The Roots of the Bush Doctrine

Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy

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The promotion of democracy is central to the George W. Bush administration's prosecution of both the war on terrorism and its overall grand strategy, in which it is assumed that U.S. political and security interests are advanced by the spread of liberal political institutions and values abroad. In an approach variously characterized as "democratic realism," "national security liberalism," "democratic globalism," and "messianic universalism," the Bush administration's national security policy has centered on the direct application of U.S. military and political power to promote democracy in strategic areas. In a summer 2004 interview, Bush expressed his "deep desire to spread liberty around the world as a way to help secure [the United States] in the long-run."[1] According to Bush, "As in Europe, as in Asia, as in every region of the world, the advance of freedom leads to peace."[2] This generic statement of cause and effect is also applied specifically to terrorism: "democracy and reform will make [Middle Eastern states] stronger and more stable, and make the world more secure by undermining terrorism at its source."[3] More broadly, the Bush administration proposes a liberal international order grounded in U.S. military and political power; as its 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) contends, the unparalleled U.S. position of primacy creates a "moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe . . . [the United States] will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world." This view appears to be contingent on the belief that U.S. power is "the sole pillar upholding a liberal world order that is conducive to the principles [the United States] believes in."[4]

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1. "Interview with George Bush, Laura Bush," *CNN Larry King Live,* August 12, 2004.
2. "Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy," White House press release, November 6, 2003.
3. Ibid.
4. Robert Kagan, "America as Hegemon," *In the National Interest,* Vol. 2, No. 29 (July 2003), http://www.inthenationalinterest.com. See also Niall Ferguson, "A World without Power," *Foreign Policy,* No. 143 (July/August 2004), p. 32.

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Although a radical departure in many other respects, the current U.S. grand strategy's privileging of liberalism and democracy falls squarely within the mainstream of American diplomatic traditions. For reasons unique to the American political experience, U.S. nationalism—that is, the factors that define and differentiate the United States as a self-contained political community—has historically been defined in terms of both adherence to a set of liberal, universal political ideals and a perceived obligation to spread those norms internationally. The concept of the United States as agent of historical transformation and liberal change in the international system therefore informs almost the entire history of U.S. foreign policy. As Jeanne Kirkpatrick has observed, no modern idea "holds greater sway in the minds of educated Americans than the belief that it is possible to democratize governments anytime, anywhere, and under any circumstances."[5] Or as Thomas Paine wrote to George Washington in the dedication of *The Rights of Man*, the United States was founded to see "the New World regenerate the Old."[6] Democracy promotion is not just another foreign policy instrument or idealist diversion; it is central to U.S. political identity and sense of national purpose.

Although grounded in the same nationalist premise of liberal exceptionalism, two contending schools have developed with respect to the long-term promotion of democratic change. One perspective—which, following historian H.W. Brands, may be termed "exemplarism"—conceives of the United States as founded in separation from Old World politics and the balance of power system. It suggests that U.S. institutions and values should be perfected and preserved, often but not exclusively through isolation. The United States exerts influence on the world through the force of its example; an activist foreign policy may even corrupt liberal practices at home, undermining the potency of the U.S. model. A second perspective—"vindicationism"—shares this "city-on-a-hill" identity, but argues that the United States must move beyond example and undertake active measures to spread its universal political values and institutions.[7] Henry Kissinger observes these "two contradictory attitudes" in

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5. Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: A Critique of U.S. Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, Georgetown University, 1978), p. 37.
6. Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 34.
7. The concepts of exceptionalism and mission are major themes in the expansive secondary literature on U.S. foreign relations. Although this broad distinction is central to my argument about nationalist ideologies, I use Brands's terminology, both because it is the catchiest and because the academic world does not need yet another set of stylized terms. H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Many authors recognize the distinction identified here and agree on the direction of ideological

how the United States conceives of its international role: America as both beacon and crusader.[8] Anthony Smith, a British historian of nationalism, recognizes this same dichotomy in more general terms, drawing a distinction between "covenanted peoples" who "turn inward away from the profane world" and "missionary peoples" who "seek to expand into and transform the world."[9]

Both exemplarism and vindicationism follow from a foreign policy nationalism that regards the United States as an instrument of democratic change in the international system. Given this broad agreement on moral and strategic objectives—Americans are all, or at least historically have been, liberal exceptionalists—the debate has been over the policy means with which to prosecute that mission. One is a strategy organized around the concept of the United States as exemplar, the other around the United States as missionary and evangelist. At stake between them are a series of normative and causal claims about the nature of international politics and the capacity of U.S. power to produce major social and political change abroad; they are in effect competing theories of democracy promotion.

