

From "The Washington Note" – by Steve C. Clemons, August 13th, 2004

"THE NEOCONSERVATIVE MOMENT" BY FRANCIS FUKUYAMA is an important new essay in the latest edition of *The National Interest*. The link only provides an excerpt -- but a subscription to this magazine is a cheap price to pay to read what may be the beginnings of a civil war among neoconservatives.

I attended a dinner last week hosted by *The National Interest* and the [Nixon Center](#) featuring [Francis Fukuyama](#) discussing this article. The rules for the meeting were not presented, but I am going to respect the non-attribution rule of many such in house discussions as I want to make sure I'm invited back. It was one of the most fascinating roundtable discussions I've participated in in quite a long time. Among those in attendance at the 25 person dinner were Nixon Center President and former Nixon advisor Dimitri Simes, former Defense and Energy Secretary James Schlesinger, *U.S. News and World Report's* Michael Barone, Eisenhower Institute President Susan Eisenhower, former UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, Georgetown University's Charles Kupchan, former National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, National Interest Editor John O'Sullivan, and recent Department of Defense Comptroller Dov Zakheim -- who now works in the same firm of Booz Allen and Hamilton with James Woolsey, who has received some attention in [this column](#).

I mention these folks not to name drop but to make the point that these are serious people -- most of them realists, but not all. Kupchan classifies himself as a liberal internationalist, which some think is pretty close to enlightened realism anyway. But Jeane Kirkpatrick and Francis (Frank) Fukuyama were the only two who declared themselves to be "dyed in the wool" neoconservatives (this doesn't violate the non-attribution rule, as they have both said this in plenty of other venues). Michael Barone may be a neocon but left just before the juicy part of the discussion got going.

But *The National Interest* has long been the journal of record for both neocons and realists. Irving Kristol long held *The Public Interest* and *The National Interest* as important engines in his neoconservative movement -- but under the editorship of Owen Harries, *National Interest* incrementally diverged and became the home of important commentary on modern foreign policy realism. Realists like Henry Kissinger, James Schlesinger, Dimitri Simes, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Samuel Huntington, and Josef Joffe partly populate the magazine's

editorial board and management. But neocons Eliot Cohen, Francis Fukuyama, Charles Krauthammer, Richard Perle, and Daniel Pipes are also there. John O'Sullivan who long led [National Review](#) worked alongside William F. Buckley -- who himself said that he would have stood completely against the Iraq War had he known all that he knew today about the intelligence gaps -- also co-founded the neocon project, [The New Atlantic Initiative](#), which is housed at the American Enterprise Institute. O'Sullivan makes a perfect editor and overseer of the dominant new currents of realism and neoconservatism as he has long straddled both worlds.

Back to the civil war. Fukuyama's article was born from his irritable reaction to a major speech by another neoconservative elder, Charles Krauthammer, "[Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World](#)," the 2004 Irving Kristol Lecture at the annual dinner of the American Enterprise Institute.

Let me share (with permission) a couple of paragraphs from the introduction of Fukuyama's essay:

One of Washington's most exclusive clubs during the 1990s was the annual board dinner of The National Interest. Presided over by founding editor Owen Harries and often kicked off with a presentation by Henry Kissinger, the group included Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Irving, Bea and Bill Kristol, Samuel Huntington, Paul Wolfowitz, Norman Podhoretz, Daniel Pipes, Charles Krauthammer, Marty Feldstein, Eliot Cohen, Peter Rodman and a host of other conservative thinkers, writers and doers, including just about everyone now characterized as a "neoconservative."

What I always found fascinating about these dinners was their unpredictability. People's views were very much set in concrete during the Cold War; while this group was divided into pro- and anti-detente camps, virtually everyone (myself included) had staked out territory years before. The Berlin Wall's fall brought a great change, and there was no clear mapping between one's pre-1989 views and the ones held thereafter. Roughly, the major fault line was between people who were more realist and those who were more idealist or Wilsonian. But everyone was trying to wrestle with the same basic question: In the wake of the disappearance of the overarching strategic threat posed by the former USSR, how did one define the foreign policy of a country that had suddenly become the global hegemon? How narrowly or broadly did one define this magazine's eponymous "national interest"?

