NEOCONSERVATISM: SOME THEORETICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS
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CIDE

NÚMERO 16

Jesús Velasco

NEOCONSERVATISM: SOME THEORETICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS
The classification of current political tendencies in the United States is sometimes confusing. Since the beginning of Ronald Reagan’s first presidential campaign, American journalists and scholars have used indistinctly terms like right, conservatism, neconser vatism, ultraconservatism, extreme right, New Right, etc., to define the different political forces behind Reagan’s ascent to the White House. This confusion is evident in the work of John Judis. He believes that Kevin Phillips (a conservative scholar), Paul Weyrich (a New Right activist), Irving Kristol (a neoconservative leader), and William Buckley (a traditional conservative), could all be embraced within the term “conservative” without considering any differences in their theoretical and political position.¹

It is certainly difficult to define neoconservatism, because it is not a political party, its members are not affiliated to a single party, and it is not a formal organization.“We have no Neoconservative Manifesto,” asserted Peter Steinfels in 1979, “no neoconservative program for the seventies and the eighties, no statement issued from the National Association of Neoconservatives... Indeed it may be that no neoconservative is the neoconservative; the center of gravity of a collection of individuals may rest somewhere between them and outside of any single person.”² Ideologically speaking, it is also hard to classify it. Neoconservatism is a current of thought that shares principles with New Deal liberalism and traditional American conservatism, looking often like a “syncretic intellectual” expression.

Consequently, neoconservatism is a misleading term. Some European scholars have used the word to classify Margaret Thatcher’s and Ronald Reagan’s policies, to label the monetarist theory of Milton Friedman, or to characterize the social demands of the Moral Majority. Under this perspective Milton Friedman, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Jerry Falwell are part of the same political phenomenon, the neoconservative movement.³ Because of this terminology problem, Seymour Martin Lipset has declared that “the concept of neoconservatism is irrelevant to further developments within American politics... because it is a term which confuses, rather than one which helps further political discourse.”⁴

How could we study neoconservatism when it is such an amorphous term and political phenomenon? How could we capture its essence without falling into generalizations and misleading classifications? There is no easy way to solve these puzzles.

I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues at the Division of International Relations, and especially to Mauricio Tenorio for their criticisms and suggestions.

But an appropriate ideological identification of neoconservatism within the different ideological tendencies in America, and a historical analysis of its evolution and organization, could help us to properly understand and draw the boundaries of this intellectual and political expression.

I divide this essay into three main sections. First, I identify the core members of the neoconservative movement, as a way of demarcating one of the main actors of this study. Second, I present a characterization of American ideological tendencies (mainly conservatives) in order to correctly place neoconservatism within the U.S. ideological spectrum. Third, I examine four interconnected elements of the neoconservative movement: its origins, organizations, publications and ideology. My main purpose here is to identify neoconservatism as a type of “intellectual community,” a group of people that share, in general terms, common origins, who participate in the same organizations, who write with analogous perspectives about similar topics, who are involved in the publication of several journals that disseminate their ideas, and who share a basic political ideology or worldview.

**Toward an Identification of the Neoconservatives**

One of the main problems with the term neoconservatism is that it is very difficult to distinguish the main advocates of this intellectual and political expression. The difficulties arise when even the people usually considered neoconservatives dislike the label. Daniel Bell describes himself as “socialist in economics, liberal in politics, and conservative in culture,” and vehemently rejects being classified as a neoconservative. Norman Podhoretz maintains that Daniel Patrick Moynihan dislikes being called conservative, and asserts that Moynihan has been moving away from neoconservatism since his election as Senator. Irving Kristol has called Seymour Martin Lipset the “bumblebee” because it is hard to predict where he will land. Likewise, the word neoconservatism presents several problems because it “has never referred to a set of doctrines to which a given group of adherents subscribe.”

Intellectual communities are usually hard to identify. As Charles Kadushin has rightly pointed out, intellectual circles (and other cultural circles) “have no clear boundaries and the dividing line between the center and the periphery is often arbitrarily drawn.” Despite this severe limitation, it is possible to offer a fairly clear picture of the main neoconservatives. To identify the neoconservatives, I have studied three

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Velasco / Neoconservatism: Some Theoretical and Terminological Clarifications

Table 1
Names of Neoconservatives Quoted in Three Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Podhoretz</th>
<th>Bell</th>
<th>Lipset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. William Barett</td>
<td>Daniel Bell*</td>
<td>Elliott Abrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Daniel Bell</td>
<td>Joseph Epstein</td>
<td>Daniel Bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. John B. Bunzel</td>
<td>Nathan Glazer</td>
<td>William Bennett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Nathan Glazer</td>
<td>Samuel Huntington</td>
<td>Peter Berger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sidney Hook</td>
<td>Jeane J. Kirkpatrick</td>
<td>Midge Decter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick</td>
<td>Hilton Kramer</td>
<td>Chester Finn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Hilton Kramer</td>
<td>Irving Kristol</td>
<td>Nathan Glazer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Irving Kristol</td>
<td>Seymour M. Lipset</td>
<td>Cal Gershom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Seymour M. Lipset</td>
<td>Robert Nisbet</td>
<td>Gertrude Himmelfarb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Daniel P. Moynihan</td>
<td>Daniel Patrick Moynihan</td>
<td>Max Kampelman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Michael Novak</td>
<td>Norman Podhoretz</td>
<td>Jeane Kirkpatrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Diane Ravitch</td>
<td></td>
<td>Irvin Kristol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Everett C. Ladd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Seymour M. Lipset*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Edward Luttwak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daniel Moynihan</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Novak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Perle</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Pipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Norman Podhoretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diana Trilling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert Tucker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ben Wattenberg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Author of the article.

articles written by these intellectuals about their movement. The aim is to have a list of people recognized by neoconservatives as a part of this tendency. To achieve this goal, I am following a consensus method. If a person is listed in two of the three articles I will consider him or her a core neoconservative.

Table 1 lists the people quoted in each article along with the authors.

The analysis reveals that ten persons conform the core of the neoconservative movement (see Table 2). Nathan Glazer, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Hilton Kramer, Irving Kristol, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Norman Podhoretz and James Q. Wilson were

The three articles are: Seymour Martin Lipset, "Neoconservatism Myth or Reality," *Society*, Vol. XXV, No. 5, July-August 1988. Norman Podhoretz, *op. cit.* Daniel Bell, "The Cultural Wars: American Intellectual Life, 1965-1990," unpublished paper. Two criteria were used to select these articles. First, the authors were commonly identified as neoconservative. Second, in their pieces they broadly alluded to the advocates of this tendency. The articles mentioned above were the only three that satisfied both criteria.
Table 2
List of Core Neoconservatives

1. Daniel Bell
2. Nathan Glazer
3. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick
4. Hilton Kramer
5. Irving Kristol
6. Seymour Martin Lipset
7. Michael Novak
8. Daniel Patrick Moynihan
9. Norman Podhoretz
10. James Q. Wilson

quoted in the three articles used in this study. Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset and Norman Podhoretz were cited in two and each one was author of one piece evaluated here. Michael Novak was cited in only two.

This account is very consistent with the opinion of several specialists. Alexander Bloom\(^1\) considers that Moynihan, Kirkpatrick, Kristol, Podhoretz, Bell, Glazer, and Lipset are the most prominent figures of this tendency. Robert Nisbet\(^2\) does not incorporate Jeane Kirkpatrick on his list, but he includes Samuel Huntington and James Q. Wilson. Peter Steinfels\(^3\) and Isidore Silver\(^4\) name more or less the same people. The coincidence between the opinion of these authors and the outcome of my analysis reinforces the notion that the ten persons mentioned above are the nucleus of the neoconservative movement.

