make peace by negotiating any parcel of land coming from the Golan Heights, Gaza, and the West Bank". Such an extremist approach made it impossible to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the basis of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. We see the evolution of this position in the work "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm" developed by a group of neoconservatives such as J. Colbert, Ch. Fairbanks Jr., D. Feith, R. Loewenberg, D. Wurmser, and M. Wurmser under the supervision of Richard Perle, which contained political recommendations regarding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the elaboration of a critical strategy by the United States and Israel. The paper argues that before improving relations with the Palestinians, Israel must "ensure the security of its streets".⁴⁰

To do so, Israel had to conduct regular inspections of Palestinian-held areas. According to the authors, this was a justified practice and would have the support of the United States. The peace process was to be based on signed agreements, but Israel had to be sure that Palestine would act in line with the terms of the agreements. At the same time, it was proposed by the United States and Israel to establish a Joint Compliance

³⁹ Didier Chaudet, "The Neoconservative Movement at the End of the Bush Administration: Its Legacy, Its Vision and Its Political Future", *E-International Relations*, October 21, 2009, <https://www.e-ir.info/2010/10/21/the-neoconservative-movement-at-the-end-of-the-bush-administration-its-legacy-its-vision-and-its-political-future/>.

⁴⁰ Richard Perle, James Colbert, Charles Fairbanks, Jr., Douglas Feith, Robert Loewenberg, David Wurmser, and Meyrav Wurmser, "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm", *Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies*, December 27, 2004, <https://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Articles/Story1351.html>.

Monitoring Committee, which was to regularly examine whether the PLO was meeting the minimum standards of compliance, authority and responsibility, human rights, and judicial and fiduciary accountability. In any case, the reality was that American neoconservative ideologues were voicing what Israel wanted, which was to cancel the Oslo Accords. It was stated that Israel should not be bound by these agreements until the PLO fulfilled its obligations. It was stated that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not be extended to other Arab countries. On the contrary, the Arabs, in the person of Israel, can find a good partner in the promotion of democracy and human rights.⁴¹

The establishment of peace via the use of force is best referred to in the section relating to the format of US-Israeli relations. It states that Israel's strategy should be aimed at developing its own economic and military capabilities, in order to ensure peace through the use of force and act as an upholder of Western values in the region.⁴²

US neoconservatives criticized those Israeli officials who were in favour of improving relations through negotiations. For instance, John Podhoretz strongly criticized the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who opposed the existence of Israeli settlements on the West Bank, and the Israeli government, which, presumably, had not taken more stringent measures to stop Hezbollah.⁴³ This proves that the neoconservatives continuously consider negotiations a sign of weakness.

In his article "Some provisions of the US strategy in the context of the Iraqi issue" G. Harutyunyan highlights the neoconservatives' connection with Israel. Harutyunyan emphasizes that the US support for Israel's in the context of its Middle East policy was driven not only by the Jewish lobby but also by the White House Protestant majority. The union of the "Moral Movement", founded by the latter, funded the Israeli right-wing parties that advocated for the protection of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip. Interestingly, this was not due to "Judeophilia", but to the fact that the Protestant-Baptist elite remained faithful to the spirit of the Old Testament. This approach was called "Christian Zionism" as it was in line with the provisions of Zionism.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Perle et al, "A Clear Break".

⁴² Chaudet, "The Neoconservative Movement".

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Gagik Harutyunyan, "Some provisions of the US strategy in the context of the Iraqi issue", *The 21st CENTURY* 3, no. 5, (2004): 110.

"Messianic sentiments" also played a role.⁴⁵ Some authors tend to believe that messianism was introduced into American foreign policy by the "neocons".⁴⁶ However, this is a primitive approach. Neoconservatism is just a derivative of American imperialism. Messianism syndrome is the result of the development of imperial ideology (or, in other words, geo-ideology). As in the past, messianism is often expressed in the form of well-thought-out informative action. For example, in his public speeches, President G. W. Bush often appealed to God and providence by announcing that they are pushing him to take this or that step. In the context of the Middle East policy, it was assumed that after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iraq would become a democratic and economically prosperous country and a model for the greater Middle East. Advocates of this approach believed that if countries like Syria, Saudi Arabia or even Egypt did not voluntarily follow the example of Iraqi democratization, the US would have to deal with them much more severely, forcing those countries to comply with the requirements of American civilization.⁴⁷

