

**America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy**

*Francis Fukuyama*

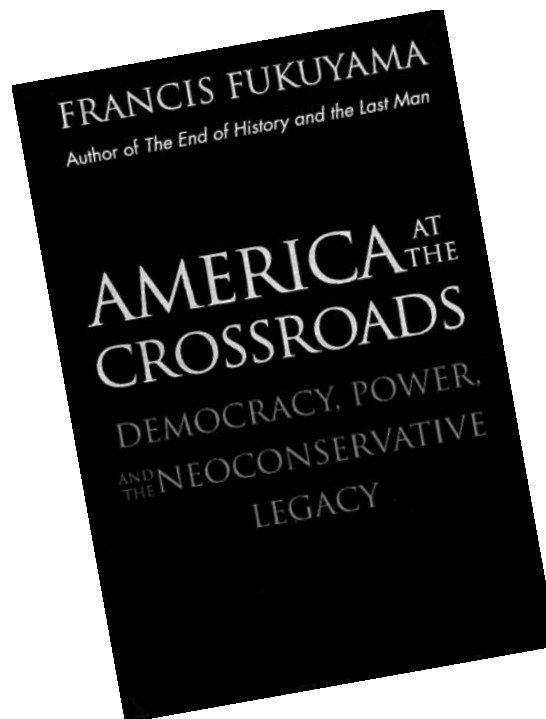
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The image of the United States is disquieting. The country is divided, torn apart by petty polemics, corroded by doubt, undermined by suicidal hedonism and dazed by the shouting of the demagogues...The other road, the road of public health, passes through the examination of the conscience and self-criticism: a return to their roots, the foundations of the nation. In the case of the United States: to the vision of the founding fathers. Not to repeat what they said: to recommence. These beginnings are simultaneously purification and change.

OCTAVIO PAZ<sup>1</sup>

How much has President George W. Bush's foreign policy been influenced by U.S. identity and politics and how much by the specificities of the president and his administration? Five years after the September 11 terrorist attacks, U.S. foreign policy strategy is conditioned by the failure of the armed inva-



sion of Iraq. So, how will history judge George W. Bush's term?

Reading about the ingenuity of U.S. interventionism and its repercussions in the international system is the common task of any avid reader. Nevertheless, reading the acrimonious criticisms of a prestigious neoconservative thinker like Francis Fukuyama is very different. The author of the polemical *The End of History and the Last Man*, in his new book, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy*, traces his journey through neoconservatism and defines himself as an intellectual crit-

ical of the administration. His new aim: to denounce the militarization of Washington's international policy strategy.

It is paradoxical that Fukuyama, a member of the bombastic "Project for the New American Century," is denouncing the ideology that he himself had fostered since the 1990s. His main argument is that the Bush Doctrine of preventive war has limited itself to an ideological effort unprecedented in the annals of U.S. history. His proposal is to reconcile in the international system what Louis Hartz called the powerful liberal absolutism with a realist current justifying U.S. hegemony. In this sense, Fukuyama calls for a "realist-Wilsonian" strategy for international policy.

Neoconservatism is an ideological and political movement that has pushed for U.S. leadership of the international system for 40 years through a foreign policy that ranges from anti-communism to a change in regime and preventive war as articulating axes of national security. Thus, the prefix "neo" is a product of its assimilation as the contemporary expression of U.S. conservatism. In this way, passing through three major stages, neoconservatism not only renovated conservatism defined as an ideology of the search and institution of values of the old community, but it also aided in translating it into a permanent element of international politics.

The first stage began in the 1970s when a growing polarization of U.S. society—manifested after the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War, the imbalances in the international economy, the political crisis caused by Watergate and followed by the resignation of President Richard Nixon—fostered an isolationist discourse in foreign policy inscribed in a theory of historic cycles of the great powers. Then, the neoconservatives, with their liberal, anti-communist roots, not only renovated the Republican Party, but also gave great impetus to the conservative nation (think tanks, foundations, associations, interest and pressure groups that were all part of the conservative movement) that finally consolidated with the arrival of a president who jibed with the movement: Ronald Reagan.

The second stage was the direct result of the implosion of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new scenarios in the balance of world power among nations. The neoconservatives feared that once the

threat of communism disappeared, the United States would withdraw behind its borders and depend on collective security mechanisms for preserving peace and stability in the world. The post-Cold War would require the leadership of the United States to deal with dictatorships and hostile ideologies and promote the principles of liberal democracy by military force if necessary. Thus, the 1990s was a period of great political activism for the conservative nation, which promoted the doctrines of security and defense represented in a single U.S. pole in the international system.