To restrict the neoconservative movement to ten individuals is inadequate. The reason is simple. Around these core neoconservatives are clustered a number of other intellectuals and politicians that can be classified neoconservatives, or at least sympathetic to this political and ideological tendency. Lipset’s list in Table 1 is very revealing in this regard. Furthermore, Irving Kristol maintains that his son, William Kristol, Peter Skarry, Suzanne Garment and others, constitute a second generation of neoconservatives.\(^5\) To include other neoconservatives beyond the core group seems to be unavoidable.

I think that the best way to incorporate other neoconservatives in my study, without making inappropriate classifications, is to establish what I would like to call the periphery of the neoconservative movement. The periphery will be integrated by those specialists with whom Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, or other core neoconservatives have interacted, or from whom they have borrowed ideas.

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\(^3\) Peter Steinfels, *op. cit.*


Table 3
Core and Periphery of the Neoconservative Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core</th>
<th>Periphery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Daniel Bell</td>
<td>1. Elliott Abrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nathan Glazer</td>
<td>2. William Baret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hilton Kramer</td>
<td>4. Peter Berger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Irving Kristol</td>
<td>5. John B. Bunzel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Daniel Patrick Moynihan</td>
<td>8. Chester Finn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Neoconservatives quoted in interviews.

Ten core and twenty-eight periphery members constitute what will be considered in this study the neoconservative movement. Two reasons make this list very important for what will be studied in the following pages. First, it will help me draw the boundaries
of neoconservatism, restricting my research and comments to the political and intellectual activities of a concrete number of people. Second, it is an indispensable pattern of reference of my analysis. It is important to highlight that the list is only the first step in the identification of the neoconservative movement. To have a complete view, it is necessary to evaluate its historical evolution, organization, and ideology.

Some Ideas about U.S. Ideological Tendencies

One of the main characteristics of U.S. political debate since the country’s origins as a political independent society is the close margins of its ideological debate. This has been the consequence of the existence of an ample consensus in the American society about the main topics of debate, and above all about political and economic organization.

As Louis Hartz\(^\text{16}\) and other authors have shown, the prevailing climate of U.S. opinion and political confrontation has always been liberal, and the basic American political values and beliefs are “liberal, individualistic, democratic, egalitarian, and hence basically antigovernment and anti-authority in character.”\(^\text{17}\) Thus we find that the topics of political dispute are mainly concentrated around liberal ideology. As a matter of fact, from the birth of the U.S. as an independent society up to the present, liberal theory has dominated its development, providing approaches and variants within a relatively restricted ideological spectrum.

The overwhelming presence of liberal discourse has been reflected in the fact that genuinely conservative thought—with its emphasis on degree and hierarchy, authority, hereditary status, deference, and the sanctity of tradition—has never had much impact in America. The relatively fluid class structure, the absence of feudal tradition and the prevalence of acquisitive individualism have seen to it that Americans have been unreceptive to and even suspicious of the appeal of traditional conservative thought.\(^\text{18}\)

For these reasons, the United States never found its basis in the classic conservative philosophy inspired by Edmund Burke, since it neither corresponded to nor was in agreement with its historical roots.

According to Seymour Martin Lipset\(^\text{19}\) four conservative expressions have existed since 1945. The first is traditional conservatism, advanced mainly by Russell Kirk. He has emphasized his links to a major founder of European conservative thought, Edmund Burke. This stream is closest to the traditionalist, aristocratic conservatism of Europe

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in its appeal to the “collective wisdom of our ancestors.” For the advocate of this tendency, tradition is the most important source of human conduct and religion is central to the civil social order. They believe in limited government and free-market economy, endorse a militant anti-communist position, and present a clear opposition to central liberal principles such as equality and enlightenment. 20

The second is libertarian conservatism, based on the postulates of liberalism but emphasizing economic concerns like the virtues of the free market and limited instrumental state controls against the dangers inherent in big government. The principal intellectual advocates of this view are Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. The third is liberal conservatism (or “neoconservatism”) which according to Lipset is the most deeply-rooted in the American tradition of pragmatic individualism. Spokesmen like Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, Norman Podhoretz, to name a few, accept existing welfare institutions and, unlike other types of conservatives, support efforts to achieve greater egalitarianism is society. The roots of their political philosophy are to be found in traditional American liberalism rather than in conservatism. Fourth is populist conservatism which emphasizes many of the social concerns of traditional conservatism, but in a more authoritarian fashion, and it finds itself composed of laymen of action rather than by intellectuals as in the other three cases. Some of the most important spokesmen of this tendency are Richard Vieguerie, Jerry Falwell, and Paul Weyrich.

Among these conservative groups journalists tend to include people from neoconservatism, and populist conservatism —popularly known as the New Right— as members of the same political tendency. The confusion is the outcome of three related facts. First, the diffusion that both expressions received in the media in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Second, the important role that both played in the ascent of Ronald Reagan to the presidency. Third, because in some areas, particularly in foreign affairs, their viewpoints are quite similar. Table 4 lists some relevant domestic and foreign issues and the views of both groups.

As can be deduced from the classification mentioned above with the exception of the traditional conservatism of Kirk, most conservative expressions in the U.S. have a liberal matrix, a framework provided by American liberalism. Most scholars agree on this point. “Our conservatism,” asserted the conservative thinker Peter Viereck in the late 1950s, “in the absence of medieval feudal relics, must grudgingly admit it has little

