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## Starting a War: Neoconservatism, Human Rights Rhetoric, and the Push to Democratize Iraq

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Starting a War: Neoconservatism, Human Rights Rhetoric, and the Push to Democratize Iraq

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The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

By  
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## Introduction

Foreign policy has been integral for the successes of the United States of America. The United States' "super power" status rests on the shoulders of a strong foreign policy – without linkage to the international community, the United States is an isolationist state, not a super power. The United States shows a history far from isolationism, but rather a history of foreign policy riddled with expansion. It can be said that even after Westward Expansion, the United States still looked to grow outward, and it did.

Robert Kagan, a leading neoconservative and self described "liberal interventionist," writes that United States history is essential in understanding foreign policy and interventionist politics. Far before the Cold War or the Reagan Administration, the United States sought to promote democracy around the globe. Kagan cites the Republican Party's 1900 campaign platform, in which they congratulated themselves for America's triumph and recent victory in the war in Spain. Kagan writes, "It was, they declared, a war fought for 'high purpose,' a 'war for liberty and human rights' that had given 'ten millions of the human race' a 'new birth of freedom' and the American people 'a new and noble responsibility ... to confer the blessings of liberty and civilization upon all the rescued people.'"<sup>1</sup> This new birth of freedom is the experience of democracy while the war fought for a high purpose – the liberation of Cuba from Spanish rule. In their eyes, the win was for American democracy and human rights.

Kagan then moves deeper into history, going as far as the mid 19th century. He references William Henry Seward, the founder of the Republican Party, New York Governor, and future Secretary of State under Abraham Lincoln. As early as 1850, Seward "declared it America's duty 'to renovate the condition of mankind' and lead the way 'to the universal

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<sup>1</sup> Kagan, Robert. "Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, C. 1776." *World Affairs* 170.4 (2008): 13-35. *JSTOR*. Web.



restoration of power to the governed.”<sup>2</sup> Seward is alluding to it being the responsibility of the United States of America to set the standard of global rights while influencing the international community. His use of “restoration of the power to the governed” is another way of stating that the United States must lead the international community in promoting democracy around the world.

It is clear, however, that this phenomenon was not limited to the 19th and 20th centuries as Kagan references the likes of Alexander Hamilton in the 18th century. Kagan writes that “Hamilton, even in the 1790s, looked forward to the day when America would be powerful enough to assist the ‘gloomy regions of despotism’ to rise up against the ‘tyrants’ that oppressed them.”<sup>3</sup> Only twenty years after the inception of the United States of America as a country, its founders were imagining a future in which the United States would serve as a beacon of democracy for the rest of the world. Hamilton mentions “gloomy regions of despotism” and “tyrants” because they now represent the opposite of democracy, the very pillar of what their new country was founded on.

It would only make sense that a country that was founded on democratic principles would view these principles as central to the rights of the people who inhabited it. By escaping tyranny and being built as a democracy, the United States associated democracy with rights and monarchy as oppression. The new state would be free and focused on the promotion of liberty, a vast difference from pledging allegiance to a single ruler. In coming from tyranny and moving towards democracy, the United States understood that democracy was the truest, freest form of government that bestowed the most rights upon its citizens.

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<sup>2</sup> Kagan, Robert. "Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, C. 1776."

<sup>3</sup> Kagan, Robert. "Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, C. 1776."

Kagan argues that the United States then spent, up until the Iraq War, promoting democracy abroad. As early as World War I, the United States was fighting wars using the rhetoric of democracy. Kagan mentions Woodrow Wilson's message to Congress in 1917: "The right is more precious than peace," he proclaimed, "and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts," for "democracy" and against "selfish and autocratic power."<sup>4</sup> The day had finally come when America was "privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness."<sup>5</sup> He then remarks that this is language that would make the speechwriters for President George W. Bush blush.

The Bush Administration fought the Iraq War in the name of democracy. The war was meant to help the people of Iraq by removing an abhorrent dictator from power while simultaneously giving the people agency by establishing a democracy. It was fought for human rights. But above all else, it was a neoconservative war. That is not to say the war was fought without good intentions – neoconservatives believed in the promotion of democracy because of its ability to stabilize the region, its benefits for the Iraqi people, but also its benefits for the United States of America.

Neoconservatism has played an integral role in shaping American foreign policy since the start of the Reagan Administration, culminating with the Iraq War. This project examines neoconservatives and their relationship with human rights, particularly in regards to the Iraq War. By co-opting human rights language and creating a human rights policy that focused on the promotion of democracy, neoconservatives in the Bush Administration were ultimately able to start the war in Iraq. Their policy and focus were not new, as was their determination, but their rhetoric and capability was. With a love for democracy, a love for the United States Military, and

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<sup>4</sup> Kagan, Robert. "Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, C. 1776."

<sup>5</sup> Kagan, Robert. "Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, C. 1776."

countless influence, neoconservatives started a war that would come to be considered as this generation's Vietnam.

## 1. Human Rights and Neoconservatism

### American Exceptionalism as Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism is American exceptionalism, as outlined by Robert Kagan. It rests on the shoulders of foreign policy intertwined with American ideals, interests, and aspiration. As he writes, “The expansive, moralistic, militaristic tradition in American foreign policy is the hearty offspring of this marriage between Americans' driving ambitions and their overpowering sense of righteousness.”<sup>6</sup> This overpowering sense of righteousness is a euphemism for American exceptionalism – the idea that the United States and its interests are more important than any other nation or governing body on the planet. By combining this righteousness with a driving ambition and a desire to build the nation’s military, Kagan argues that neoconservatism takes shape.

It is Michael McDonald who breaks down this relationship even further in his chapter titled, “What Were Neoconservatives Thinking?” He first writes that “America is exceptional for neoconservatives because the world needs American, and only American, values.”<sup>7</sup> This plays closely with rhetoric surrounding American exceptionalism. At its heart, this exceptionalism is isolationist. There is an emphasis on American values, and only American values, as being a remedy for international issues. The next step in this order of logic focuses on how these values can be extended internationally, which is through a show of power. McDonald continues, writing,

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<sup>6</sup> Kagan, Robert. "Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, C. 1776." *World Affairs* 170.4 (2008): 13-35. *JSTOR*. Web.

<sup>7</sup> MacDonald, Michael. *Overreach: Delusions of Regime Change in Iraq*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2014. Print.

“American interests are embedded in its principles (and its principles are embedded in its power), and, as the second axiom provides, all countries benefit when America extends its principles (or its power).”<sup>8</sup> Through this logic, the American exceptionalism that neoconservatives exude is beneficial for other nations. This affinity for American values, which directly benefit the United States, mixed with an extension of power, benefit the world.

The values McDonald writes about and neoconservatives have such affection for are the democratic principles the United States was founded on. This is what makes the United States so special in neoconservative eyes. McDonald continues, writing through a neoconservative lens: “America is exceptional really because its principles coincide with and serve interests that are universal. By neoconservative accounts, all people benefit when American principles are exported.”<sup>9</sup> Through this, it becomes clear that the exportation of American values is a promotion of democratic government. The United States enjoys the benefits of democracy, such as freedom and liberty, which serve these “universal interests.” Exporting these “universal interests” is democracy promotion.

### **Elliott Abrams, Neoconservatism, and Human Rights through Reagan**

Neoconservatives were able to establish themselves in the American governmental sphere through intellect. Leaders were considered thoughtful intellectuals, not partisan hacks. There was no focus on party loyalty but rather a strong drive to create policy that would enforce American values. Brandon High writes in his “The Recent Historiography of Neoconservatives” that “the neoconservatives could never have sustained political careers without developing a network of

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<sup>8</sup> MacDonald, Michael. *Overreach: Delusions of Regime Change in Iraq*

<sup>9</sup> MacDonald, Michael. *Overreach: Delusions of Regime Change in Iraq*

pressure groups and think-tanks. In this, neoconservatism was scarcely unique.”<sup>10</sup> Through this strong commitment to policy and change, neoconservative thought became foreground to the Reagan Administration and central to anti-communist sentiment during the Cold War.

This commitment to policy is exactly what led to neoconservative thought becoming synonymous with the Republican Party during the late 1970’s and into the 1980’s. As High writes, “by the mid-1970s, the neoconservatives were not just becoming members of other people’s committees, they were forming their own permanent think tanks.”<sup>11</sup> This had a lasting effect. High continues, writing that “the neoconservatives (along with other groups with different objectives) not only forced the Republicans to engage in ideological warfare, but also became the first sizeable group in the history of the Republican party to have a vested interest in the production of ideas, as opposed to making money or soldiering.”<sup>12</sup>

Neoconservatives rose to prominence during the Reagan Administration. Human rights had been pushed heavily under President Carter in the years before, yet Reagan’s Administration saw global human rights as an afterthought. With public pressure surrounding the Administration, President Reagan took significant steps to create the appearance that human rights was starting to take a top priority. A memo circulated through the State Department in 1981 outlined a human rights strategy and its increasing role within the nation’s foreign policy. As written in *The New York Times* by Barbara Crossette, “the State Department says that the United States cannot hope to offer a credible alternative to either the Soviet example or what it sees as a rising tide of neutralism unless it takes a strong position on political freedom and civil

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<sup>10</sup> High, Brandon. "The Recent Historiography Of American Neoconservatism\*." *The Historical Journal* 52.02 (2009): 475. Web.

<sup>11</sup> High, Brandon. "The Recent Historiography Of American Neoconservatism\*."

<sup>12</sup> High, Brandon. "The Recent Historiography Of American Neoconservatism\*."

rights.”<sup>13</sup> As noted by Crossette, as the Cold War slowly moved along, the United States sought ways to better themselves in regards to public, international perception. One way was to distance themselves from their former “neutralist” approach to human rights and advocate for freedom and civil rights heavily.