Although these contending approaches have coexisted throughout U.S. political history, they have also prevailed at different times. Students of U.S history generally agree on the direction of change: whereas the first few generations of U.S. political leaders believed that the United States was exceptional for the example it set, vindicationism largely prevailed in the twentieth century, culminating in a Bush doctrine in which the active—and even coercive—promotion of democracy is a central component of U.S. grand strategy. The central puzzle addressed in this article is: what explains this shift in democracy-promotion strategy, from the concept of the United States as exam-

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change, although they often fail to advance clear, systematic explanations. See Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Russell Nye, *This Almost Chosen People: Essays in the History of American Ideas* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1966); Edward Burns, *The American Idea of Mission: Concepts of National Purpose and Destiny* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957); Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001); Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Defending the West: Occidentalism and the Formation of NATO," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (September 2003), pp. 223–253; and Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955).

8. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 18.

9. Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 93.

ple to the concept of the United States as mission? What explains the long-term shift from exemplarism to vindicationism? Whence this peculiarly American faith in what has been called "global social engineering," or the belief in the capacity of U.S. power to effect major social and political change abroad?

It could be argued that broad variation in the U.S. approach to democracy promotion is explained entirely by power. Political realism predicts that, due to the incentives and pressures created by the international political environment, the expansion and contraction of a state's political interests tend to correspond with changes in relative power. In fact, the broad change from exemplarism to vindicationism correlates with a massive increase in relative power: as the United States acquired the capability to use intervention as a mechanism of democratic change, it exercised it. This hypothesis is advanced independent of variation at the domestic level; its conceptual implication is that ideology and nationalist ideas are either epiphenomenal of material structure, or cannot account for any variation independent of changes in a state's relative power position. But is early exemplarism explained entirely by the fact U.S. political leaders presided over a weak and disunited state, and now inapplicable to the conduct of U.S. hegemony? To appropriate Robert Kagan's pithy formulation, is exemplarism just a "weapon of the weak?"[10]

My argument is that periods of activist democracy promotion can be explained by both the expansion of material capabilities and the presence of a nationalist domestic ideology that favors vindicationism over exemplarism. While power is an important factor, long-term variation in the United States' democracy-promotion strategy also turns on subtle but significant ideational shifts in the doctrine of liberal exceptionalism. The founders, grounded in a political-realist and Calvinist view of politics, were skeptical toward the capacity of the United States to effect democratic change abroad, distrusted the concentration of power necessary to implement an activist foreign policy, and resolved to limit the U.S. liberal mission to demonstrating the success of an experiment in self-government. The character of liberal exceptionalism began to shift in the late nineteenth century. Various reform movements such as Progressivism and the Social Gospel, both political reactions to post–Civil War industrialization and modernization, produced a different set of normative and instrumental beliefs about the nature of progress and the efficacy of U.S. power to create a more perfect social and political order.

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10. Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review,* No. 113 (June–July 2002), p. 3.

If persuasive, this argument contributes to two sets of debates, one theoretical and one substantive. Theoretically, it conceptualizes "nationalism"—which, in the U.S. case, is inextricably linked with a liberal-exceptionalist ideology and identity—both as a source of political preferences and as an intervening variable that mediates how states respond to the incentives and constraints created by the international political environment. A "neoclassical" line of realist argumentation contends that the mechanisms by which the effects of relative power are translated into state behavior are not as smooth or determinate as structural realist theories assume, and must be supplemented with unit-level variables.[11] U.S. democracy promotion illustrates the utility of this approach: if, according to Kenneth Waltz, "international political theory deals with the pressures of structure on states and not how states will respond to those pressures,"[12] my argument privileges ideological changes in the doctrine of liberal exceptionalism as a domestic political process that determines the latter, shaping how states respond to external constraints and incentives. With respect to the Bush Doctrine, if relative power shapes the basic parameters of a state's foreign policy, unipolarity has created a permissive environment in which an aggressive ideology of democracy promotion can flourish. Power and ideas are not mutually exclusive explanations, but interact to produce foreign policy outcomes of interest.