Finally, the third stage began with 9/11. The strategies of dissuasion and contention were insufficient to deal with the new threat. In this way, the neoconservatives renovated the crosscutting themes of a foreign policy built on the basis of the principles of preventive war, unilateralism and hegemonism.

U.S. foreign policy has been the product of a perennial struggle between two different but complementary ideological perceptions: the tradition of liberal internationalism and that of conservative nationalism. Therefore, U.S. foreign policy is subject to cyclical fluctuations of interventionism and isolationism. Arthur M. Schlesinger says that the conceptions of these fluctuations correspond to the old dispute between perceiving the United States as an experiment or as destiny.

Fukuyama's work is interesting when he argues, indirectly, that the study of the international system requires not only the analysis of materialist aspects, but also the incorporation of new social concepts like national identities. Then, is it possible to design and implement a foreign policy that on the one hand pays obeisance to *realpolitik* and at the same time to a policy of change and alignment of external national identities? As a result, will states with political, social and cultural affinities grow closer together? Could this be a reliable, successful strategy for U.S. foreign policy?

President George W. Bush's foreign policy is a revolt understood as a return to the principles defined as the "American Creed," a rebellion, seen as the subversion and dissidence of a traditionalist, nativist political group, and a revolution, not in the sense of a transformation of society, but as an accelerated, radical change in Washington's international policy strategies.

In short, what Fukuyama says about neoconservative foreign policy doctrine is that the United States must maintain and promote its status as the sole military, economic and cultural pole; increase its national defense budget; and promote democratic values through—in the words of Joseph S. Nye—hard power and soft power. Thus, the single-pole character of the international system is built based on three elements: 1) the promotion of democracy; b) the creation of a new U.S. internationalism through strengthening and developing new alliances; and c) maintaining and expanding the *pax Americana*.

Thus, President Bush's neoconservative foreign policy rests on five principles: 1) the United States exists in a dangerous world; 2) states are the main actors in the international system; 3) military power is something that reaffirms hegemony and the single-pole system; 4) international accords and multilateral bodies are neither essential nor necessary; and 5) the United States is the world's only super-power.

There are three theories about the impact of neoconservatism on President Bush's foreign policy. The first is that the administration has been waylaid by a neoconservative group. The second states that the neoconservatives foresaw the threat of terrorism and were able to adjust their strategy. But, the third theory is more valid and Fukuyama seems to defend it: after 9/11, the neoconservative discourse attracted and convinced a conservative nation. Therefore, neoconservative foreign policy became a conservative focus of U.S. international policy after 9/11.

In this way, after 9/11, President Bush pushed for the creation of a new and powerful foreign policy elite inside the establishment, so that neoconservative doctrine currently provides one of the most plausible guidelines for Washington's international policy. Thus, the interventionist-unilateralist-messianic triad is part of the post-9/11 political discourse. In that sense, it is undeniable that the foreign policy strategy is revolutionary: it abandons a perennial debate between dissuasion and contention as instruments of international policy.

The experience in Iraq proved to be an expensive chosen—not necessary—war. It has sparked intense debate within the United States and throughout the rest of the world about U.S. foreign policy and

its role in the international system. Therefore, the idealist Wilsonian tradition of internationalism and the nationalist realist tradition in the foreign policy of President George W. Bush demonstrate the radical resurrection of U.S. national identity as a theory of international policy in the post-9/11 international system.

With things in this state, it is probable that if there were another terrorist attack in the United States similar to 9/11 or even deadlier, the neoconservative foreign policy doctrine would be taken out of mothballs and cleansed of its failures in Iraq. The response by future generations of U.S. political leaders to any threat to security will be inexorably linked to the reactions of their own national identity. Thus, power and ideas will be assimilated into a single body, a doctrine, a perception.

*America at the Crossroads* marks a trend: conservative intellectuals' rejection and criticism of the Bush administration prior to the November mid-term elections, and the loss of credibility of the U.S. political class. So, Fukuyama presents the reader with yet another critique of President Bush's messianic interventionism, at the same time that his book triggers even older and at the same time modern misgivings about the role of intellectuals in the discursive handling of universalist, exclusivist ideologies as the unfathomable dogma of international policy.

As Octavio Paz wrote, Americans are a people hurtling into the future, but for the "public health" of their own government, they examine their own self-criticism and moral judgment. The resurrection of the American Creed, the product of the seventeenth-century Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture and its links to so-called chauvinists and xenophobes, is the product of American recovery of the *other*, of the quest for answers for dealing with the external world and its labyrinths. ■■■

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Octavio Paz, *Tiempo nublado* (Barcelona: Seix-Barral, 2003), pp. 55-56.