This anti-Soviet sentiment went deeper than distancing, however. By first ridding themselves of neutralism, the Reagan Administration then sought to contrast the Soviet Union as opposite to these new rights-centered values. As Crossette writes, “The memorandum says that attempts to match or challenge Soviet military power must be complemented by efforts in international organizations to portray the Soviet Union as repressive and show its contrast to free societies.”<sup>14</sup> Crossette then notes that written in the memorandum itself is the statement “our ability to resist the Soviets around the world depends in part on our ability to draw this distinction and persuade others of it,”<sup>15</sup> referring directly to this new difference. As Tamar Jacoby summarizes in her piece “The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights,” the memo “outlined a two-track human rights policy, a “positive” effort to expound democratic values and shame the Soviet Union, complemented by a “negative” policy of scolding both friends and adversaries for their serious abuses.”<sup>16</sup>

Abrams believed strongly in this “positive” strategy. He perceived human rights as positive because of its attachment to good morality – nations would view a foreign policy based on human rights as “positive.” He laid this out in his memo, stating, “Overall foreign policy, based on a strong human rights policy, will be perceived as a positive force for freedom and

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<sup>13</sup> Crossette, Barbara. “STRONG U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY URGED IN MEMO APPROVED BY HAIG.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 04 Nov. 1981. Web.

<sup>14</sup> Crossette, Barbara. “STRONG U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY URGED IN MEMO APPROVED BY HAIG.”

<sup>15</sup> Crossette, Barbara. “STRONG U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY URGED IN MEMO APPROVED BY HAIG.”

<sup>16</sup> Jacoby, Tamar. “The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights.” *Foreign Affairs* 64.5 (1986): 1066. Web.

decency.”<sup>17</sup> In order to win the Cold War, it was the United States job to win over public opinion by being this driving force of “freedom and decency,” the vessel being a foreign policy based on human rights values. This was again echoed as he wrote, “We seek to improve human rights performance wherever we reasonably can. We desire to demonstrate, by acting to defend liberty and identifying its enemies, that the difference between East and West is a crucial policy distinction of our times.”<sup>18</sup>

What Crossette and Jacoby both note, is that “less than a week after the memo was circulated, the White House nominated [Elliott] Abrams to be assistant secretary for human rights.”<sup>19</sup> This memorandum and policy shift placed a neoconservative in a high level state department post focusing on human rights. A neoconservative was now responsible for creating United States governmental human rights policy, shaping the way the Administration handled human rights. This would not be the last time neoconservatives and human rights would mix.

Elliott Abrams was the first neoconservative, and the first member of the Reagan Administration, to care deeply and believe in the cause of human rights. At the same time, Abrams believed that a commitment to human rights was distinctly American. As Abrams wrote in his 1981 memo, “Human rights is at the core of our foreign policy because it is central to what America is and stands for.”<sup>20</sup> Abrams was selected to be the Assistant Secretary of Human Rights for the Reagan Administration because of its shortcomings on human rights – the administration needed Abrams due to his core beliefs. He also happened to be a young and budding neoconservative.

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<sup>17</sup> Crossette, Barbara. "STRONG U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY URGED IN MEMO APPROVED BY HAIG."

<sup>18</sup> Crossette, Barbara. "STRONG U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY URGED IN MEMO APPROVED BY HAIG."

<sup>19</sup> Jacoby, Tamar. "The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights."

<sup>20</sup> Crossette, Barbara. "STRONG U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY URGED IN MEMO APPROVED BY HAIG."



It is vital to distinguish whether or not Abrams believed in focusing on human rights as a method of combatting the Soviet Union, or because of his own humanitarian values. As Jacoby notes, “from the beginning, Abrams encouraged the President to use human rights as a rhetorical weapon against Moscow.”<sup>21</sup> The Reagan Administration was determined to use human rights as a device to win domestic popular opinion, while simultaneously using rights language to shame the Soviet Union. Jacoby writes, “as his 1981 memo stated bluntly, the very purpose of a human rights policy should be to convey to the public, at home and in Europe, just what the difference was between East and West.”<sup>22</sup> The East was determined to fight for the rights of the oppressed, using freedom and democracy, while the West would continue to oppress, using communism as an anchor.

While it is clear human rights were being used against the Soviet Union, Elliott Abrams very much embraced human rights. Jacoby writes that as the years progressed, Abrams views on human rights progressed as well. “‘It is not enough,’ Abrams told a reporter in 1982, ‘to ask who is in power and what is he like. We also have to ask what is the alternative, what are the likely prospects for improvement.’”<sup>23</sup> Abrams was concerned with developing nations and promoting democracy – something fighting the Cold War had taught him how to do well. Jacoby continues, writing that “by December 1983 he was even more explicit, noting in a speech delivered in New York that human rights are ‘not a free-floating goal to be considered in isolation each morning. We do not betray the cause of human rights when we make prudential judgments about what can and can't be done in one place at one time.’”<sup>24</sup> In other words, human rights were often carefully

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<sup>21</sup> Jacoby, Tamar. "The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights.

<sup>22</sup> Jacoby, Tamar. "The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights.

<sup>23</sup> Jacoby, Tamar. "The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights.

<sup>24</sup> Jacoby, Tamar. "The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights.

considered in many different situations. Elliott Abrams was a neoconservative who deeply cared about human rights.

The Reagan Administration used this East versus West human rights foreign policy while backing the El Salvadoran government against communist rebels during the late 1980's. During this time, the Salvadoran government was accused of committing various atrocities and war crimes, such as the massacre at El Mozote. Abrams however, the Assistant Secretary of Human Rights for the US government, believed that these small violations were worth it, as a communist takeover of El Salvador would be even worse. As Mark Danner writes in his book *The Massacre at El Mozote*, "Abrams stood the human-rights argument on its head, contending that to argue for an aid cutoff was, in effect, to argue for a guerrilla victory, and that at the end of the day, however badly the Salvadoran government behaved, those collective atrocities could never approach the general disaster for human rights that an F.M.L.N. victory would represent."<sup>25</sup> In his eyes, a democratic government, no matter how imperfect or violent, would always respect human rights more than a communist regime.

This is how neoconservatives were able to approach human rights – it wasn't about the small violations but part of a much larger picture. Human rights for them is the security of democracy, liberty, and freedom. Establishing or protecting a community with these values was invaluable, especially at a time in which Americans believed communism threatened the sanctity and sovereignty of their nation. Nothing, not even the massacre of over 900 civilians, as the massacre at El Mozote was, could compare to the abuses that would be committed under a repressive communist government. Such was the Latin American foreign policy under the Reagan Administration – from the rebel contras in Nicaragua to the military coup d'état led by

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<sup>25</sup> Danner, Mark. *The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War*. London: Granta, 2005. Print.

Augusto Pinochet in Chile. Each was in the name of the promotion of American values in foreign nations, and each led to war crimes or the disappearances of civilians.

It is important to note that Elliott Abrams was later confirmed as the Assistant Secretary of State during the second term of the Reagan Administration. He was subsequently involved in the Iran - Contra affair, in which members of the United States government were charged with illegally selling arms to Iran in order to fund rebels fighting in Nicaragua. Abrams was facing several felony charges but instead pleaded guilty to two counts of withholding information from congress, misdemeanors. He was sentenced to two years probation and 100 hours of community service. Then, in 1992, he was pardoned by then President George H. W. Bush. In June of 2001, “National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice announced today the appointment of Elliott Abrams as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Democracy, Human Rights, and International Operations at the National Security Council.”<sup>26</sup>

### **The Kirkpatrick Doctrine**

Another key role player in this neoconservative human rights revolution was Jeane Kirkpatrick, a foreign policy advisor for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and then his Ambassador to the United Nations. Kirkpatrick won the favor of Reagan with her 1979 essay titled “Dictatorships and Double Standards,” in which she criticized the Carter Administration’s foreign policy while simultaneously arguing for the liberalization of authoritarian regimes in order to fight encroaching communism and socialism. In keeping with neoconservative human rights ideology, she wrote, “although most governments in the world are, as they always have been, autocracies of one kind or another, no idea holds greater sway in the mind of educated Americans than the

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<sup>26</sup> "Statement by the Press Secretary." *National Archives and Records Administration*. National Archives and Records Administration, 2 Dec. 2002. Web.

belief that it is possible to democratize governments, anytime, anywhere, under any circumstances.”<sup>27</sup> It was her personal belief that allying with authoritarian regimes with democratization in mind, the United States would be able to fight communism. Her 1979 essay came to be known as the “Kirkpatrick Doctrine,” and heavily influenced the foreign policy of the Reagan Administration.

Jerome J. Shestack places Kirkpatrick’s argument as a discussion surrounding national security in his piece “Human Rights, the National Interest, and U. S. Foreign Policy.” Shestack writes that Kirkpatrick believed “that national security interests required alliances with any state that was adverse to the Soviet Union,” keeping with the East vs. West dichotomy. Shestack agrees that national security interests trump human rights in times of peril but regards Kirkpatrick’s view as extreme.

Kirkpatrick’s foreign policy can be broken down to a “totalitarian-authoritarian model.” In this model, “Communist regimes were totalitarian and hostile, and their abuses were decried. Anti-Communist regimes were authoritarian and friendly; they were to be supported economically and militarily, and their human rights abuses were to be downplayed,”<sup>29</sup> writes Shestack. This shows immediate preference for authoritarian regimes and their ability to be liberalized. In Kirkpatrick’s eyes, it is possible to influence an authoritarian regime to adopt policies that center around freedom – a form of human rights for her. For communist regimes, this is impossible.