Empirically, neoconservatism is situated within a long tradition of vindicationism. Treatments of neoconservatism are usually descriptive, often alarmist, and occasionally conspiratorial. My argument treats neoconservatism not as a momentary aberration, but as consistent with a history of nationalist ideologies rooted in liberal exceptionalism, and specifically emerging from a late nineteenth-century Progressive and Social Gospel understanding of political progress and the capacity of American power to effect democratic change in the international system.

The first section of this article introduces the basic realist hypotheses about state behavior that are relevant to understanding variation in U.S. democracy-promotion behavior. The second section examines the sources of liberal exceptionalism as the defining feature of American nationalism. The third section develops the two competing perspectives on democracy promotion more

11. For surveys of this literature, see Gideon Rose "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics,* Vol. 51, No. 1 (October 1998), pp. 144–172; and Randall L. Schweller, "The Progressivism of Neoclassical Realism," in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds., *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).
12. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 51.

fully, and the fourth explains why the founders resolved the democracy-promotion debate in favor of exemplarism. The fifth and sixth sections investigate this long-term shift by looking at two cases, the 1890s and the Bush Doctrine. Both the 1890s and Bush administration will be compared along the following dimensions: the expansion of material power, the political effects of such expansion, and the presence of a prevailing vindicationist ideology.

Political Realism and State Behavior

Political realism advances a number of general propositions about the impact of relative power on foreign policy behavior. These arguments are important because they propose a series of testable hypotheses applicable to U.S. democracy promotion and because they form a tradition of political philosophy from which U.S. political leaders, and especially the country's founders, have drawn. Two arguments are of particular interest.

First, a key realist hypothesis since Thucydides has been that states expand in the absence of countervailing power; unbalanced power will act without moderation, and states not subject to external restraint tend to observe few limits on their behavior. Political agents, according to Thucydides' Athenians, are "under an innate compulsion to rule when empowered."[13] Modern realism thus argues that states balance against extreme asymmetries in power; under conditions of anarchy, imbalanced power creates the possibility for aggressive behavior, regardless of the domestic character or benign intent of the leading state.[14]

Second, realism advances the hypothesis that states' definitions of their interests—both political and strategic—tend to expand as a consequence of increasing relative power. According to Gideon Rose, the "central empirical prediction" of classical realism is that "the relative material power resources countries possess will shape the magnitude and ambition . . . of their foreign policies: as their relative power rises states will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls their actions and ambitions will be scaled back accordingly."[15]

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13. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War,* trans. Steven Lattimore (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), p. 298.
14. Factions within structural realism debate whether states balance against aggressive intentions (a component of "threat") or against power. This debate is critical to competing conceptions of U.S. exceptionalism because vindicationism regards U.S. intentions—and thus power—as inherently benign and nonthreatening.
15. Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," p. 151. The argument that interests expand with power is also introduced in Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500–2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

Realism has offered a number of different causal logics to explain why political interests expand commensurate with relative power. In Robert Gilpin's account of international change, states pursue a "bundle" of security and welfare objectives, finding an optimum position on a set of indifference curves. Because the indifference curve selected by a state is in part a function of its capabilities, an increase in relative power "stimulates" a state to demand a larger bundle of these objectives.[16] Other scholars have argued that states are "influence-maximizing": because of the inherent uncertainty in international politics, they seek to maximize control over their external environments.[17] A final causal story is that hegemonic states tend to acquire a greater stake in world order, leading inexorably to an expansion of their political and security interests and commitments. As a corollary, because of these wide-ranging commitments, powerful states tend to identify their own national interests as necessarily consistent with public, international interests.[18]

Relative power is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for explaining variation in the United States' democracy-promotion strategy. The capability to project political and military power is clearly a precondition to actively promoting democracy abroad, but not all states with this capability necessarily pursue a policy of democracy promotion. Realism can explain the broad contours of political expansion, but it cannot capture within the terms of the factors it privileges variation in the specific content of interests or policy choice. Realist behavioral expectations are overly general; they follow from a positional logic, independent of the properties or intentions unique to states. The conceptual frame of nationalism and national identity help to explain why the United States defines its political interests in terms of democracy promotion.[19]

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16. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
17. Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).
18. Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 3, No. 118 (September 2003), pp. 365–388; and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), chap. 9.
19. This conceptual deficiency in realism, especially with respect to U.S. liberalism, is discussed in the appendix of Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). See also see Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravscik's methodological "two-step," in which certain sets of theories—"epistemic," social-constructivist—explain the sources and perceptions of interests, while rationalist third-image theories—neorealism and neoliberalism—explain the strategic pursuit of those interests subject to variations in such external constraint as the distribution of material capabilities or information. Legro and Moravscik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55.