The impact of neoconservatism on the US Middle East policy during the presidency of George W. Bush

It is important to mention that the key decision-makers in the White House were not neoconservative ideologue. However, Vice President Dick Cheney (an avid follower of hard-line political realism), National Security Adviser, eventual Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, the former Secretary of Defense who served until 2006, and Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Secretary of Defense and a well-known neoconservative) who, along with Douglas Feith, had a significant impact on the development of national security strategy at the Pentagon, were standing close to the neoconservative ideology.⁴⁸ According to Mann, the September terrorist attacks were a good opportunity for the "Vulcans", to try to achieve their long-standing goal of the unilateral reorganization of the post-Cold War world⁴⁹ using the ideological

⁴⁵ Harutyunyan, "Some provisions of the US strategy", 112.

⁴⁶ The term "neocon" is widely used in mass media and professional literature to refer to neoconservatives.

⁴⁷ Harutyunyan, "Some provisions of the US strategy", 113.

⁴⁸ Petar Kurecic, "The Key Aspects of Neoconservative Influence on the U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy during the first G.W. Bush Administration", *The Romanian Journal of Society and Politics* 11, no.1 (2011): 15.

⁴⁹ Kurecic, "The Key Aspects of Neoconservative Influence", 22.

provisions of neoconservatism. As a result, unilateral policy and the use of preventive and pre-emptive strikes were formally enshrined in 2002 and 2006 US National Security Strategy documents.

Interestingly, in 2000, during a presidential debate with his opponent, Al Gore, George W. Bush stated that if he became president, he would pursue a "moderate policy" in the Middle East and that ousting Saddam would lead to nation-building in another region which was not in line with their political vision. For his part, D. Cheney asserted that they were for continuing the policy of non-intervention and containment, emphasizing that the opposite is typical of states with imperialist aspirations.⁵⁰

At this point, a question arises regarding whether this was just pre-election rhetoric, or the Iraqi campaign and the further development of Middle East policy were prompted by the September 11 terrorist attacks. According to the second-generation neocon Max Boot, the policy of the White House was conditioned by 9/11, and not by the influence of neoconservatives. As noted by M. Boot, the neocons had no representatives in the administration's "top tier". President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and National Security Advisor and later the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have never been neoconservatives. The Bush administration decision-makers were either liberal internationalist or traditional national-interest conservatives who criticized the Clinton administration for its intervention in the Balkans and focus on nation-building and human rights promotion, things that were highly championed by the neocons.⁵¹ M. Boot then states the Bush administration adopted the regional policy of ousting Saddam Hussein and promoting democracy not because of neoconservative influence but because of the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. After the latter, the United States moved from its "humble" foreign policy, and the ambitious National Security Strategy issued in September 2002 was its direct result. NSS 2002 called for the US primacy, promotion of democracy, and "vigorous actions, preemptive if necessary", to stop terrorism and weapons proliferation. It was a "quintessentially neoconservative document".⁵²

⁵⁰ Kurecic, "The Key Aspects of Neoconservative Influence", 18.

⁵¹ Boot, "Think Again: Neocons", 20.

⁵² Ibid, 20-21.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, M. Boot believes that the ideas of neoconservatism have never been entirely fulfilled, and “triumph of neoconservatism was hardly permanent or complete” because the Bush administration “didn’t adopt neocon arguments to push for regime change in North Korea and Iran”.⁵³ G. W. Bush established friendlier relations with China and even launched negotiations with North Korea. Additionally, as M. Boot further states, Bush put in place “a high-profile effort to promote a “road map” for settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that most neocons predicted would lead nowhere”.⁵⁴

However, a profound study of the neoconservatives' programming documents shows that they were in favor of ousting the regime in Iraq before the 2001 terrorist attacks. The Iraqi policy was aimed at securing the economic interests of the United States, where one of the political pillars of the Bush Doctrine formed under the ideological influence of the neoconservatives. In 1995, Republican senators called for permanent US access to natural hydrocarbon reserves, especially in the Persian Gulf region. Even before 9/11 terrorist attacks, a report was issued by the Baker Institute for Public Policy on “Strategic Energy Policy Challenges for the 21st Century” where the destabilizing impact of Iraq on the Middle East's oil market's hydrocarbon supplies are described as a threat to the existing world order and international relations. At the time, it was stated that the US should conduct a comprehensive analysis of Iraq's political, economic, and military capabilities to assess the situation. According to Michael Claire, the establishment of control over Iraq would lead to the recognition of oil as a factor to be reckoned with, and control over the Persian Gulf would also lead to greater influence in Europe, Japan, and China.⁵⁵