20 For Seymour Martin Lipset, William Buckley and Peter Viereck are also important representatives of traditional conservatism. It is difficult to subscribe this perspective. Although Buckley agrees with some postulates of traditional conservatism —like his praises of religion and human virtue—he shares other conservative views and liberal perspectives. As John Wesley Young has pointed out, in Buckley’s thinking “all the major standards of contemporary conservatism —the libertarian, the traditionalist, the anti-Communist— are represented in an eclectic whole.” (John Wesley Young, “William F. Buckley Jr.: Conservatism with Class,” in Mark J. Rozell and James F. Pontuso (eds.), American Conservative Opinion Leaders, Boulder, Westview Press, 1990, p. 58.) Thus, Buckley is closer to certain liberal principles —like the Lockean view of the role of government— than Kirk. With regards to Viereck, as I will argue later, he was even in favor of recognizing the essential liberal tradition of American politics. Consequently, I have decided to consider Kirk as the main proponent of traditional conservatism.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>New Right</th>
<th>Neoconservatism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Origins</td>
<td>Have their origins in 1962 but became consolidated until the 1970s. Their crucial moments were during the first Reagan administration.</td>
<td>Some views have their origins in the 1930s, but the crucial years for these public intellectuals were from the sixties up to the eighties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Main groups or organizations</td>
<td>Young Americans for Freedom</td>
<td>Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Viguerie Company</td>
<td>American Enterprise Institute (for Public Policy and Research) (AEI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heritage Foundation</td>
<td>Committee on the Present Danger (CPD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The American Legislative Exchange Council</td>
<td>Committee for the Free World (CFW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The National Congressional Club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jefferson Marketing Inc., of American Relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Center for a Free Society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Conservative Political Action Committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative Caucus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And some religious organizations as the Christian Voice and the Religious Round Table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Main leaders</td>
<td>Richard Viguerie</td>
<td>Irving Kristol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joseph Coors</td>
<td>Jean Kirkpatrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul M. Weyrich</td>
<td>Jerry Falwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jesse Helms</td>
<td>Daniel Bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Howard Phillips</td>
<td>Nathan Glazer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John T. Dolan</td>
<td>Daniel Kramer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Seymour Martin Lipset</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Novak</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Daniel Patrick Moynihan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Norman Podhoretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>James Q. Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>New Right</td>
<td>Neoconservatism</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Main target</td>
<td>Grass Routes movements</td>
<td>Political and public opinion elites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ideology</td>
<td>• Defender of the traditional values sustained by American society.</td>
<td>• Is a current of thought that shares principles with New Deal liberalism and traditional American conservatism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Backlash movement that works to revert the power structures, do not preserves the <em>status quo</em>.</td>
<td>• Change is accepted if it is gradual and does not alter drastically economics, politics and social conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Defender of classical liberal thought.</td>
<td>• Has a history of opposition to mass culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Characterized by populist tendencies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Communism</td>
<td>• Aggressive Anticommunism</td>
<td>• Rejects totalitarian expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Perception of communism as a conspiracy force was a</td>
<td>• They criticized the radical right anticommunism, especially McCarthyism. They define themselves as a liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>justification to impel their reactionary policies.</td>
<td>Anticommunism current.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Government</td>
<td>Eliminate every kind of governmental intervention that is</td>
<td>• Neoconservatives formed an alliance with Social Democrats in their fight against international communism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>noxious for citizens liberty.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Capitalism</td>
<td>Its main view is close to libertarianism. People of New Right believe in economic liberalism:</td>
<td>They do not oppose State intervention in the economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Freedom and individualism</td>
<td>However, they reject the Paternalistic State.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pro free market forces</td>
<td>• Consider that only capitalism can support the survival of a civilised culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• State as inefficient entity</td>
<td>• The economic system was founded quite heavily, but not totally, on free enterprise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Taxes reduction</td>
<td>• Believe the government has grown too large.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Balance the budget</td>
<td>• Support the liberal Political Economy of the 1950s, but reject the changes by the Johnson’s administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>New Right</td>
<td>Neoconservatism</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 9. Political influence | Electoral Campaigns: Since the 1980s became an important force in the political arena. Their activities were expressed in three different areas: 
   a) Played an important role to mobilize the electorate, and reinforcing independent candidates of the two main parties, especially the Republican. 
   b) Introduced topics that traditionally were defended inside of the public national debate, for example they initiated a campaign through the mass-media to sensibilize public opinion against the right of abortion. 
   c) As a political censor of the Reagan administration "purity". | • Neoconservatives were mainly at the center of the Democratic Party. 
   • By the 1980s they participated actively in the Reagan administration, especially in the field of foreign policy. 
   • Through think tanks they build their base to develop their role as public intellectuals. For them, their association with think tanks, as well as their other organizations (CDM, CPD, and CDW) increases their power for establishing relationships with influential political and economic elites. |
| 10. Democracy | Democracy is accepted as the permanent political system in the U.S. | They are in favor of limited democracy. |
| 11. Social issues | • Social traditionalism, need a global revision of the moral values sustained by modern families and of the different ways the State has modified them. 
   • They opposed the Amendment for the women civil rights. 
   • Condemned homosexuality. 
   • Against abortion, and busing. 
   • In favor of school prayer, and gun control. | • Social movements are perceived as countersubversive forces. 
   • The US crisis of the 1960s and 1970s was considered the product of the emergence of a counterculture which is a rebellion against established moral, social and aesthetic values. 
   • They opposed the student’s movement because they thought that their main objective was the destruction of the authority itself. 
   • Reject the struggle of homosexuals and lesbians. 
   • They were against women’s liberation, and civil right movements. |
real tradition to conserve except that of liberalism.”"²¹ More than twenty years later, in
a similar vein, Alan Wolfe from the left pointed out that the “distinguishing features of
American conservatism must be sought in the uniqueness of American Liberalism.”²²

These particularities produced certain characteristics in American conservatism
that differ from European conservatism. The U.S. current is not a feudal conservatism,
as was the European expression that was in opposition to the egalitarian and anticlerical
French revolution. On the contrary, U.S. conservatism is bourgeois. It desires to
preserve not the precapitalist forms or the main elements of preindustrial society, but
the economic and political privileges of the U.S. bourgeoisie. It is also more optimistic
about human nature, the uses of reason and the possibilities of progress and democracy.
It is more materialistic, since its political theory is more oriented toward economic
problems rather than ethical and political ones. It is more individualistic, because of its
conception of the human being as the end of the most important element of society. It
is therefore not surprising that American conservatism looks to Spencer or Adam Smith
rather than to Burke or Coleridge when it seeks ideological backing.²³

Adapting to the conditions imposed by the advances of a juggernaut capitalism that
transforms older customs and ways of living, American conservatism constitutes a true
anti-liberal reaction that advances and develops according to that liberal theory. By ac-
quiring very particular features, it has managed to survive and adapt to create changes,
setting on more than one occasion the tone and direction of U.S. political debate.

Neoconservatism is a clear example of contemporary conservative expressions in
the U.S. Its rejection of the traditional conservative view of Burke and Kirk has allowed
it to present a “realistic” conservative perspective that takes into account the dominance
of the liberal discourse in the U.S. Likewise, this movement has been able to absorb
the historical lessons of similar expressions that preceded it, and to conform an active
and influential current within American society. Having described briefly the main
features of conservatism and liberalism in the U.S., let me turn to the analysis of
neoconservatism.

The History

Broadly speaking, the history of neoconservatives has three main phases of develop-
ment. First, as members of a young radical association. Second, as a distinguished group
of social scientists and writers who defended centrist liberalism. Third —and without

²¹ Peter Viereck, “The Philosophical New Conservatism,” in Daniel Bell (ed.), Radical Right,
Expanded and Updated, Garden City, Doubleday, 1963, p. 167. Also see his Unadjusted Man: A New
Hero for Americans, Boston, Bacon Press, 1956, pp. 246, 182 and 183.


²³ On U.S. conservative thought one may consult Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America, New
losing their importance as scholars—, as public intellectuals participating in think-tanks and political organizations as neoconservative advocates.

Contrary to what is commonly understood, neoconservatism is not necessarily a by-product of the 1960s. Some neoconservative views have their origin in the 1930s, in the struggle between Stalinism and Trotskyism in the Soviet Union. In 1936, almost all the main leaders of the October Revolution were charged with treachery, sabotage, and espionage against the Soviet state. These events, known as the Moscow trials, provoked strong reactions among some American intellectual and political circles, who seriously criticized the Soviet regime.

An anti-Stalinist sentiment promptly flourished in the United States, and Trotskyism, the radical ideology not deprived by bureaucracy and power, became a very popular political tendency among some intellectual communities. In 1936 Partisan Review, perhaps the most influential literary journal at that time, broke relations with the Communist Party. Refunded in 1937 as an independent magazine, Partisan Review became an anti-Stalinist publication very sympathetic to Trotskyist viewpoints. To a greater extent, Trotskyism provoked the emergence of the anti-communist left among New York intellectuals, and became a clear symbol of radical opposition to Stalin. “Trotskyism made it possible for these rebellious intellectuals,” asserts Alan M. Wald, “to declare themselves on the side of revolution..., and yet also to denounce Stalin from the left as the arch betrayer of Lenin’s heritage.”