Shestack dives deeper into what Kirkpatrick believes is the prime objective for governments, especially that of the United States. He goes on to write that Kirkpatrick believed

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<sup>27</sup> Kirkpatrick, Jeane J. "Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics." *Foreign Affairs* 61.1 (1982): 219. Web.

<sup>28</sup> Shestack, Jerome J. "Human Rights, the National Interest, and U.S. Foreign Policy." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 506 (1989): 17-29. JSTOR. Web.

<sup>29</sup> Shestack, Jerome J. "Human Rights, the National Interest, and U.S. Foreign Policy."

that “a government's primary moral and political duty is to prevail in the struggle of us – the good – against them – the evil. In that struggle, the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”<sup>30</sup> In her eyes, the United States primary moral and political duty is to prevail in the fight against communism. To do this, it was necessary to back regimes who shared the same duty. For the United States, the fight against the Soviet Union was fought in battles across Latin and South America, in the form of backing specific groups that held one main vital US interest, no matter their human rights record – they were anti-communist.

### **Post Cold War Neoconservatism**

With the end of the Cold War came the end of the communist threat. The United States had effectively bankrupted the Soviet Union, leading to its dissolution. The West had won its fight against the East, marking a time for a new foreign policy. Here, is where neoconservatives split. The neoconservative mission had been to fight the spread of communism, yet neoconservatives had spent much less time creating post-Cold War foreign policy. David Hoogland Noon writes that the neoconservative movement split into two camps with the fall of the Soviet Union: “Some argued that a narrower definition of the national interest best suited the new times. Others saw an opportunity, with the Soviets gone, to spread American influence across the globe in the form of crusades for democracy.”<sup>31</sup> Older neoconservatives believed that with communism defeated, it was most beneficial for the United States to shrink its definition of national interest. For decades the United States had been fighting the Soviet Union through spreading American values abroad. With the threat of the Soviet Union gone, older neoconservatives believed this was no longer necessary. One neoconservative who held this

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<sup>30</sup> Shestack, Jerome J. "Human Rights, the National Interest, and U.S. Foreign Policy."

<sup>31</sup> Noon, David Hoogland. "Cold War Revival: Neoconservatives and Historical Memory in the War on Terror." *American Studies* 48.3 (2007): 75-99. Web.

thought was Jeane Kirkpatrick, who said the United States could now be a “normal country in a normal time.” Through her and the older generation of neoconservatives eyes, the United States had won. It was time for the nation to focus on American issues, reverting away from attaching to foreign countries or playing world police.

The younger generation, made up of neoconservatives such as Elliott Abrams, Paul Wolfowitz, Robert Kagan, and William Kristol, disagreed heavily with this notion. Noon writes that “they believed that with the Soviet Union out of the way, the US was free to actively spread its own democratic values around the world.”<sup>32</sup> These neoconservatives believed that it was the responsibility of the United States to make the world a better place by continuing to promote American values abroad. Noon makes note of writing by Robert Kagan, which states that it was imperative to build “upon the successes of the cold war to create a permanent ‘benevolent domination’—in other words, world hegemony.”<sup>33</sup> A world led by the United States would be a world that reveled in democracy and freedom, thereby a world that advocated and enforced human rights values. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was no reason to withdraw from the human rights and foreign policy set by the Reagan Administration. If anything, it was a reason to continue promoting democracy throughout the world.

It is important to note that the belief that it is the responsibility of the United States of America to lead the world comes from the notion that it is the only remaining superpower after the fall of the Soviet Union. The United States is in this position because of the global power they hold. Neoconservatives believed that it was more important to use this power to influence the world than it was to sit back and leave the world to their own devices.

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<sup>32</sup> Noon, David Hoogland. "Cold War Revival: Neoconservatives and Historical Memory in the War on Terror."

<sup>33</sup> Noon, David Hoogland. "Cold War Revival: Neoconservatives and Historical Memory in the War on Terror."

This sentiment was highly echoed in a piece written by Robert Kagan and William Kristol in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, published in 1996. The piece, titled “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy” was focused on laying claim to America’s role as benevolent dominator of the world. It was a direct response to perceived foreign policy complacency after the fall of the Soviet Union. First, it lampooned foreign policy under the Reagan Administration by recognizing the policies that were used to spar with the Soviets, such as “large increases in defense spending, resistance to communist advances in the Third World, and greater moral clarity and purpose in U.S. foreign policy.”<sup>34</sup> This “greater moral clarity and purpose” is referring to an emphasis on human rights. In the eyes of Kagan and Kristol, the Reagan Administration’s foreign policy focused on moral issues – language that often finds itself surrounded around human rights. Kagan and Kristol particularly highlight that Reagan “refused to accept the limits on American power imposed by the domestic political realities that others assumed were fixed.”<sup>35</sup> For them, this refusal to accept the limits of American power is intertwined with human rights, as it is involved with the spreading of American values. What was so fantastic about the Reagan Administration was their ability to spread American beliefs and morals throughout the globe.

For Kristol and Kagan, securing global hegemony was based upon the moral confidence of the United States, combined with increased defense spending and a larger military. By their view, human rights was dependent on military strength. By creating a vast and expansive military, the largest in the world, to secure complete global power, the United States would be able to enforce their moral character and spread democracy. As they write, “The appropriate goal of American foreign policy, therefore, is to preserve that hegemony as far into the future as

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<sup>34</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy." *Foreign Affairs* 75.4 (1996): 18. Web.

<sup>35</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy."

possible. To achieve this goal, the United States needs a neo Reaganite foreign policy of military supremacy and moral confidence.”<sup>36</sup> Kristol and Kagan are arguing that it is beneficial for the world as a whole for the United States to be leaders of this “benevolent hegemony” and to “preserve that hegemony as far into the future as possible.” Preserving this hegemony leads to less human rights abuses over a longer period of time, something that would be beneficial for the United States and the globe as a whole.

Kagan and Kristol also seek to define the relationship between American moral goals and fundamental national interests. This can be characterized by the policy of democracy promotion. Foreign policy in regards to American morality is the promotion of Democratic principles worldwide. National interests in regards to foreign policy are one in the same, as creating stable democratic governments benefit the United States. This is directly spelled out, as they write, “The United States achieved its present position of strength not by practicing a foreign policy of live and let live, nor by passively waiting for threats to arise, but by actively promoting American principles of governance abroad – democracy, free markets, respect for liberty.”<sup>37</sup> This reasoning is exactly why the United States is the perfect fit for global leader. The United States of America is the world’s only superpower because it actively promoted American principles and values abroad. It is also important to note their use of the word “threats.” For Kristol and Kagan, threats to American society are the same battles fought in Latin America. To them, the foreign policy of the Reagan Administration prevented such threats from harming the United States, or the world.

Kagan and Kristol then make a direct appeal for global security and human rights. In doing so, they first acknowledge conservatives tendency to revert back to America as being a

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<sup>36</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy."

<sup>37</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy."



“city on a hill.” They also invoke John Quincy Adams, stating that conservatives align with the saying that the United States should not go “abroad in search of monsters to destroy.”<sup>38</sup> Kagan and Kristol respond, writing, “But why not? The alternative is to leave monsters on the loose, ravaging and pillaging to their heart’s content, as Americans stand by and watch.”<sup>39</sup> Kristol and Kagan are directly advocating for the United States to become the world’s leading global power in the name of protecting human rights. They argue for American intervention because of this same American moral character. It is the duty of the United States to continue to prevent the spread of ideology or regimes that purport ideology that directly conflicts with American principles. These so called “monsters” violate human rights, and should be stopped. It is better for the world for the United States to be at the helm. Kagan and Kristol take it one step further, writing that “a policy of sitting atop a hill and leading by example becomes in practice a policy of cowardice and dishonor.”<sup>40</sup> With the United States’s power, it would be cowardly and dishonorable to not lead the world and protect it from harmful ideology or abuses. In order to be the city atop the hill, the United States needs to enforce beliefs around the world that put the United States at the top of the hill in the first place.

Robert Kagan and William Kristol would go on to form Project for a New American Century, a neoconservative think tank based in Washington D.C. Their essay, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” was the basis for this group, which centered around creating United States foreign policy. Project For a New American Century frequently advocated for the removal of Saddam Hussein from power and included members such as Elliott Abrams, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz. These characters would actively pursue a neo-Reaganite foreign policy not too far into the future.

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<sup>38</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy."

<sup>39</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy."

<sup>40</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy."

From the late 1970's leading up until the 1990's, neoconservatives dominated United States foreign policy decisions. Their time can be characterized by aggressive expansionism and global democracy promotion, centered around the notion that to live in a democratic country is to participate in positive human rights discourse. Their human rights policy was largely focused on deterring Soviet and communist development, and containing the threat to the eastern hemisphere. In doing so, the United States saw human rights as a long term investment, choosing to back authoritarian regimes with poor human rights records in order to promote democratic principles, regarding this as better for human rights overall compared to a communistic takeover.

## 2. Neoconservative Human Rights and the Iraq War

### Democracy as Human Rights

A definition of human rights that focuses on the exceptionalism of specific populations or, more extreme, ideas is often excluded in the academic understanding of universal human rights. The post-9/11 neoconservative definition of human rights, rather, flips accepted rights language on its head. American neoconservatives coopted universal human rights discourse to further an American political agenda. Their influence on the Bush Administration started the Iraq War by veiling the promotion of American democracy in human rights language and extreme attention to American exceptionalism.