The Project for the New American Century launched a specific initiative in 1998 January sending a letter to the US then-president B. Clinton urging him to make removing Saddam from power a priority of US foreign policy. If this was not achieved, then the doctrine of dual

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Abrar Turaev, “Neoconservative Practice: Operation “Iraq”, *Wschodnioeuropejskie Czasopismo Naukowe (East European Scientific Journal)* 10, no. 50, (2019): 59.

containment in the Middle East would be considered a failure.⁵⁶ The neoconservatives believed that it would be impossible to succeed in the conflict with Saddam Hussein without a war. Neoconservatives favouring the continuous containment of Iraq also opposed the UN humanitarian program “Oil for Food”.⁵⁷

Criticism of the Bush administration over its Middle East policy

As many American foreign policy observers have pointed out, there has been a widespread belief among policymakers that “the US political and security interests are advanced by the spread of liberal political values abroad”.⁵⁸ In addition to this, one of the prominent critics of neoconservatism, the father of offensive realism, John Mersheimer, notes that neoconservatives believed that the United States, while implementing its regional foreign policy, “could rely on stealth technology, air-delivered precision-guided weapons, and small but highly mobile ground forces to win quick and decisive victories”⁵⁹. However, opponents have always been quite certain that the invasion of Iraq would divert attention from the real threat posed by al-Qaeda and the true fight against terrorism. As for Iraq, it was considered a manageable country for the United States. It was considered that the United States possessed a huge variety of restraint measures and instruments. Consequently, the neoconservatives' propositions or specific arguments could not justify the actions of George W. Bush. In particular, the right-wing leader of the Republican Party, Patrick J. Buchanan, who was known as a staunch critic of neoconservatives, called them “political parasites”. According to P. J. Buchanan, by carrying out military actions in Iraq and waging “permanent war for permanent peace”, the US got involved in a region where there had never been any threat to US interests.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Letter to President Clinton on Iraq, January 26, 1998, <https://www.noi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/iraqclintonletter1998-01-26-Copy.pdf>. In the text of the letter there were D. Rumsfeld, R. Armitage, J. Bolton, R. Perley, E. Abrams, R. Walsh and other signatures of those who later joined the Bush administration.

⁵⁷ Turaev, “Neoconservative Practice”, 59.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Monten, “The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in US Strategy”, *International Security* 29, no. 4, (Spring 2005): 1.

⁵⁹ Schmidt & Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War”, 199.

⁶⁰ Kisilitsyn, “Foreign policy ideology and practice of American neoconservatism”, 125, 82

The Bush administration and the neoconservatives were also criticized by the proponents of the American global leadership and liberal interventionism, who stated that the US president administration executed a unilateral policy and failed to use soft power in Iraq in terms of the promotion of democracy and financing domestic opposition in the Middle East.⁶¹ Stephen M. Walt, in line with his “balance-of-threat theory”, noted that a unilateral policy makes the US unpredictable, which is assessed as a threat and in such cases “that states form alliances to balance against threats.”⁶²

Opposition figures did not deny that Saddam Hussein's policy was too aggressive and expansionist when considering his actions against neighbouring countries such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. But as Mearsheimer and Walt noted, Iraq's policy was no worse than that of Egypt or Israel, both of which have fought several wars since 1948.⁶³ Thus, the policy of preventive and preemptive strikes to dismantle Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party's regime not only proved to be a failure but also contradicted US national interests in terms of realpolitik.

Criticisms were also voiced by other neoconservatives. For instance, Fukuyama singled out three major mistakes made by both the Bush administration and the neoconservatives involved in the White House and Pentagon. The first is large-scale social engineering, which was used as the only tool for the export and promotion of democracy and the introduction of the Western model of society in the Middle East. The second is the inability to perceive the legitimacy of the principles of international law and their significance. The third is the adoption of a pro-Israeli stance on Middle Eastern affairs and its application by the United States.⁶⁴

F. Fukuyama concludes that neoconservatism, both as a political symbol and as a theoretical concept, has degenerated into something that cannot be reconciled. The author points out the tendency of the utilization

⁶¹ Kislitsyn, “Foreign policy ideology and practice of American neoconservatism”, 126.