The antagonism to Stalinism was shared, in their youth, by several intellectuals currently associated to neoconservatism. As students of the City College of New York, Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, and others, presented a consistent critique to Stalinism. Some of them even became members of the Young People’s Socialist League, a Trotskyist youth organization.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s they started their journey from the left to the center of the ideological spectrum, rejecting both communism and fascism. Their process of deradicalization was shaped by several domestic and international events. In the domestic sphere, by their experience with American communists in states like New York and Washington. In the international arena, by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1948, the blockade of Berlin, the Korean War and the violation of human rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Rejecting totalitarianism because of its suppression of freedom of thought, some


26 Seymour Martin Lipset was a chairman of this organization.

27 For an example of neoconservatism’s rejection of communism and fascism see the opinions expressed by Nathan Glazer and quoted in Hamilton Lawson Bowling III, op. cit., p. 68.

28 According to Seymour Martin Lipset, these people “were anti-Soviet not because of what was going on in the Soviet Union, they were anti-Soviet because of their experiences with American communists.” Conversation with Seymour Martin Lipset, March 18, 1993.
neoconservatives participated in the American Congress for Cultural Freedom (ACCF), an organization of anti-communist intellectuals. Affiliated to the international Congress for Cultural Freedom, both associations were conceived to defend “intellectual and cultural freedom against the forces of totalitarianism both at home and abroad.” Irving Kristol became its first executive director and Daniel Bell participated as officer. In 1953, Kristol co-founded with Stephen Spender *Encounter*, a London-based magazine sponsored by the Committee for Cultural Freedom. At this moment it was very clear that neoconservatives were very well integrated into the mainstream of American society.

In 1950, they publicly and academically criticized the anti-communism from the right, especially McCarthyism. “If American liberalism is not willing to discriminate between its achievements and its sins,” Irving Kristol warned in 1952, “it only disarms itself before Senator McCarthy, who is eager to have it appear that its achievements are its sins.” In a similar vein, a year later Nathan Glazer asserted that it was “a shame and an outrage that Senator McCarthy should remain in the Senate.”

Academically speaking, some current neoconservatives were trying to explain the rise of McCarthyism on the American political scene. In 1954, Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer held with other distinguished groups of social scientists a faculty seminar at Columbia University. The result of their deliberations was published a year later in the *New American Right*, a book that was republished in 1963 under the title *The Radical Right, Expanded and Updated*.

Considering that McCarthyism has extensively damaged the fabric of democratic politics, the authors of the *Radical Right*, especially Richard Hofstadter and Seymour Martin Lipset, used the notion of status politics to explain the rise of extremist movements. Status politics was used to “refer to political movements whose appeal is to the not uncommon resentments of individuals or groups who desire to maintain or improve their social status.” For them, class politics arise in times of “economic depression, and status politics in periods of betterment.” In times of prosperity and general well-being on the material plane,” asserted Richard Hofstadter, “status considerations among the masses can become much more influential in our politics.”

Consequently, the growth of radical right organizations is the result of the displacement of some sectors of the population from former positions of domination. When certain groups feel that they are “losing their power and status they seek to reverse the direction of changes through political means.” Radical right expressions are mainly

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32 Daniel Bell, *op. cit.*


34 *Ibidem*, p. 168.

the reaction to the "losing of status and influence." Under these lenses, status politics clearly explains McCarthyism, because this political expression emerged in a period of great economic bonanza. For Lipset, radical right movements are marginal expressions of discontent that do not threaten the U.S. democratic process.

The 1960s and early 1970s were crucial years for neoconservatism. First, because the global crisis experienced by the United States during that time greatly accentuated some political and ideological tendencies previously manifested by neoconservative advocates. Second, because this period marked the neoconservative transition to the role of public intellectuals, a process that was consolidated in the 1970s. Most observers agree that a global crisis flourished at that time. In the United States the breakdown revealed the end of the Roosevelt project and the appearance of a profound political, economic, and international crisis.

The symptoms are familiar. In the political sphere, student rebellion; the women’s liberation and Civil Right movements; opposition to the Vietnam war; the Watergate scandal; the Kennedy and King assassinations. In the economic field, the U.S. was affected by two basic problems. The first was the monetary crisis, which had its most spectacular expressions in the devaluation of the dollar in 1971, the collapse of the international monetary system, and the increasing levels of inflation. The second was the new difficulties faced by the productive system, including a high fiscal deficit that rose to approximately $100 billion in 1975 and the increasing rate of unemployment that reached a rate of 8.5% of the civil labor force in 1975.

Finally, in foreign policy the “decline of U.S. hegemony” was manifested in several ways. First, defeat in Vietnam provoked a drastic reduction in U.S. influence in Southeast Asia. The rise of Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany as prominent industrial centers demonstrated the emergence of other important powers in the interna-


37 Later, Lipset and Earl Raab expanded the notion of status politics by using the concept of extremism. Their conceptual model is characterized by five basic elements. First, all extremist groups from the right and from the left share similar traits: they are anti-pluralist, which is to say, are monists. Second they are backlash organizations, and consequently anti-modernist. Third, they are simplistic expressions, movements that offer simple remedies for multifactored phenomena. Fourth, they are moralist, with special emphasis in Christian morality. Finally, conspiracy theory is a central element of their ideology and political action. Cfr., ibidem. It is important to highlight that the notion of extremism was a clear concept for the authors of the Radical Right. However, Lipset and Raab expanded and systematized this model. For a good critique of status politics theory one may consult. Alan Wolfe, “Liberalism and Radical Right,” New Left Review, No. 128, July-August 1981, and Jerome L. Himmelstein, To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.

tional scene. The oil embargo and the OPEC price controls in 1973-74 manifested the new intentions of the so-called “Third World” to participate in the international system.

The general crisis fractured the vital center of American society. Polarization became a common phenomenon in the 1960s, and the maintenance of consensus politics was a difficult task. Different versions over relevant political issues were in vogue: Pro-war and anti-war expression; pro-civil rights movements and racist organizations; association in favor of women’s liberation, and groups against women’s emancipation; people sympathetic to the students’ protests, and citizens against their anti-establishment and anti-authority tendencies; New Left intellectuals, and academics antagonistic to New Left ideas. In a nutshell, American society was badly divided, and the divisions were evident in almost any single manifestation of U.S. political life.

Neoconservatives were more on the anti than on the pro side. They criticized the New Left for calling a guerilla action “in the field of culture,” and for being “left-wing ‘intellectual Poujadists’, of a back-lash opposition to systematic and quantitative social science, to the large scale of social research, to the very conception of the utility of efforts at value-free objective scholarship in policy relevant fields.” For Norman Podhoretz, the New Left resembled the Stalinism of the 1930s, and “constitute a ‘new class’ that has taken over the universities and the publishing, public service, and cultural industries of the United States.”

They opposed the students’ movement for its confrontation strategy. For them the students’ main goal was the destruction of authority itself, and the “destruction of what was most distinctive and most valuable in universities-the ability to distance themselves from immediate crisis, their concern for the heritage of culture and science, their encouragement of individual and even eccentricity”. They considered the pro-life movement “one of the greatest human right programs,” and argued that radical blacks destroyed the civil rights movements of the early 1960s. In all, for them the crisis of those years was the product of the emergence of a counter-culture, which is to say, a “rebellion against established moral, social and aesthetic values of the 1960s.”