Nicolas Guilhot, a political scientist, writes on the neoconservative definition of human rights in his article titled “Limiting Sovereignty or Producing Governmentality? Two Human Rights Regimes in U.S. Political Discourse” in which he separates neoconservative thought from the widely accepted, unilateral definition of human rights. In this separation, Guilhot discovers the origins of American exceptionalism as well as outlines the process that leads to the promotion of democracy internationally – the ultimate American human rights policy.

Guilhot first differentiates between neoconservative thought and universal human rights by observing international law. He makes the claim that international law is widely thought to be the foundation of universal human rights; however, neoconservative thought disagrees. “This [neoconservative] discourse is also an explicit critique of legalistic understandings of human rights. It constantly mobilizes realist critiques of legal formalism to emphasize the legal deficit of international law and to extend it to human rights,”<sup>41</sup> writes Guilhot, expressing the

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<sup>41</sup> Guilhot, Nicolas. "Limiting Sovereignty or Producing Governmentality? Two Human Rights Regimes in U.S. Political Discourse." *Constellations* 15.4 (2008): 502-16. Web.

aforementioned contempt for international law practice. Guilhot remarks that this contempt is then transferred to human rights, as neoconservatives embrace the “legal deficit.” But what exactly is this legal deficit? In neoconservative eyes, international law can only be enforced if countries are willing to participate. Guilhot continues, “‘the content of international law is uncertain,’ as Joshua Muravchik writes. At that level, legal validity is entirely dependent upon the consent of those who recognize it: in other words, international law is hardly law. At best, it is a ‘positive international morality.’”<sup>42</sup> This mention of “consent” creates the notion of at least two parties, willing and able to participate in legal discourse. These two parties, or states, must both acknowledge the presence of international law for it to be binding. A simple refusal to obey international law unhinges the structure upon which it stands – creating an international morality or stringent set of values. These values are then obeyed by some, but not all. Neoconservative discourse pins this argument against international law and then transfers it to human rights. If international law can be described as a “positive international morality,” so can human rights.

In separating human rights from international law, however, universality is destroyed. Rather than come from an international, unified body designated to enforce natural rights, these rights must now come from and be enforced by the state. As Guilhot notes, “the existence of rights is tightly subordinated to a pre-existing political community. Human rights are not formal declarations or international treaties: they essentially designate specific forms of political organization that characterize primarily Western democracies.”<sup>43</sup> Rights, in this context, are not innate nor bound by laws; rather, they are tied to specific social normalities. Human rights “define routinized social practices.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Guilhot, Nicolas. "Limiting Sovereignty or Producing Governmentality?"

<sup>43</sup> Guilhot, Nicolas. "Limiting Sovereignty or Producing Governmentality?"

<sup>44</sup> Guilhot, Nicolas. "Limiting Sovereignty or Producing Governmentality?"

An exclusion of international binding directly characterizes the human rights policy of the American government. The United States repeatedly refuses to prescribe to this “pre-existing political community” as it relates to human rights. For example, the Law of the Sea Treaty, which has been ratified by 161 parties and governs international waterways, has not been ratified by the United States of America. Among others include the treaty forming the International Criminal Court, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.<sup>45</sup> The failure to ratify these treaties and covenants are characterized by a direct rebuttal to international bodies holding power over the United States of America. These treaties, which represent solutions to issues important to the international community as well as the United States, are seen as an encroachment on American sovereignty. In rejecting these forms of international human rights, American citizens rights are upheld through the state government.

According to Guilhot, there are two resulting consequences. First, human rights are equated to state power. In such system, “the defence of the national interest of democracies is not only compatible, but also equivalent to the defence of human rights.” Secondly, “human rights cannot be politically or ideologically neutral.”<sup>46</sup> Because human rights are not a policy supported by international law, they become a policy that supports democratic governance. This leads to a singular form of human rights in Guilhot’s eyes: A human rights policy can only be a policy of democracy promotion.<sup>47</sup>

Democracy promotion manifested itself in neoconservative thought through the formation of Project for a New American Century in 1997 – a collective made up of influential, high-ranking neoconservative political thinkers. Members included Elliott Abrams, Paul

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<sup>45</sup> Robillard, Kevin. "10 Treaties the U.S. Hasn't Ratified." *POLITICO*. POLITICO, n.d. Web. 12 Dec. 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Guilhot, Nicolas. "Limiting Sovereignty or Producing Governmentality?"

<sup>47</sup> Guilhot, Nicolas. "Limiting Sovereignty or Producing Governmentality?"

Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld among others. In their statement of principles, the project called for a revitalization of the American military and to enforcing democracy promotion as a governmental foreign policy. In a small bid for human rights, they wrote, “We need to promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad.”<sup>48</sup> This idea of political and economic freedom embodies the core of human rights for neoconservatives. In their eyes, economic freedom adhered to laissez-faire and neoliberal principles while political freedom was represented by free and democratic elections. Without making a direct call to protecting human rights of those across the globe, the Project for a New American Century made it clear that they believed in the protection of Western values.

A year later, a similar group with the same core members was founded as the Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf. The mission of the group was to promote the stabilization of the Middle East. The way to do this, according to the Committee, was to remove Saddam Hussein from power. On February 19, 1998, the Committee sent an open letter to President Clinton, urging him to take action against Saddam Hussein because of his threat to national security, with specific note of his ability “to develop biological and chemical munitions.”<sup>49</sup> The letter also mentioned Hussein’s willingness to use these munitions “against his own people,”<sup>50</sup> once again calling to human rights in an indirect manner. While President Clinton may not have acted in the interests of the Committee, the election of President George W. Bush and a post-9/11 America saw many changes to political and foreign policy that did.

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<sup>48</sup> Various. "Statement of Principles." Project for a New American Century, 3 June 1997. Web. May 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Various. "Open Letter to the President." *Open Letter to the President - 2-19-98*. Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf, 19 Feb. 1998. Web. May 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Various. "Open Letter to the President."

## Human Rights in the Bush Administration

Professor Mary Stuckey and Joshua Ritter echo Guillhot in their piece “George Bush, Human Rights, and American Democracy.” Together, they connect the Bush Administration and human rights, finding ties to neoliberalism and neoconservatism. They write, “Neoliberal and neoconservative conceptions of ‘democracy’ are thus inherently tied to how human rights function in Bush's discourse; that is, market fundamentalism and neoliberal orthodoxy are the ‘democratic’ freedoms and rights to which Bush refers, and these rights become debased into the freedom to consume under the veneer of a certain ‘moral’ order.”<sup>51</sup> Stuckey’s democratic rights and freedoms are Guillhot’s consequences. This “‘moral’ order” Stuckey refers to are the “routinized social practices.” Therefore, human rights, under the Bush Administration, are distinctly different from international human rights. American human rights such as “market fundamentalism and neoliberal orthodoxy” are specific to American citizens, not the international community. Through this process of the breakdown of international law as well as the equation of human rights with state power, the only place this version of human rights can then go is outward.

Stuckey and Ritter accent Guillhot perfectly through their depiction of the relationship between neoconservatives and human rights. Playing deeper into the idea of moral values, they write, “Neoconservatives desire to restore a sense of moral purpose to society by a type of ‘social control through construction of a climate of consent around a coherent set of moral values.’”<sup>52</sup> It becomes clear that the human rights definition for neoconservatives is based on social interaction, and how governing bodies and states are supposed to interact with one another. Again there is a focus on consent regarding rights – implying that two or more parties must be

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<sup>51</sup> Stuckey, Mary E., and Joshua R. Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy." *Presidential Studies Quarterly Presidential Studies Q* 37.4 (2007): 646-66. Web.

<sup>52</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."

privity to the concept of rights coming from the international community. Without this compliance, as noted before, rights come from the state. Instead of consenting to an international human rights agenda, neoconservatives seek to create a climate of consent of the American people around a “coherent set of moral values” in order to create American “human rights.”

Interestingly, Stuckey and Ritter also outline the relationship between neoconservative human rights and what they call “military humanism.” They first describe the effect neoliberalism has on human rights, writing, “Human rights function within neoconservative discourse as a powerful example of what must occur rhetorically in order for neoliberal ideology to remain effective.”<sup>53</sup> This creates the notion that the sole purpose of neoconservative human rights is to create a space in which neoliberalism can flourish. For instance, creating a democracy. In creating this space, “a set of ‘moral’ values is rhetorically constructed around neoliberal ideology in an attempt to bring order to the chaos that is actually created by neoliberalism. These moral values, incidentally, also serve to justify any military interventions as ‘military humanism.’”<sup>54</sup> These moral values are neoconservative human rights.

Under the Bush Administration, groups like the Project for a New American Century and Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf were dominant – many members received policy positions within the administration. Stuckey and Ritter write that “From the early days of his administration, Bush offered the promise that ‘the United States will continue to stand for greater consolidation of pluralism and religious freedom, wider access to information, and respect for human rights and for the rule of law.’”<sup>55</sup> This promise, one can argue, can be attributed to a letter written by two dozen leading conservatives, including Elliott Abrams, to President Bush in January of 2001. The letter urged President Bush to adopt a strong human rights policy and

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<sup>53</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."

<sup>54</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."

<sup>55</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."



provided advice on how to do so: “American leadership must never remain indifferent to tyranny, must never be agnostic about the virtues of political and economic freedom, must always be concerned with the fortunes of fragile democracies.”<sup>56</sup> Here again is the language of “political and economic freedom,” centerfold of the neoconservative human rights discourse. Less subtle, however, is Abrams’s focus on “fragile democracies,” directly opposite his use of the word “tyranny.” In this letter, Abrams is asking President Bush to openly admonish those who oppose American values while helping those who share “political and economic freedoms.”

Similar to the letters from Project for a New American Century and Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf, the correspondence between Abrams and President Bush promoted the perspective of America as the largest, most powerful nation in the world with a duty to spread democracy and prevent harm to other smaller nations.