⁶² Schmidt & Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War”, 206.

⁶³ Schmidt & Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War”, 199, Mearsheimer and Walt's post-war analysis shows that Saddam Hussein was neither sane nor insane. It is no coincidence that WMDs were not found in Iraq, which once again confirms the veracity of the realists' claims. Realists also do not believe in the idea of neoconservatives that Saddam Hussein cooperated with al-Qaeda and that Iraq was a sponsor of international terrorism.

⁶⁴ Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads*, 9.

of hard power in the Middle East, which, clearly outlined in the works of the neoconservatives, materialized after September 11.⁶⁵

As for the leading American neocon think-tank, the New American Century Project, they declared that the Bush administration was wrong about Iraq's nuclear weapons programs, for those had already been shut down as of 2001. Concerning the data on weapons of mass destruction, the Bush administration was basing this on information acquired by intelligence in 1997 during the presidency of B. Clinton. But the neocons here blamed the CIA for providing false data and accused Donald Rumsfeld of being ill-prepared to face the challenges and possible failures in management.⁶⁶

As a result of the civil war in Iraq and facing criticism from the American public and political circles, Paul Wolfowitz left the Pentagon in January 2005, and Donald C. Rumsfeld resigned from his post in November 2006. As for J. Bolton, who has always had a negative opinion of international organizations, he was sent to the UN in the aftermath of the Republicans' failure in the midterm elections.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Thus, neoconservatism formed in the 1950s and was birthed by Wilsonian liberal values, political realism, Jacksonianism, Cold War skepticism, and American exceptionalism, and experienced its political rise in the first decade of the 21st century under George W. Bush. From a geopolitical as well as a political point of view, an attempt was made to give new life to the concept of Pax Americana based on neoconservative principles, through unilateral policy, military supremacy, preventative and pre-emptive strikes and the promotion of democracy.

The liberal-interventionist policy formed on these pillars manifested itself especially in the Middle East. Reconsidering the US Middle East policy in the unipolar world order, due to the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration initiated a shift in foreign policy implementation. After 9/11, the target of the fight became international

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Kislitsyn, "Foreign policy ideology and practice of American neoconservatism", 126; Boot, "Think Again: Neocons", 28.

⁶⁷ Kislitsyn, "Foreign policy ideology and practice of American neoconservatism", 128.

terrorism, which, according to the G.W. Bush administration, was supported and anchored by the "rogue states", inter alia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The objective of Middle East policy became the management of the threat caused by the target to the US and the overall situation in the Middle East. Interestingly, during the six decades of its existence, the viability of neoconservative beliefs was still conditioned by the presence of an enemy or possible invasion and remains unchanged to this day.

Preventive and pre-emptive strikes were documented as a moral imperative by the National Security Strategy, and the United States, without any UN sanctions, unilaterally "legitimized" the invasion of Iraq within the context of the "War on Terror". Unilateral actions in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq, were presented as a main rule rather than an exception, bypassing or selectively interpreting international law. To highlight its ideological assertion, it is necessary at least to quote G. W. Bush saying that different circumstances require different methods but not different moralities.

Although neoconservatism was formed on liberal values, in the case of Middle East policy it took the form of typical imperialism with the strongest preference for the use of hard power. As a result, the neoconservatives' demand to oust Saddam Hussein from power in the 1990s onwards was directed not so much against the supposed threat as it was part of the policy aiming at expanding US influence and presence from the Balkans to Afghanistan.

Thus, it can also be assumed that the Middle East policy, developed under the influence of neoconservatives, was not unrealistic, but rather was a policy based on miscalculations and improper predictions. Particularly after the invasion of Iraq, they were not flexible enough to assess that land fighting against non-traditional actors of world politics via the use of predominantly hard power is not an effective solution.

The Middle East policy based on the ideological provisions of neoconservatism, inter alia, the invasion of Iraq, was criticized not only by political opponents but also by the 44th and 45th presidents of the United States - Barack H. Obama's and Donald J. Trump. However, it is interesting that despite this criticism, the subsequent authorities have not refrained from the temptation to follow the abovementioned political and ideological provisions. This was reflected in their decision-making

represented by engaging the neoconservatives involved in the Bush administration, the use of preventive and selective strikes in the Middle East, as well as in foreign policy statements (e.g. the US NSS 2010 and 2015) in which the formulations on the global dominance of the US through the implementation of a unipolar policy is apparent.

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