The neoconservative opposition to the social protests of the 1960s was widely considered by the academic and political community because of their reputation as

40 Quoted by Alan M. Wald, op. cit., p. 356.
41 Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol (eds.), “Introduction,” ibidem, p. XI.
43 Michael Novak, Commentary, Vol. 90, No. 3, 1990, p. 35. It is interesting to observe that the concerns for abortion and pro-life movement come mainly from the catholic sector of neoconservatism. Jews, the dominant group, are not very concern for these type of topics.
44 Hilton Kramer, ibidem, p. 52.
distinguished scholars in U.S. social science. We only have to remember that in 1960 Seymour Martin Lipset gained, with *Political Man*, high recognition as an advocate of modernization theory, American exceptionalism, and the end of the ideology movement. The same year, Daniel Bell published perhaps his most famous book, *The End of Ideology*, arguing the exhaustion of ideology in the West.\(^47\)

In 1963 Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan issued *Beyond the Melting Pot*, a controversial study of five ethnic groups in New York, and five years later Samuel P. Huntington published *Political Order in Changing Society*. Huntington criticized classic modernization theory, highlighting the superiority of American values, institutions and processes. His analysis became very influential in American political science, and in 1988, his book was the one most required by graduate professors in the core course of comparative politics.\(^48\)

Politically speaking, neoconservatives were mainly in the center of the Democratic party. The crisis of the 1960s cracked the alliances created during the political realignment around the New Deal. Vietnam and the social issues that emerged during those turbulent years divided the party into two main factions. One bloc, represented by Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, and Robert Kennedy, moved more to the left, rejecting the war and favoring arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union. The other faction was embodied by old New Dealers and heads of the AFL-CIO who remained anti-communist, and pro-war. Having as its main leaders Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey and Henry Jackson, this group won the 1968 nomination. However, four years later, the revolts against the war and the social-issue cleavages led to the triumph of McGovern. By 1972 it was clear that the party was badly polarized.

It is within the second political trend that we find an important number of neoconservatives. At that time they were mainly democrats who voted for Hubert Humphrey in 1968. Some of them voted for Nixon in 1972, but mainly as a way to oppose McGovern.\(^49\) Considering that McGovern exemplified the erosion of the traditional principles defended by democrats, they participated in 1973 in the creation of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, an organization dedicated to returning the party to the center. Ben J. Wattenberg, Midge Decter, Max Kampelman, and Jeane J. Kirkpatrick were involved in the organizing committee. Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, Michael Novak and Norman Podhoretz were founding sponsors of CDM, while Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Henry Jackson were co-chairs of the organization.

By the 1980s part of the movement participated actively in the Reagan administration, especially in the field of foreign policy. Richard Perle, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Elliot Abrams, and Max Kampelman were appointed to major positions in the Department of State and Defense. Richard Pipes worked for the National Security Council.


\(^{48}\) Cfr. Dean E. McHenry, Jr., “Summary and Analysis of A Survey of Graduate Core Course in Comparative Politics,” *Political Sciences and Politics*.

\(^{49}\) The exceptions were Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer who vote for McGovern.
Norman Podhoretz and Ben Wattenberg participated in Reagan’s national communication apparatus. Michael Novak became Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Likewise, neoconservatives formed an alliance with Social Democrats in their fight against international communism. Carl Gershman worked with Jeane Kirkpatrick at the United Nations; Penn Kemble became head of Friends of Democratic Center in Central America (Prodemca), an influential pro-contra lobby; and Tom Kahn was appointed as director of the international affairs department of the AFL-CIO.

The 1960s also marked the neoconservatives’ transition to the role of public intellectuals, a process that was consolidated in the 1970s. In 1960 Norman Podhoretz assumed the directorship of Commentary, giving a clear neoconservative perspective to this journal. Five years later, Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell founded The Public Interest, and neoconservatives began publishing in magazines and newspapers of wide circulation.

The 1970s witnessed the arrival of important numbers of neoconservatives to think tanks. In these institutions, they founded journals to diffuse their ideas to a general and educated audience and obtained an institutional base to develop their role as public intellectuals. We find neoconservatives at The Center For Strategic and International Studies, the Hoover Institution for War Revolution and Peace, and the Institute for Contemporary Studies. But according to Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, the centerpiece of the neoconservative movement is the American Enterprise Institute. Neoconservatives have been highly involved in the activities of the AEI, and their participation in this organization has been very important in their relationship with the political power in Washington. The next section will address these topics.

Institutions and Organization

To fully understand neoconservatism it is necessary to understand the nature and development of its different organizations. There are four main neoconservative organizations: the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), and the Committee for the Free World (CFW). These associations together with their four main publications—Commentary, The Public Interest, The National Interests, and the New Criterion—are the main organizations of this political and intellectual expression.

Among more than one hundred think tanks that operate in Washington D.C., the

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50 Seymour Martin Lipset, “Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality,” op. cit., p. 34.
54 James Allen Smith, op. cit., p. xiv.
American Enterprise Institute has been the home of neoconservatism. The American Enterprise Association was founded in 1943 by Lewis Brown, president of the Johns-Manville Corporation. In the 1950s the organization had five full-time employees and research programs mainly in economics. In 1960 the Institution was renamed the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, and obtained public recognition for its economic studies. Four years later its president, William Baroody Sr., became well known for advising and writing speeches for Goldwater.

Baroody was committed of creating a respectful academic institution to oppose liberal think tanks. In the 1950s and 1960s, he brought distinguished economists such as Milton Friedman, Gottfried Haberler, Paul McCracken and G. Warren Nultler onto AEI’s board of academic advisors. By the mid-1970s, neoconservatives came to the organization forming with the conservative economists a very solid scholarly group. AEI was a natural place for neoconservatives because the institution was clearly ideologically moderate, especially if compared to center-right think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and center-left like Brookings. Likewise, enlisting Democratic neoconservatives like Lipset, Wattenberg, and Kirkpatrick was an important move to build a reputation for balanced excellence. By 1980 AEI had grown to an organization with a budget of 10.4 million dollars and a staff of 135.

Neoconservatives have been very active within AEI, and have participated on the editorial boards of several journals. Ben J. Wattenberg and Seymour Martin Lipset were the co-editors of Public Opinion, and Irving Kristol and Jeane Kirkpatrick participated on the editorial board of the journal. The editor of Regulation was Anne Brunsdale, but Kristol and Kirkpatrick were on the board of editors. They also promoted the creation of journals within the organization. The publication of Regulation—a journal mainly concerned with policies of deregulation—was Irving Kristol’s idea. Currently, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Samuel Huntington and James Q. Wilson are members of the council of academic advisors, and Wilson is also a member of the board of trustees.

Neoconservatives have performed several important functions within AEI. First, they have given academic recognition to the institution. As distinguished intellectuals, they are capable of defending their viewpoints in a highly scholarly way. In the “war of ideas” they have presented an intellectual argument to battle the adversary culture. According to Irving Kristol, “neoconservatives have demonstrated to the media and the intellectual and political community that conservatism could be intellectually respectable. Bill Buckley can be dismissed, but we cannot be dismissed.” Likewise, neoconservatives have translated complicated research into an accessible language for politicians and the public in general.