### **Post 9/11 Human Rights Rhetoric**

Human rights rhetoric, however, changed in American governmental policy after 9/11. Rather than seeing the attacks on September 11th as a continuation of violence and destabilization in the Middle East that had tortured the region for decades, the Bush Administration saw 9/11 as a human rights abuse. As President Bush himself said, “The terrible tragedies of September 11 served as a grievous reminder that the enemies of freedom do not respect or value individual human rights. Their brutal attacks were an attack on these very rights.”<sup>57</sup> In this respect, human rights became a battle for freedom against those who sought to strip it from the American people. President Bush characterized the events after 9/11, including

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<sup>56</sup> Mufson, Steven. "Bush Urged to Champion Human Rights." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 26 Jan. 2001. Web. May 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."

the War on Terror, as a battle between “freedom” and “fear ” — freedom being the United States and human rights; fear being the generic “terrorist.”

There is specific evidence of President Bush alluding to this, as freedom played a key role in his presidential discourse. The President’s 2006 Proclamation on Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights week stated, “The advance of freedom is the story of our time, and new chapters are being written before our eyes. Around the world, freedom is replacing tyranny and giving men and women the opportunity to enjoy lives of purpose and dignity.”<sup>58</sup> Here, President Bush determines that living with “purpose and dignity” means living in a democracy. In order to experience a life characterized by “purpose and dignity”, individuals must live in a society characterized by freedom and liberty. He continues, “Because Americans are committed to the God-given value of every life, we cherish the freedom of every person in every nation and strive to promote respect for human rights.”<sup>59</sup> As Americans, President Bush purports, we are exceptional and must promote human rights where they are not enforced – countries which are not democracies.

Iraq in 2003 was undeniably encountering a humanitarian crisis. The practices of the Saddam regime were brutal and inhumane, such as political assassinations and disappearances. Additionally, foreign conflicts leading up to the War in Iraq played a significant role as well. “A 2003 UN report noted that “the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War and sanctions took a heavy toll on the health and education sectors, which had previously been among the best developed in the region”<sup>60</sup>. Earthquakes, floods, and droughts also contributed to the upheaval and displacement of Iraqi civilians.

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<sup>58</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."

<sup>59</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."

<sup>60</sup> Horowitz, Jonathan. "Human Rights as a Weapon of War." *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*. New York: NYU, 2015. 147-71. Print.

While the United States spearheaded the campaign in Iraq, the United Nations passed Resolution 1511 in October 2003 unanimously, urging countries to contribute to a multinational force committed to deposing Saddam Hussein and returning power to the Iraqi people. In a short statement to the American people, President Bush said, “The world has an opportunity — and a responsibility — to help the Iraqi people build a nation that is stable, secure, and free. This resolution will help marshal even more international support for the development of a new, democratic Iraq.”<sup>61</sup> It was one year earlier, however, in which President Bush outlined his plan for combatting those who opposed America and Western ideals.

### **Analyzing the 2002 State of the Union Address**

In his 2002 State of the Union Address, President Bush unveiled his infamous “Axis of Evil,” a grouping of North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. It was asserted that these states were in possession of or trying to possess weapons of mass destruction. What made the state of Iraq “evil” was its continual flaunting of hostility towards America and its support of terror. In her book, *Cheap Threats: Why the United States Struggles to Coerce Weak States*, Dianne Pfundstein Chamberlain posits that this branding was a part of a preemptive policy, created in order to protect Americans from foreign threats. Examining the State of the Union, Chamberlain writes, “Bush asserted that ‘the United States of America will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons. . . . We are protected from attack only by vigorous action abroad, and increased vigilance at home.’”<sup>62</sup> It is this language that links security to human rights.

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<sup>61</sup> Bush, George W. "Statement by the President." White House Archives, 16 Oct. 2003. Web. May 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Chamberlain, Dianne Pfundstein. "Cheap Threats." Georgetown University Press, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

Bush used thinly veiled human rights rhetoric of words such as “protection” to create a preemptive human rights, not security, agenda. In a world that saw the September 11 attacks as an attack on American sovereignty, values, and rights, Bush’s preemptive human rights agenda sought to prevent such an attack from happening ever again. The prevention of another wide scale attack on American culture became the focal point for domestic human rights policy. By preemptively engaging with Iraq, American rights would not be threatened. The policy, however, would be characterized by “vigorous action abroad,” as well as “increased vigilance.”<sup>63</sup> Later in the address, President Bush is seen using another instance of “protection.” A large priority, he states, “is to do everything possible to protect our citizens and strengthen our nation against the ongoing threat of another attack.”<sup>64</sup>

A direct absorption of human rights language comes later in the address, as President Bush makes the statement that in the coming years, “America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.”<sup>65</sup> Here, President Bush uses universality to create a bridge between American and Iraqi citizens. His use of the word “everywhere” is meant to support inclusion, especially in regards to the Iraqi people. By “defending liberty and justice,” President Bush imagines that the American government will be defending human rights in Iraq. Liberty and justice represent the opposite of the Hussein regime in neoconservative eyes. What “liberty and justice” does represent is democracy.

President Bush takes his statements one step further, claiming the rights that America stands for. He says, “America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance.” Again, in claiming that America stands firm

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<sup>63</sup> Bush, George W. "The State of the Union Address." *NPR.com*. NPR, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Bush, George W. "The State of the Union Address."

<sup>65</sup> Bush, George W. "The State of the Union Address."

for these values, President Bush is stating that these values represent democracy. In order to spread these values, the United States of America must spread democracy.

On top of this, however, President Bush made sure to include human rights abuses purported by the Iraqi government. He went on, saying that Iraq was “a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens -- leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children.”<sup>66</sup> The imagery used by the Bush Administration was meant to tap into the hearts of American citizens. “Mothers huddled over their dead children” would evoke empathy in the American public and would create a conversation around our duty to put an end to atrocities happening in the Middle East – specifically those carried out by Saddam Hussein. The Bush Administration uses the language of “mothers” in a gendered approach as well. As an appeal to the American public, President Bush used the imagery of “mothers,” something the American public would be familiar with. Rather than just exclaim that human rights had been violated with the murder of Iraqi citizens, President Bush brought in familiarity and horror in his address. In this vein, Saddam Hussein was not only threatening the human rights of Iraqi citizens, but was continually threatening the human rights of American citizens as well.

### **Starting the War**

Stuckey and Ritter argue that President Bush was able to use human rights discourse such as this to further an agenda ultimately subverted by the same language. The administration’s emphasis on the rights of the Iraqi people as reason for starting the Iraq War is paradoxical to Stuckey and Ritter due to the war instead leading to horrific human rights abuses led by the American government. As Stuckey and Ritter write, “American military power was used only to

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<sup>66</sup> Bush, George W. "The State of the Union Address."

support its neoconservative mission, which was the defense of neoliberalism, under the guise of international human rights.”<sup>67</sup>

Jonathan Horowitz takes this one step further in his book *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*. In a chapter titled “Human Rights as a Weapon of War,” Horowitz makes the claim that the Bush Administration weaponized human rights to their benefit, ultimately creating the War in Iraq, using human rights to influence public and political opinion.

First, Horowitz notes, the Bush Administration made the claim that Saddam Hussein had access to weapons of mass destruction. In this hands, the administration argued that democratic allies in the Middle East, as well as American national security would be put at severe risk. On this basis, it was an American moral obligation to prevent a devastating attack from the Iraqi regime. Horowitz writes, “the administration layered the incontestable facts of Saddam Hussein’s human rights abuses to depict the president as a tyrant with no regard for humanity, one whose removal from power would benefit not only the Iraqi people but also the world at large.”<sup>68</sup> In removing Saddam Hussein from power, the United States would avert possible nuclear disaster. Of course it was later discovered that Iraq was never in possession of weapons of mass destruction and the claims were largely discredited.

Second, the Bush Administration asserted that there were ties between the Iraqi regime and Al-Qaeda. In invoking Al-Qaeda — the terrorist group responsible for the attacks on September 11, 2001 — the administration tapped into public fear that Americans were not safe in their own homes. It also created the idea that the United States would be able to bring those who carried out the attacks to justice. Reports that Al-Qaeda and the Iraqi regime had ties were also discredited as false.

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<sup>67</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."

<sup>68</sup> Horowitz, Jonathan. "Human Rights as a Weapon of War."

The Bush Administration also used vivid descriptions of abuses in order to explain to the American public that it was the United States duty to intervene in Iraq. In recounting human rights abuses carried out by Saddam's regime, President Bush said in a radio address that "dissidents in Iraq are tortured, imprisoned, and sometimes just disappear; their hands, feet, and tongues are cut off; their eyes are gouged out; and female relatives are raped in their presence."<sup>69</sup> In prefacing this statement, President Bush claimed how he had learned of these abuses. "We know from human rights groups,"<sup>70</sup> he stated.

As another strategy method, the United States used relief efforts as an active counterinsurgency tool. Instead of using relief efforts to provide a positive quality of life for Iraqi civilians, the United States government used it as a tactic to garner Iraqi support. The 2006 Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency went as far to say that to gain support the American Military had to "defeat insurgents or render them irrelevant, uphold the rule of law, and provide a basic level of essential services and security for the populace."<sup>71</sup> This focus on providing a basic level of essential services was a thin veil of human rights used to further the American political agenda.

The United States relief efforts included congressionally funded programs such as the Commander's Emergency Response Program, the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund, Iraq Freedom Fund, and the Commander's Humanitarian Relief and Reconstruction Program funds. Such projects would be tasked with "repairing public buildings, clearing roadways, and providing needed supplies to hospitals and schools."<sup>72</sup> This was all championed under the "hearts and minds" campaign, set at winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people.