It was at one of these dinners that Charles Krauthammer first articulated the idea of American unipolarity. In the winter of 1990-91, he wrote in Foreign Affairs of the "unipolar moment"; in the Winter 2002/03 issue of The National Interest, he expanded the scope of his thesis by arguing that "the unipolar moment has become the unipolar era." And in February 2004, he gave a speech at the annual dinner of the American Enterprise Institute in which he took his earlier themes and developed the ideas further, in the aftermath of

the Iraq War. He defined four different schools of thought on foreign policy: isolationism, liberal internationalism, realism and his own position that he defines as "democratic globalism", a kind of muscular Wilsonianism-minus international institutions-that seeks to use U.S. military supremacy to support U.S. security interests and democracy simultaneously.

Krauthammer is a gifted thinker and his ideas are worth taking seriously for their own sake. But, perhaps more importantly, his strategic thinking has become emblematic of a school of thought that has acquired strong influence inside the Bush Administration foreign policy team and beyond. It is for that reason that Krauthammer's writings, particularly his AEI speech, require careful analysis. It is in the spirit of our earlier debates that I offer the following critique.

The 2004 speech is strangely disconnected from reality. Reading Krauthammer, one gets the impression that the Iraq War-the archetypical application of American unipolarity-had been an unqualified success, with all of the assumptions and expectations on which the war had been based fully vindicated. There is not the slightest nod towards the new empirical facts that have emerged in the last year or so: the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the virulent and steadily mounting anti-Americanism throughout the Middle East, the growing insurgency in Iraq, the fact that no strong democratic leadership had emerged there, the enormous financial and growing human cost of the war, the failure to leverage the war to make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front, and the fact that America's fellow democratic allies had by and large failed to fall in line and legitimate American actions ex post.

The failure to step up to these facts is dangerous precisely to the neo-neoconservative position that Krauthammer has been seeking to define and justify. As the war in Iraq turns from triumphant liberation to grinding insurgency, other voices-either traditional realists like Brent Scowcroft, nationalist-isolationists like Patrick Buchanan, or liberal internationalists like John Kerry-will step forward as authoritative voices and will have far more influence in defining American post-Iraq War foreign policy. The poorly executed nation-building strategy in Iraq will poison the well for future such exercises, undercutting domestic political support for a generous and visionary internationalism, just as Vietnam did.

It did not have to be this way. One can start with premises identical to Krauthammer's, agree wholeheartedly with his critiques of the other three positions, and yet come up with a foreign policy that is very different from the one he lays out. I believe that his strategy simultaneously defines our interests in such a narrow way as to make the neoconservative position indistinguishable from realism, while at the same time managing to be utterly unrealistic in its overestimation of U.S. power and our ability to control events around the world. It is probably too late to reclaim the label "neoconservative" for any but the policies undertaken by the Bush Administration, but it is still worth trying to reformulate a fourth alternative that combines idealism and realism-but in a fashion that can be sustained over the long haul.

Fukuyama, throughout his article, argues with Krauthammer over both the ideological substance of neoconservatism as well as the

implementation of neoconservative vision. Fukuyama argues that legitimacy of American values and institutions is not automatic in the eyes of those around the world -- and a certain degree of realism requires us to acknowledge that since India thinks that a UN resolution is the only thing that can make a war legitimate, then we need to respect that reality if we want a nation like India's support. There were some in the room during the dinner who thought that Frank Fukuyama's remarks didn't really define true neoconservatism because he didn't acknowledge the universalism of American ideals and institutions and acknowledged that America's predominant power would breed rival balances of power in the future -- which these observers feel doesn't hang with pure neoconservatism.

I'm convinced that Fukuyama is a major stakeholder in neoconservative circles -- mostly because he thinks he is and makes a claim to some degree of ideological stewardship of this movement. But it's clear that Krauthammer and he disagree strongly on ideology and on its practice in Iraq. I have been informed by the editor of *National Interest* that Charles Krauthammer will have a counter-point article in the next issue of the journal.

I hope you are still with me at this point in this long entry. This battle matters as the neocons populate many important positions throughout the Bush administration -- and knowing that they may be divided, or even that they could be divided, may present significant opportunities for advancing U.S. foreign policy thinking towards a more enlightened direction than now is the case. This is particularly true if the Bush team loses to Kerry -- but even if we have a new President next year -- these battles over American grand strategy and the debate between neoconservatism, realism, and liberal internationalism are still going to rage.



THE WASHINGTON NOTE

by steven c. clemons