Second, within AEI and also in their general activities as intellectuals, neoconservatives have brought together different expressions of conservatism. As I will argue later, neoconservatives consider that the new politics movement and the policies promoted by the “new class” have seriously affected the economy. They also believe

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55 Irving Kristol mentioned this to me. Conversation with Irving Kristol, May 27, 1993.
56 Ibidem.
that only capitalism can guarantee the survival of a civilized culture. Thus, “neoconservatives have built the bridge between economic conservatives and cultural conservatives.” For Irving Kristol, “cultural conservatives were mainly religious, and economic conservatives were all agnostic. Through the emphasis on social policy we have been able to some degree to reach that gap, which is very important, because that is the future of the Republican Party, to reach that gap.”

Third, they have mobilized the conservative foundations in favor of conservative publications and organizations such as think tanks. In 1978, Kristol participated in the three-year campaign established by AEI to raise sixty million dollars for an endowment. Kristol and Novak called upon business leaders, foundations and corporations to financially support conservative causes in the “war of ideas.” Your philanthropy, asserted Irving Kristol in 1977, “must serve the long term interests of the corporation. Corporate philanthropy should not be, can not be disinterested.” The Public Interest and The National Interest are currently financed by conservative foundations.

Fourth, neoconservatives have identified a political target with apparently scientific precision. In their diagnosis of the main problems faced by the United States—one later evaluated in detail—they refer to the so-called "new class" as the main protagonists of the U.S. crisis. Formed by different professionals, this new class rejects the basic values of American society and culture, creating what neoconservatives call the “adversary culture.” With this analysis, neoconservatives have been able to present, scientifically, a common enemy to the American society.

Think tanks have been one of the two most important institutions for the consolidation of the neoconservative movement. They perform several functions for these intellectuals. First, they work as their center of operations. Washington is a political city and politicians usually turn to think tanks rather than to university professors when they seek policy advice. For neoconservatives, their association with think tanks increases their possibilities of establishing relationships with influential political and economic circles. Maximizing their possibilities of creating webs of influence with the main centers of power is a task that can not be fully accomplished without the institutional support of think tanks.

Second, think tanks increment the diffusion of neoconservative ideas. The permanent participation of think-tank neoconservatives in conferences, briefings, and lunch-eons to discuss policy issues with politicians, the mass media, and leaders of the business community, as well as their regular appearance—at least of some of them—on T.V. programs, have turned these university professors into public figures. Let me illustrate my point with some examples.

In March 1992, Ben Wattenberg organized a conference at AEI titled “New Global Popular Culture” with the participation of core neoconservatives Michael Novak, Walter Bems, and Robert A. Goldwin. The lecture was broadcast nationally by C-SPAN. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick commented on the August 1991 Soviet coup in AEI’s press briefing. Richard Perle organized the “Gulf Crisis,” a videotape first made-for-television conference, and Ben Wattenberg discussed in CNN the 1992 presidential primaries. The AEI is a marketing institution that sells ideas, and neoconservatives would not be able to disseminate their products to a nationwide audience without the help of such think tanks.

Third, think tanks fortify the notion of neoconservatism as an intellectual political movement. Think tanks concentrate people with similar ideological tendencies in one organization to have public effects. Within the walls of AEI, neoconservatives have reinforced both each other as well as the image that this is not an activity of just one person expressing his or her viewpoints, but an identifiable current of opinion congregated at AEI. Neoconservatism, therefore, does not operate in a vacuum. AEI as their institution plays a very important role: it facilitates the external perception of neoconservatism as a political tendency, and reinforces their image as a consistent group of “public intellectuals,” a community of articulators and disseminators of political discourse.60

Think tanks offer greater possibilities for intellectuals to link knowledge and power, to relate their academic expertise with the political power in Washington. Therefore, think tanks are central institutions for neoconservatism. For Irving Kristol, D.C is an intellectual center in public policy, dominated by a wide assortment of social scientists that constitute an intellectual community, and many of the best and the brightest “congregate in that extraordinary Washington institution, the think tanks.”61

Besides think tanks there are three other important neoconservative organizations: the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) and the Committee for the Free World (CFW). CDM was created in 1972 as a reaction to the new politics movement and the nomination of George McGovern as the Democratic candidate for the presidency. As a faction within the Democratic party, CDM launched a campaign against the different reforms in the party, opposed the policy of quotas, and presented a strong attack to the Soviet Union and international communism. Among its members we found important political figures like Senators Henry Jackson and Daniel P. Moynihan, intellectuals like Daniel Bell (not very involved),

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60 I adopt in this study Russell Jacoby’s distinction between intellectuals and public intellectuals. For Jacoby, intellectuals are “those who cherish thinking and ideas,” and “public intellectuals, those who contribute to the public discussion.” Russell Jacoby, The Last Intellectuals. American Culture in the Age of Academe, New York, Basic Books 1982, p. 221. What is very striking in the neoconservative case is that these intellectuals have actively participated in both terrains. Therefore, I am interested in both facets of the neoconservative movement, because the academic side offers the theoretical support and general framework to their position as public intellectuals.

Seymour Martin Lipset, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Nelson Polsby and journalists like Ben Wattenberg. The main influence of this neoconservative organization was in Congress and the Democratic party.

The Committee of the Present Danger was established in 1976. CPD was a defense and foreign policy oriented organization that promoted a campaign against the Soviet Union and encouraged the growth of the American military budget. CPD diffused the notion that the United States was in a period of danger and the danger was increasing because of the military growth of the U.S.S.R. Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Richard Pipes, Richard Perle, Max Kampelman, Seymour Martin Lipset and Jeane Kirkpatrick are some of the neoconservatives that participated in this organization. The influence of this organization became quite evident when in 1981 thirty-two of its members were appointed to the Reagan administration, controlling important parts of Reagan’s foreign and defense policy.

The Committee for the Free World was created in 1981. Directed by Midge Decter, its Board of Directors was composed of twenty-nine members, eight of whom — William Barret, William Bennet, Carl Gershman, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Hilton Kramer, Irving Kristol, Seymour Martin Lipset and Norman Podhoretz— were neoconservative figures. Additionally, we find other neoconservatives such as Elliott Abrams, Chester E. Finn, Suzanne Garment, Nathan Glazer, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Sidney Hook, Samuel Huntington, Max Kampelman, Edward Luttwak, Michael Novak, Richard Perle, Richard Pipes, Ben Wattenberg and James Q. Wilson.

CFW defined itself as an intellectual association formed by a group of “writers, artists, editors, trade unionists, scientists, teachers, publishers, and others who live in various countries.” With a conspiracy pronouncement similar to the one delivered by CPD, CFW argued that the “free societies are coming increasingly under attack.” The threat was represented by the “rising menace of totalitarian barbarism” exemplified by the Soviet Union. The organization considered that “freedom had been threatened by the spread of ideas hostile to it.” As in the case of CPD, the conflict was once again between the Western civilization and the totalitarian world. To safeguard the free world, it was necessary “to conduct a worldwide ideological defense of freedom.”

Magazines are the other sort of neoconservative institution. Neoconservatives are great believers in the power of reviews to permeate elites and society in general with their ideas. Neoconservatism is unintelligible without a proper evaluation of the role played by their journals in the development and consolidation of this movement.