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<sup>69</sup> Horowitz, Jonathan. "Human Rights as a Weapon of War."

<sup>70</sup> Horowitz, Jonathan. "Human Rights as a Weapon of War."

<sup>71</sup> Horowitz, Jonathan. "Human Rights as a Weapon of War."

<sup>72</sup> Horowitz, Jonathan. "Human Rights as a Weapon of War."

## Reflection

With the drastic implications of the Iraq War affecting the region today, it is easy to look at the Iraq War as a disastrous mistake made by the American government. At the same time, however, it is clear that Iraqi opposition leaders were calling for international intervention in the hopes that Saddam Hussein would be ousted from power. As Ahmed Chalabi writes, “Personalities whose political record is replete with anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist acts call for further international intervention in Iraq usually under the guise of UN action. Iraqi patriots welcome the sight and sound of foreign fighter aircraft flying over their country.”<sup>73</sup> Chalabi was an Iraqi political figure who led the purge of Saddam’s regime and provided the United States with intelligence documents.

Chalabi also makes a call for an establishment of human rights. His piece, *Opposing Saddam Hussein*, is cry for help from the international community. Saddam Hussein, he argues, is destroying the country through his “bloodthirsty” regime. His piece, which was written in the mid 90’s, can be seen almost as a premonition for what the Bush Administration hoped to establish. “Looking into the future,” he writes, “the people of Iraq are seeking a democratic, constitutional, parliamentary and pluralistic system, guaranteeing human rights within a federal structure as a formula for the Iraqi state.”<sup>74</sup> It is this vision the Bush Administration hoped to create with the invasion in 2003 - a free Iraqi state.

It is often overlooked how reviled of a dictator Saddam Hussein was. In an obituary by the New York Times, Neil MacFarquhar wrote, “The despot, known as Saddam, had oppressed Iraq for more than 30 years, unleashing devastating regional wars and reducing his once

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<sup>73</sup> Chalabi, Ahmed. "Opposing Saddam Hussein." *The Brown Journal of Foreign Affairs* 1.1 (1994): 119-30. JSTOR. Web.

<sup>74</sup> Chalabi, Ahmed. "Opposing Saddam Hussein."



promising, oil-rich nation to a claustrophobic police state.”<sup>75</sup> There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein ruled brutally and vastly harmed the people he ruled over.

While many parties opposed Saddam’s rule, a large amount of Iraqi civilians might not have called for intervention from the international community. Information and requests for help from opposition parties were enough for the Bush Administration to believe something had to be done the Iraqi people. Once again, it was the administration’s belief they had a moral obligation to help those who were suffering.

It is also important to remember, however, that neoconservatives succeeded in creating a war that would last for over a decade, killing thousands of American troops, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians. As Muhammad Idrees Ahmad writes in his book, *Road to Iraq*, “the neoconservatives succeeded because they operate within a political consensus that sees US global dominance as the desired end and military force as the necessary, if not preferred, means.”<sup>76</sup> This would ultimately shape United States foreign policy for the entirety of the Bush Administration — a total of 8 years.

All in all, the Bush Administration used human rights as means to achieve political gains and assert the United States as the leader of freedom and democracy. Stuckey and Ritter write that “by strategically wielding human rights throughout his presidency and by using human rights to amplify his use of association and dissociation, Bush connects his actions in important ways to the foundational myths of American Democracy.”<sup>77</sup> They posit that President Bush used human rights as a way to affirm the American identity as the frontrunner of liberty and by doing

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<sup>75</sup> Macfarquhar, Neil. "Saddam Hussein, Defiant Dictator Who Ruled Iraq With Violence and Fear, Dies." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 29 Dec. 2006. Web. May 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Ahmad, Muhammad Idrees. *The Road to Iraq: The Making of a Neoconservative War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014. Print.

<sup>77</sup> Stuckey and Ritter. "George Bush, <Human Rights> , and American Democracy."

so, reinforce American exceptionalism. However, in doing so, the United States managed to subvert its own political identity by approaching the Iraq War from a human rights standpoint.

The Iraq War has not been remembered for its liberation of Saddam's regime or providing freedom for the Iraqi people, but rather images of torture and waterboarding at the hands of the American Military, detainees at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, and the ever growing institutionalization of Islamophobia. What has been remembered is the danger in equating human rights with state power and the tools used to create a decade long war.

### 3. Iraq as a “Humanitarian War”

The Iraq War has been characterized as a neoconservative war – one which was engineered in order to promote democracy in the Middle East. Some are quick to forget, however, how human rights played an integral role for many in regards to starting the war. The Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002 passed the Senate without amendment on October 11, 2002. It became public law on October 16th. In the Senate, the bill received 77 yes votes, 29 of which were Democrats. Yes votes came from senators such as Hillary Clinton, former Secretary of State John Kerry, and current Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer.<sup>78</sup> Regime change in Iraq was necessary, they thought. It was also imminent. The case for war, however, was not just made by neoconservatives. To many, fighting the Iraq War was necessary on humanitarian grounds.

#### **Left Leaning Arguments for Humanitarian Intervention**

Conversations surrounding humanitarianism and Iraq can be approached through three different methods. The first is through a philosophical lens – focusing on intellectual points surrounding the Saddam regime. The second focuses on humanitarianism through a political lens, in which human rights play a role in intervention for the benefit of the state intervening. Lastly, humanitarianism can be rights oriented and determined to provide a service to a group that needs it. All three of these were tackled by intellectuals and politicians in determining whether or not Iraq should be invaded on a humanitarian basis.

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<sup>78</sup> "Senate Roll Call: Iraq Resolution." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, 11 Oct. 2002. Web.

Christopher Hitchens, a notable leftist and contrarian was an intellectual who heavily advocated for the Iraq War on humanitarian grounds. In his essay, “The Case for Regime Change,” Hitchens lays out specific reasons for the need for military action in Iraq. First, he writes that the United States should invade because of “The beggaring of the infrastructure, the immiseration of the society, with the regime’s own turn to opportunism Islamism, presented the international community with the real possibility of an imploded Iraq, riven by sectarian differences and with a new lumpen underclass at the mercy of demagogy.”<sup>79</sup> The civilians, Hitchens argues, were in need for release from the brutal rule of Saddam Hussein. His rule had led to the effective breakdown of the state as a whole; infrastructure as well as society were crumbling.

For Hitchens, Iraq was presenting itself as a state close to failure. He outlines the difference between rogue states and failed states, and posits that without intervention, Iraq would soon become a failed state. His first point echoes that of Robert Kagan and William Kristol, as he writes, “Clearly, a superpower like the United States, and the world community in general, has several kinds of interest in preventing the occurrence of state failure. The first is obvious enough: it is something worse than callous to witness such developments as a spectator.”<sup>80</sup> This echoes their essay, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” regarding their sentiments as the United States as a bystander to global atrocities and human rights violations. The United States has the means to prevent and react to such – and can not herald itself as a champion of human rights as it watches a dictator torture his nation.

Second, Hitchens aims at the consequences of a failed state. He writes that “state failure or implosion may involve actual or attempted genocide, which nations signed to the Geneva

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<sup>79</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*. Berkeley: U of California, 2005. Print.

<sup>80</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

Convention are sworn to prevent and to punish.”<sup>81</sup> The United States, is of course, signed to the Geneva Convention. For Hitchens, it is important to intervene now as Iraq teeters on the edge of a rogue state, before Iraq fails and the United States must make measures to stop an active genocide or attempted genocide. Hitchens invokes Rwanda as a failed state that led to genocide and remarks that it would be in the United States best interest to prevent an atrocity such as that again.

Third, Hitchens argues that a failed state has ramifications for the region as a whole, not just the state itself. He writes that “state failure often drags neighboring countries into a “black hole.”<sup>82</sup> The failure of Iraq would see other Middle Eastern countries affected by civil war or conflict, such as the displacement of Iraqis and a refugee crisis. Hitchens also uses the example of the genocide in Rwanda leading to civil war in the Congo. Bringing other countries in the region to violence would only increase the likelihood of a United States intervention, with many more lives lost and much more rebuilding to do. In the interest of time, it would be the best decision to intervene before Iraq had fully devolved into a failed state.

The last point Hitchens makes is that Saddam Hussein had been a serious threat to the region for some time. Hussein gained power in the 1970’s, used sarin gas on the Kurds in the 1980’s, invaded Kuwait in the 1990’s, and supported Al Qaeda’s mission in the early 2000’s. Hitchens writes that “Saddam Hussein was not a newly invented enemy. He was one of the oldest foes, not just of the United States but of international norms. If he was not, in the vernacular of the argument, an “imminent” threat, he was certainly a permanent and serious

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<sup>81</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

<sup>82</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

one.”<sup>83</sup> According to Hitchens, it made sense for the United States to invade Iraq in hopes of changing the regime – for the betterment of the Iraqi people and the region as a whole.

Hitchens represents the philosophical side of approaching humanitarianism. While he is invested in the rights of the Iraqi people and the effects of the Saddam regime, he concludes his point through an abstract set of hypotheticals. Hitchens is excited by the failings of the regime and what it might come to mean in the long term. His method is prediction based on historical context and fact, analyzed through a what-if scenario.

An important politician who felt the same way as Christopher Hitchens was Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. In a speech to the House of Commons, Blair publicly advocated for the removal of Saddam Hussein from power on humanitarian grounds. First, Blair appealed to the detriments of the economic situation in Iraq. In his speech, he stated that Iraq was impoverished, with “60% of its population dependent on Food Aid. Thousands of children die needlessly every year from lack of food and medicine. Four million people out of a population of just 20 million are in exile.”<sup>84</sup> In a state that was heading for failure, the economic situation would only proceed to get worse. Blair argued that the state of Iraq was in a humanitarian crisis, and that it was the job of a coalition led by the United States to intervene in hopes of restoring a comfortable state of living for the Iraqi people.

Blair did not shy away from blasting the Hussein regime for their human rights abuses, as well. Hussein was responsible for the current economic situation in Iraq while simultaneously abusing citizens by violating their social and civil rights. Blair spoke to the “brutality of the repression” of the Hussein regime, saying “the death and torture camps, the barbaric prisons for political opponents, the routine beatings for anyone or their families suspected of disloyalty – are

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<sup>83</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

<sup>84</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

well documented. Just last week, someone slandering Saddam was tied to a lamp post in a street in Baghdad, his tongue cut out, mutilated and left to bleed to death, as a warning to others.”<sup>85</sup>

Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator who violated many international laws and the United Kingdom was more than willing to depose him through military force, along with the United States of America.

Tony Blair went on, referencing the freedom those in Great Britain experienced and the pleasures the citizens enjoyed. Iraqi citizens were not so lucky, he argued. “We take our freedom for granted. But imagine not to be able to speak or discuss or debate or even question the society you live in. To see friends and family taken away and never daring to complain. To suffer the humility of failing courage in face of pitiless terror. That is how the Iraqi people live. Leave Saddam in place and that is how they will continue to live,”<sup>86</sup> he said. What the Iraqi people were missing was the benefits bestowed upon the citizens of democracy. Without democracy, Iraqi citizens had no liberty or freedom. Without the democracy enjoyed by states like Great Britain or the United States, Iraq was devoid of human rights.

Blair represents the political side of approaching humanitarianism. His speech to the British House of Commons had the intent of persuasion. Blair was advocating for the toppling of the Saddam regime and invoking human rights in order to emphasise the necessity. Blair’s speech was a political act, aided and abetted by the utilization of human rights language. Later in his speech, Blair references past incidents with Saddam Hussein and the only way in which Saddam listened to international pressure. “What changed his mind?” Blair asks? “The threat of

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<sup>85</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

<sup>86</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

force.”<sup>87</sup> With this it becomes clear that Blair’s goal is military intervention in Iraq with humanitarianism as a leading political cause.

The need for military intervention is echoed by Thomas Cushman into his book, “A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for the War in Iraq.” The book, comprised of many essays by left leaning thinkers advocating for the war in Iraq based on humanitarian values, presents an insightful image of Saddam Hussein and his ferocious rule. The introduction, written by Cushman, lays an outline for the rest of the book, detailing exactly how important the removal of Saddam from power was. Cushman writes on Saddam, “For more than three decades, his crimes against humanity, wars of aggression, support of international terrorism, and volatility as a destabilizing force were tolerated, aided, and abetted by world powers and the international community for the sake of political expediency, stability, and material interests.”<sup>88</sup> Here, Cushman’s thinking falls directly in line with Christopher Hitchens. Saddam Hussein was by no means a new enemy to the United States of America, or world for that matter. He was, however, consistent in his attempts to violate international law and commit human rights abuses.

Cushman also understands the human rights from a perspective that isn’t rooted in American politics. His voice, along with the voices in his book, are important because they represent a different set of human rights than neoconservatives do. Cushman is less focused on the United States of America, and more focused on how Saddam Hussein affected the Iraqi people. Cushman writes that “coming to the rescue and aid of a people who had been subjected to decades of brutality and crimes against humanity is entirely consistent with the basic liberal principle of solidarity with the oppressed and the fundamental humanitarian principle of

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<sup>87</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

<sup>88</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.



rescue.”<sup>89</sup> Humanitarian intervention for the purpose of establishing a democracy is not what Cushman is writing about. He is writing that the state of Iraq falls well within the parameters of a humanitarian intervention on basic principles. It was the United States’ duty to protect the people of Iraq because they could.

Cushman then goes on to invoke human rights language that all members of advocacy work and human rights work understand easily. He writes that “The war can be seen as morally legitimate on grounds of basic human rights as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is the ethical basis for the international world order.”<sup>90</sup> By referencing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Cushman is distinctly stating that the state of Iraq was experiencing human rights atrocities that needed to be addressed, in a language that all politicians or non-governmental human rights workers could understand. This, is approaching humanitarianism through a rights-centered lens. Cushman is advocating for the use of military force strictly for the means of helping the Iraqi people.

### **Paul Wolfowitz and Iraq**

The war in Iraq was undoubtedly fought on humanitarian grounds, and should have been for many, conservatives and democrats alike. The war, however, was pushed by neoconservatives for other reasons. Paul Wolfowitz, a noted neoconservative and Deputy Secretary of Defense for the Bush Administration made this clear with the infamous 1992 “Defense Planning Guidance,” known to many as the Wolfowitz Doctrine. The document, which was lampooned and ultimately rewritten, focused heavily on American exceptionalism and how the United States could benefit from other regions around the world.

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<sup>89</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

<sup>90</sup> Cushman, Thomas. *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*.

The first mention of the Middle East has nothing to do with a national defence strategy. Rather, Wolfowitz saw fit to characterize the Middle East as most importantly an economic opportunity for the United States. He writes, “In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the region and preserve US and Western access to the region’s oil.”<sup>91</sup> First and foremost, Wolfowitz makes it clear that the United States’s relationship with the Middle East should be one of power and control. “Remaining the predominant outside power” is the first thing he mentions. This shows a knowledge of other “outside powers” in the region, and a competitiveness to outlast these other states. Secondly, Wolfowitz states directly that the United States must preserve their access to oil. In this document, there is no call to human rights or interest in the well being of the people of the Middle East. It is about how interactions with Middle Eastern countries can benefit the United States of America.

Wolfowitz goes on, again placing heavy emphasis on how to protect American benefits by creating peace. He places an emphasis on sustaining regional stability, presumably in order to maintain the relationship between the United States and Middle Eastern oil. Wolfowitz writes, “We also seek to deter further aggression in the region, foster regional stability, protect US nationals and property, and safeguard our access to international air and seaways.”<sup>92</sup> The same can be said about “deterring further aggression in the region.” Wolfowitz’s main goal is to create a Middle East that continues to supply the United States with oil. Here, however, Wolfowitz outlines other goals. He also places importance on “protecting US nationals and property,” as well as safeguarding access to international air and seaways.

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<sup>91</sup> Wolfowitz, Paul. "Defense Planning Guidance." *NSA Archives at George Washington University*. George Washington University, n.d. Web.

<sup>92</sup> Wolfowitz, Paul. "Defense Planning Guidance."

Lastly, Wolfowitz makes the claim that specific states uniting in the Middle East will conclude with detrimental outcomes for other states. He specifically mentions Iraq in a tone that purports “bad for business.” He writes, “As demonstrated by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, it remains fundamentally important to prevent a hegemon or alignment of powers from dominating the region. This pertains especially to the Arabian peninsula. Therefore, we must continue to play a strong role through enhanced deterrence and improved cooperative security.”<sup>93</sup> Wolfowitz is interested in keeping the Middle East sentient. In his ideal world, the Middle East will remain un-united while simultaneously continuing to flow oil to the United States and the rest of the Western world. The only unity Wolfowitz wishes for is a rallying around American interests.

Once the war had started, Wolfowitz had no problem invoking human rights in reference to the good the United States was doing in Iraq. A 2003 news article from the American Forces Press Service reported that “Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz urged Iraqi women's and human rights group representatives here today to continue their hard work and dedication ‘to make sure Iraq becomes a free country.’”<sup>94</sup> Wolfowitz was quoted while visiting Fatima al-Zahra Center for Women's Rights in Hilla, a town south of Baghdad. Wolfowitz praised the center, which had become the first Center focused around vocational training for women who had been widowed or were living in poverty. In speaking more, Wolfowitz directly correlates rights with democracy, stating that “The key to preventing another dictator is to participate in the political process and to work to ensure that all people's rights are protected.”<sup>95</sup> Here, he creates the distinction between a dictatorship and free democracy. His mentioning of preventing “another dictator” hinges upon securing rights for the citizens of Iraq. By providing disadvantaged women

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<sup>93</sup> Wolfowitz, Paul. "Defense Planning Guidance."

<sup>94</sup> Miles, Donna. "Deputy Secretary Praises Iraqi Women's and Human Rights Groups." *United States Department of Defense*. American Forces Press Service, 24 Oct. 2003. Web.

<sup>95</sup> Miles, Donna. "Deputy Secretary Praises Iraqi Women's and Human Rights Groups."

with vocational training, the women are empowered toward economic independence. As such, these women are much more likely to engage with the “political process” Wolfowitz mentions. He acknowledges that the United States is improving the lives of individuals while simultaneously laying the foundation for democracy – rights.

Only a month before his visit to Hilla, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz was speaking at a forum hosted by the *New Yorker* magazine at the New School University. His focus: defend the Bush Administration’s foreign policy to a largely anti-war, liberal audience. After being met with hisses and boos upon his introduction, as well as a man who rushed the stage and was carried out by security, Wolfowitz reminded those in attendance that “all that Iraqis were also now enjoying the right of free speech.”<sup>96</sup> Retort aside, much of Wolfowitz’s talk revolving around the reasons for invading Iraq centered around a concern for human rights. As written by the *New York Times*, “The United States waged war for three reasons, he said: the concern over Iraq's drive to obtain chemical, biological and nuclear weapons; Iraq's connections to terrorism; and Mr. Hussein's reign of terror that Mr. Wolfowitz said was responsible for perhaps a million Iraqi deaths.”<sup>97</sup> Before the United States intervened, Wolfowitz stated that Iraq was “a human rights nightmare.”<sup>98</sup>

The human rights rhetoric used by Wolfowitz in regards to Hilla and his conservation in New York are a stark contrast to his pre-war rhetoric regarding Iraq, as early as the 1970’s. David Milne writes in his piece “Intellectualism in US Diplomacy: Paul Wolfowitz and His Predecessors” that Wolfowitz had his eyes on regime change in Iraq thirty years before the Iraq War. He writes, “In the late 1970s, an ambitious young Pentagon analyst named Paul Dundes

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<sup>96</sup> Schmitt, Eric. "Wolfowitz Stands Fast Amid the Antiwarriors." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 21 Sept. 2003. Web.