The journals perform four basic functions for the movement. First, they have popularized their ideas in academic and political spheres. Their publications are conceived to accomplish this goal. They are magazines in between a highly scholarly review such as American Political Science Review and widespread periodicals such as Newsweek or the New Republic. Avoiding the highly specialized jargon of social

\[^{62}\text{Cfr. "Founding Statement of the Committee for the Free World," The Committee for the Free World Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Box 37, 1981, pp. 1-2.}\]

\[^{63}\text{Cfr. The Committee for the Free World, Brochure, The Committee for the Free World Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Box 25, p. 1.}\]
Table 5
Authors with Five or More Articles in The Public Interest, 1980-1989

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<td>1. B. Bruce Briggs</td>
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<td>2. Nathan Glazer</td>
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<td>3. Irving Kristol</td>
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<td>4. Daniel P. Moynihan</td>
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<td>5. James Q. Wilson</td>
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Neoconservative journals do not spread the exclusive viewpoints of these intellectuals, but they also help to influence other people’s ideas. For Irving Kristol, the biggest direct impact of The Public Interest was during “the Nixon administration when the magazine published some articles on cost-benefit analysis which Richard Nixon read and he said ‘that’s great we must bring this into government,’ and it is now in government. We did not create that idea but we popularized it.”  
Supply-side economics was also supported by The Public Interest.

Second and according to Elliott Abrams, neoconservative journals create a sense of “intellectual community, that is, people that write for these magazines keep in touch intellectually by reading what each other is writing. If you take a look at who write in these magazines, not all are neoconservatives, but basically you get a very good definition of the neocon community.” This idea acquires more relevance if we take a look at the major contributors to The Public Interest, and themes addressed by these authors in the said publication.

From 1980-1989 only five authors published five or more articles in The Public Interest (see Table 5). The most frequent writers were, with the exception of Bruce Briggs, all core neoconservatives. The fundamental concern of Kristol during these years was the role of corporations in the United States. Glazer concentrated his analysis on social themes such as street gangs, education and ethnic problems. Wilson wrote on crime and law, and Moynihan on different policy issues. During this decade the journal published 23 articles on education, 20 on crime and legislation, 19 on racism and class, 15 on moral issues and 9 on welfare and unemployment. The central topics of attention over these years reveal the reaction of neoconservatives to the changes experienced by American society in the 1960s.

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64 Conversation with Irving Kristol, May 27, 1993.
65 Ibidem.
Continuing Abram’s diagnosis, he considers that the third function that journals perform for neoconservatism is that “you are informed by people that think, in general, as you do about subjects that you do not know about... We are all in the same camp.” Fourth they “give a general outlook about life and politics. The general outlines of the view for example that government has grown too large, that the foreign policy of the Carter administration in general was a bad foreign policy come also from these journals.”

In all, journals and think tanks have popularized neoconservative ideas, but they do it in a very different fashion. While think tanks build neoconservatives’ image as public intellectuals, journals enhance their academic respectability in knowledgeable circles. For neoconservatives, working in think tanks and publishing journals is an activity that permits them to operate in the margins of the American political process. The interaction between these intellectuals and their institutions has created systematic “windows” for the promotion of particular ideas or views.

**Ideology**

The last element to consider in this essay is the main features of neoconservative ideology. Here I will concentrate on two basic topics. The first is the neoconservative global understanding of U.S. society. The second is neoconservatism’s notion of democracy as it emerged from its conception of U.S. crisis. For the advocates of this tendency there is a close interconnection between their view of American society, the problems faced by the United States, and their idea of democracy and capitalism.

With regard to their perception of American society, most neoconservatives—especially Bell and Novak—consider that the United States operates like the Catholic Trinity, in three working systems that must function together: the political system, the economic system and the cultural system. In the United States the political system is a democracy, the economic system relies quite heavily but not totally on free enterprise, and the cultural system is a liberal one. These systems are interlocked. “If one [of them] is injured the other is injured too. If one is missing, the resulting system falls short of our dreams.” As we will see later, for neoconservatives the problems often rest in the sphere of culture.

In relation to the U.S. crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s, neoconservatism,
contrary to more progressive interpretations of U.S. reality, will not primarily accept the fact that the crisis is inherent in the capitalist system itself, and thus they emphasize the disfunctioning of the institutions which the liberals have brought about. "What the Marxists mistakenly attribute to capitalist economics," Samuel Huntington asserted, "however, is in fact a product of democratic politics."\(^72\)

For the neoconservatives, the basic problem of American society lies in a crisis of authority, an increasing loss of legitimacy among government institutions and an erroneous conception about democratic and liberal ideas. The crisis, asserted one of the advocates of this tendency, has manifested "itself in a decline of public confidence and trust in the political leaders and institutions such as political parties and the Presidency... and a weakening of the coherence, purpose and self confidence of political leadership."\(^73\) Therefore, the breakdown has an important institutional dimension, a situation that affects American democracy in a negative manner.

Likewise, neoconservatives consider that an explanation of the crisis can be found in the sphere of culture. The breakdown is essentially moral and cultural and has affected the roots of American society. For them, the crisis has one of its main manifestations in the emergence of the so-called counter-culture, a term which refers to the "rebellion against established moral, social, and aesthetic values in the 1960s."\(^74\)

The demands of the different social movements which promote this counter-culture have, in the neoconservative ideology, altered the character of American culture. The feminist rebellion, the struggle for lesbian and gay freedom, the youth protests, etc. have challenged, in one way or another, the social, economic or ideological reproduction of the U.S. society because they deteriorate the legitimacy of those institutions necessary for the reproduction of accepted cultural principles. These social movements are perceived by neoconservatives as a sort of "countersubversive" force that is eroding traditional bourgeois values.

"Who can deny," Irving Kristol observed, "that in the United States today, as never before in its history, there is a vast unease about the prospects of the republic?... Taken together, [these problems] are creating habits of mind that threaten the civic-bourgeois culture bequeathed to us by Western civilization...One wonders," Kristol concludes: "how can a bourgeois society survive in a cultural ambience that derides every traditional bourgeois virtue and celebrates promiscuity, homosexuality, drugs, political terrorism- anything, in short, that is in bourgeois eyes perverse?"\(^75\)

With these words, Kristol does not hesitate to omit from his analysis other episodes of American history (like the Civil War, in which the nation was indeed uneasy about the future of the republic) or to condemn homosexuality, which from the liberal perspective is a private matter. With this position, Kristol is expressing that the

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74 Gillian Peele, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
extension of governmental authority in certain spheres could influence social behavior. To highlight the “countersubversive” nature of the counter-culture, to create a symbolic universe in which certain social protests are noxious to a conventional American culture, is for Kristol a path to reverse the collapse of traditional values in time of changes.

The cultural dimension of the crisis has been studied fundamentally by Daniel Bell. In his Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, Bell developed the thesis that the growing gap between the socio-economic and the cultural spheres is the basic element that explains the breakdown in the political system. He argues that the economic area is ruled by the imperatives of efficiency, while the cultural sphere is dominated by the hedonist norms of self-absorption and self-fulfillment.

In the early stages of American capitalism, the overwhelming economic impulse was restricted by the Protestant ethic. Today, however, modern culture has replaced the Protestant ethic and the capitalist spirit with hedonism. Therefore, in modern culture, the “idolatry of the self is subversive of contemporary society” and threatens to overthrow the values of Western civilization. The crisis, then, is not the product of the problems inherent in the productive structure. On the contrary, it is because the capitalist system has been so efficient that the system had produced a culture antagonistic to its own nature.

Behind these corrosive effects “loom the rising influence of the adversary culture.” Adversary culture was Lionel Trilling’s phrase to characterize the subversive intentions of writers against bourgeois society. Today, neoconservatives believe that society has generated two types of conflicting cultures: massive adversary culture characterized by the voracious wish to experience new sensations, and the realm of socially responsible criticism.

By opposing a bourgeois society the adversary culture has come to shape a whole new current of thinking within society that has caused the cultural crisis and has affected even American democracy and the most essential ways of life in the United States. This adversary culture has upset the moral values of U.S. society such as family and religion, and its deeply rooted values and customs. The adversary culture is, consequently, claimed to be responsible for a multitude of sins, like the rise of the women’s liberation movement, the “fiscal crisis of the state” because of the excessive welfare expenses, and the decline of democracy. Neoconservatives, thus, have a patriotic mission: to defend the “American political tradition against politicized cultural assault.”

These scholars stress the destructive and disintegrative role played by the emergence of a whole new class which manipulates information and gives content and

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76 Daniel Bell, The Cultural..., op. cit.
direction to the adversary culture. This "new class" does not refer to a class in the Marxist sense or the sociological tradition, but rather is founded on a broad conception of "classless intellectuals." It consists of a "goodly proportion of those college-educated people whose skills and vocation proliferate in a 'post-industrial society.'" It includes employees of the public sector—scientists, city planners, lawyers, educators, doctors, sociologists, etc.—as well as politicians, journalists and academics, who share the liberal philosophy in its contemporary version.

This new class, consequently, does not have a specific economic or social relation to the society. On the contrary, its capital consists not of "money or property but of education, brains and technical expertise." In the United States, this new class of intellectuals (or "critical intelligence") who pursue power in the name of equality, "would eventually replace the old owners and entrepreneurs—that is the bourgeoisie—as the ruling elite." According to this perspective, class conflict does not take place in the terrain of production between capital and labor, but rather in the sphere of ideas. Thus, the civil rights movement and the social protests of the 1960s were not expressions of social class struggles for equality and justice, they are the result of radical intellectual elites who have manipulated the masses in order to achieve their own selfish goals of power. The new class, then, has become the central antagonist of the bourgeoisie.

It is precisely this new class with its demands for equality which has upset the original conception of U.S. society and democracy. Democracy is for the neoconservatives the classic restrictive-elitist variant of the Madisonian model. In Federalist No. 10, Madison indicated that the Constitution aims to prevent the tyranny of factions whose main source is the unequal distribution of property. The major faction (the poor) could gain power and oppress the minority groups. To prevent the poor and other majorities from mobilizing, factions must be controlled.

In Madison's opinion, a majority faction is less likely to exist if the electorate is numerous and diverse in its interests, and if it does exist, it is less likely to act as a unified movement. Likewise, in Federalist 47, he argues that concentration of power in the government is a clear manifestation of tyranny. In a nutshell, for Madison, republican government was the counterpart of democratic government. Democratic government involves direct participation and majority rule and tends toward the leveling of property differences. Republican government is a more moderate version of what we call representative democracy. For Robert Dahl, the Madisonian style of argument provided a "satisfying, persuasive, and protective ideology for the minority of wealth, status and power who distrusted and feared their bitter enemies—the artisans and farmers of inferior wealth, status and power, who...constituted the popular majority."

This tradition which protects the interests of the wealthy elites, has been absorbed

and reformulated according to current times by the neoconservatives. Showing great affinity with Madison, these intellectuals believe that for the Founding Fathers democracy and republic have two different meanings.

In a democracy [asserts Irving Kristol] the will of the people is supreme. In a republic, it is not the will of the people but the rational consensus of the people which governs... In a democracy, popular passions may rule, but in a republic popular passion is regarded as unfit to rule, and precautions are taken to see that it is subdued rather than sovereign. In a democracy all politicians are, to some degree, demagogues... In a republic there are not supposed to be such politicians, only statements... In the United States both republican and democratic principles were incorporated in a complicated and ingenious way.\textsuperscript{82}

By the same token, neoconservatives agree with Madison that it is necessary to protect the minorities from the dangerous interests of the majority, the poor. For them, the poor are the main cause of the disfunction of U.S. democracy. The popular majority has been mobilized by the new class against bourgeois interests and cultural values. In their opinion, since the 1960s the rise of populist feelings has stimulated different forms of citizen participation. Although those forms of political expression are essential for the functioning of democracy they are, at the same time, a political utopia according to which nothing is good enough for the people, since this is merely a question of a false class consciousness and a very dangerous form of radicalism.\textsuperscript{83}

In all, too much democracy is dangerous. The reason is simple: political participation is what has caused many of the United States' problems by stimulating increased levels of awareness on the part of some groups —blacks, Chicanos, women, etc.— who seek a way to obtain “what they considered to be their appropriate share of the action and its rewards.”\textsuperscript{84} Thus, there has arisen political and ideological polarization on issues of public interest within U.S. society.

Demands of increased state activity have multiplied in all spheres of individual life. This phenomenon has provoked an “overload” of work and function in the government. The government has been obliged to try to do too much and hence has failed, thus lowering its capacity for political leadership and control and producing a crisis of “governability of democracy.” “The vitality of democracy in the 1960s,” Samuel Huntington has noted, “produced a substantial increase in governmental activity and a substantial decrease in governmental authority. Thus, the vitality of democracy in the 1960s raised some questions about the governability of democracy in the 1970s.”\textsuperscript{85}

Finally, and also remembering Madison, the neoconservatives believe that good government is synonymous with limited government. For the advocates of this tendency, the modern state has become a sort of dangerous Leviathan that threatens the liberty of the citizens and the proper functioning of U.S. democracy. However, it is important

\textsuperscript{82} Irving Kristol, Reflections..., pp. 92-93.


\textsuperscript{84} Samuel P. Huntington, The Crisis..., op. cit., p. 61.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibidem, p. 64.
to highlight that some neoconservatives call for the preservation of the Keynesian economic system although they seek the rationalization of the welfare state. Therefore, they are critical of social and economic reform stemming from the welfare state, but give their selective approval to some of those which provide security and ease to the individual within society, as long as they do not imply any great intervention of the state in the affairs of individuals and do not affect the interests of private enterprises or the free play of the market laws.  

Having highlighted the main ideological characteristics of neoconservatism, let me conclude this journey toward the main features of the neoconservative movement trying to summarize, in a sort of working definition, what I have said and what I will understand by neoconservatism in this study. In this regard, I will consider six interconnected elements.

First, neoconservatism is a movement of intellectuals, politicians and journalists of national reputation. Second, among the different American ideological tendencies, neoconservatism is a centrist liberal expression. Third, it is a movement defined by a specific sequence of historical events that started with their participation as radical anti-communists in the early 1940s. Fourth, “the common link in the sources of neoconservatism is past involvement in the struggle against communism as anti-Stalinists in radical movements or as liberal opponents of communist dominated factions in sections of the Democratic party where the communists were once strong, e.g., the states of Washington, Minnesota, and New York.” Fifth, it is a movement that has four basic institutions: the AEI, the CDM, the CFW, the CPD, and four neoconservative journals.

Sixth, ideologically speaking, neoconservatives are a specific type of liberals, a group of people who endorse the main components of New Deal liberalism, but reject Johnson’s Great Society program. They are post-war liberals that accept the liberalism of “social insurance, a strong national defense, anti-communism at home and abroad, and corporate-led growth, but dislike the liberalism of maximum feasible participation of the poor, the redistribution of opportunity, affirmative action, and strict regulation of the corporation in the public interest.” They are, in all, a “direct derivative of the decomposition of the postwar consensus.”

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