<sup>97</sup> Schmitt, Eric. "Wolfowitz Stands Fast Amid the Antiwarriors."

<sup>98</sup> Schmitt, Eric. "Wolfowitz Stands Fast Amid the Antiwarriors."

Wolfowitz identified Iraq as a likely future threat to American interests. A trained political scientist and ardent anti-communist, Wolfowitz distrusted the ruthless Saddam Hussein and thought him susceptible to Soviet influence.”<sup>99</sup> This directly reflects neoconservative sentiment and the policy of containment adopted by the United States during the Cold War. Wolfowitz was keen on deposing Saddam because he felt the dictator as a threat to American ideals and saw Saddam as likely to be impacted by communism. Wolfowitz believed Saddam to be a threat because of his lack of democratic values.

Milne argues that Wolfowitz understood that Saddam’s despotism couldn’t be reason enough for United States involvement in Iraq. Instead he took a different approach, forming “a radical theory that the Middle East represented fertile ground on which to plant American-style values. He concluded that this oil-rich, Muslim-majority region would embrace westernization and that Israel represented a beacon of sort.”<sup>100</sup> Wolfowitz believed that because Israel had adopted American style democratic values, the rest of the Middle Eastern region was susceptible to the same. In doing so, Wolfowitz would be ridding the region of a dictator he believed easily influenceable by the Soviet Union while simultaneously spreading democracy to a state rich with oil reserves.

Wolfowitz saw his views validated as the United States invaded Iraq in August of 1990. He was livid, however, when instead of deposing Saddam, the United States withdrew forces without regime change. Milne writes that “In February 1998, he testified before a congressional committee that the ‘best opportunity to overthrow Saddam was lost in the month after the war.’ He viewed the president's decision to reject nation-building in Iraq as narrow-minded and

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<sup>99</sup> Milne, David. "Intellectualism in US Diplomacy: Paul Wolfowitz and His Predecessors." *International Journal* 62.3 (2007): 667-80. *JSTOR*. Web.

<sup>100</sup> Milne, David. "Intellectualism in US Diplomacy: Paul Wolfowitz and His Predecessors."

concluded that he lacked moral fibre.”<sup>101</sup> For Wolfowitz, a failure to promote democracy in Iraq is a failure to spread liberty and freedom, or a failure to share the American values with Iraqis that best represent human rights to the United States. This human rights rhetoric is vastly different than the rhetoric used by Wolfowitz regarding Hilla.

What Wolfowitz and other neoconservatives viewed as an opportunity to expand democratic freedom, President George H. W. Bush saw as an uncalled for attempt at promoting democracy in a foreign region that would cost American lives. In regards to criticism levied at him by Wolfowitz, Bush responded, "Whose life would be on my hands as the commander-in-chief because I, unilaterally, went beyond the international law, went beyond the stated mission, and said we're going to show that we're macho? We're going into Baghdad. We're going to be an occupying power - America in an Arab land - with no allies at our side. It would have been disastrous."<sup>102</sup> Here, Bush is sidelining the notion that as a superpower, it is the job of the United States to correct the shortcomings of the Saddam regime. Bush isn't concerned with exercising authority because the United States can. For him, deposing Saddam because the United States was physically capable was “macho” and unthoughtful.

Wolfowitz, however, saw this as well worth the price of establishing a democratic country in the Middle East. Milne writes that “Wolfowitz thought that America was better placed than any other nation to give Iraq a gentle nudge in the direction of liberty. The birth-pangs of democracy are not edifying, but this self-assured Pentagon staffer believed that the human costs of war were well worth paying.”<sup>103</sup> The Iraq War would be come to known as much more than a “gentle nudge in the direction of liberty” as it claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians, as well as the lives of thousands of United States soldiers.

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<sup>101</sup> Milne, David. "Intellectualism in US Diplomacy: Paul Wolfowitz and His Predecessors."

<sup>102</sup> Milne, David. "Intellectualism in US Diplomacy: Paul Wolfowitz and His Predecessors."

<sup>103</sup> Milne, David. "Intellectualism in US Diplomacy: Paul Wolfowitz and His Predecessors."

Wolfowitz demonstrates a clear change of tone regarding the Iraq War in his pre rhetoric and post invasion rhetoric in respect to human rights. His characterization of Saddam and his quest for democracy in Iraq can be described as a neoconservative looking to spread American values as a form of human rights is drastically different than the human rights language he used following the invasion of Iraq. As the United States fought the war, Wolfowitz shifted from democracy to language centered around the rights of oppressed people and how to protect those rights and ensure that they would be protected in the future.

The post invasion rhetoric used by Paul Wolfowitz can be aptly compared to the pre war rhetoric used by British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Both were centered around the promotion of human rights in an area particularly affected by oppression for political purposes. Blair was advocating for the invasion, as Wolfowitz was validating it. Visits like Wolfowitz's to Hilla were political in nature – his presence was an affirmation of the work he believed the United States to be doing. His presence was to show that the United States was committed to creating a pro human rights sentiment in Iraq by creating a new and bountiful democracy.

## Conclusion

The Iraq War formally ended in December of 2011. The United States looks back now and regards the war as a failure. In what was believed to be a quick war to depose Saddam and establish a democratic government, the war in Iraq took eight years to complete. As the United States withdrew, a power vacuum erupted and the Islamic State rose to power, starting a horrific civil war.

The experiment had failed. The mission to promote democracy in Iraq left Americans with regret for the war as a whole. Many politicians, including Secretary of Defense James Mattis regarded the Iraq war as a mistake.<sup>104</sup> Neoconservative ideology had been a failure in the eyes of the American people. In his New York Times article titled “After Neoconservatism,” Francis Fukuyama wrote, “But it is the idealistic effort to use American power to promote democracy and human rights abroad that may suffer the greatest setback.”<sup>105</sup> With the election of our newest President, the American people are starting to understand that.

President Donald Trump represents the antithesis of neoconservatism. His policies of “America First” are vastly different than those of the Reagan Administration. The Iraq War was fought based on an ideology that creating a democratic Middle East would be better for the people as well as the whole world. President Trump effectively has no foreign policy other than placing the needs of the American people above the rest of the world. He is not looking for monsters to destroy, but rather focusing on domestic issues.

So where have the neoconservatives gone? The 2016 presidential election left Americans believing that Hillary Clinton was a neoconservative as she was endorsed by the likes of Robert

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<sup>104</sup> Schwartz, Mattathias. "IRAQ WAS PROBABLY A “MISTAKE,” SAID GEN. JAMES MATTIS, TRUMP’S DEFENSE PICK." *The Intercept*. N.p., 05 Dec. 2016. Web.

<sup>105</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. "After Neoconservatism." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 19 Feb. 2006. Web.



Kagan. Kagan said of Clinton in 2014, “I feel comfortable with her on foreign policy ... If she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue, it’s something that might have been called neocon, but clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else.”<sup>106</sup> Kagan even went so far to host a fundraiser for Clinton which garnered upwards of \$25,000 for her campaign.

There is no doubt that the Trump presidency has flipped party lines – in large part thanks to his isolationist foreign policy. Curiously enough, Elliott Abrams was being considered for Assistant Secretary of State but was ultimately “nixed from the list of contenders after President Donald Trump learned of Abrams' biting criticism last May of his fitness to become president.” Why would an isolationist like Donald Trump wish to have a neoconservative in the second highest rank of the State Department, essentially creating foreign policy? Most would argue that it was because Abrams had years of foreign policy experience while Trump and his newly appointed Secretary of State had a combined zero.

Neoconservatives continue to shape thought, just not from inside the United States government. Elliott Abrams is a senior fellow for Middle East studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank based in Washington D.C. Paul Wolfowitz is now a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank based in Washington D.C. Robert Kagan is a senior fellow with the Project on International Order and Strategy at the Brookings Institute, which is – you guessed it – a think tank based in Washington D.C.

Where does this leave interventionist humanitarian foreign policy in the future? While the Trump Administration boasts an isolationist foreign policy, Paul Wolfowitz described his outlook on Trump as “optimistic” after a missile strike in Syria in retaliation for the Syrian

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<sup>106</sup> Khalek, Rania. "Robert Kagan and Other Neocons Are Backing Hillary Clinton." *The Intercept*. N.p., 25 July 2016. Web.

government's use of chemical weapons on civilians. "I think there is a fantastic opportunity here. It's only a first step, it's only an opportunity,"<sup>107</sup> Said Wolfowitz, while including that he hopes the Trump Administration will follow up with more, harsher military action. It is highly unlikely, however, that after the failures in Iraq, the United States would take it upon itself to depose the Assad regime in Syria in hopes of establishing a democracy. The future of the United States intervening in international conflicts for the reason of democracy promotion is indeed uncertain.

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<sup>107</sup> Glasser, Susan B. "Why Paul Wolfowitz Is Optimistic About Trump." *POLITICO Magazine*. N.p., 24 Apr. 2017. Web.

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