Exceptionalism and U.S. Foreign Policy

U.S. national political identity is expressed in foreign policy primarily through the idea of "exceptionalism."[20] Historically, this doctrine has referred to "the perception that the United States differs qualitatively from other developed nations, because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions."[21] Most broadly, it has referred to the distinctive qualities that follow from a U.S. political community uniquely defined by a set of universal, liberal-democratic values. Writing in *U.S. News & World Report,* Michael Barone accurately captured the logic of U.S. exceptionalism: "Every nation is unique, but America is the most unique."[22]

This tradition of liberal exceptionalism is expressed internationally in terms of a kind of foreign policy nationalism, or a belief that U.S. foreign policy should substantively reflect the liberal political values that define the United States as a national political community and meaningfully distinguish it from others.[23] Distinct from traditional great powers, U.S. political identity has been organized around a particular conception of the national purpose, expressed in foreign policy as the belief that Americans are "a chosen people," an elect nation guided by a "special providence" to demonstrate the viability and spread of the democratic institutions and values that inform the American experiment.[24]

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20. I use the term "nationalism" to refer to a national political identity or a quality of national character, and not, as defined by Ernest Gellner, to the "political principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent." Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 1.

21. Harold Hongju Koh, "Foreword: On American Exceptionalism," *Stanford Law Review,* Vol. 55, No. 5 (May 2003), pp. 1470–1528. See also Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957); McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State,* chap. 2; Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); and Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1981), p. 259.

22. For the purposes of this argument, at issue is not whether the United States is in fact more unique than others, but the extent to which the United States' historical perception of itself as exceptional has influenced foreign policy. Michael Barone, "A Place Like No Other," *U.S. News & World Report,* June 28, 2004, p. 38.

23. Characterizations of American foreign policy as "exceptional" often include dimensions other than the perception of an obligation or interest in the promotion of democracy abroad. For other treatments, see George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Joseph Lepgold and Timothy McKeown, "Is American Foreign Policy Exceptional? An Empirical Analysis," *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 110, No. 3 (Fall 1995), pp. 369–384; and Samuel P. Huntington, "American Ideals versus American Institutions," *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 97, No. 1 (Spring 1982), pp. 1–37.

24. According to one historian of the American political tradition, "perhaps no theme has ever

What explains this historical interest in the internal political organization of other states? Many national communities have conceptualized themselves as superior or endowed with a mandate to enlighten an otherwise unregenerate world.[25] Nonetheless, because of the ideational—as opposed to organic—origins of U.S. political identity, U.S. nationalism has historically been defined in terms of both an adherence to the set of universal political values that constitute the "American Creed"—in most accounts, constitutionalism, individualism, democracy, and egalitarianism—and a perceived obligation to promote those values in its external relations.[26] By this argument, U.S. interest in democracy promotion originated not only in the instrumental maximization of some material interest, but in a moral commitment to the universal political values that define the United States as a self-contained political community.[27] This core, nationalist belief in a special mandate to promote liberal-democratic values and institutions abroad largely derives from three sources: Calvinism, the Enlightenment, and most important, functional or historical necessity.

Calvinism and mission

The first source of the U.S. self-perception of mission is seventeenth-century Calvinism. The Calvinist influence was confined primarily to the Puritans in New England, but was also manifest in settler communities in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey.[28] Although a minority of the total colonial population, the Puritans exerted a disproportionate political and cultural influence on early American life, reasserted through subsequent, periodic revivals and "great awakenings." According to Samuel Huntington, the Puritan influence "reinforced republican and democratic tendencies in the eighteenth century

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dominated the minds of the leaders of this nation to the same extent as the idea that America occupies a unique place and has a special destiny among the nations of the earth." Burns, *The American Idea of Mission*.

25. For specific examples, see Waltz, *Man, the State, the War,* chap. 4; and Smith, *Chosen Peoples*.

26. The term "American Creed" was introduced by Gunnar Myrdal, and borrowed extensively in Huntington. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944); and Huntington, *American Politics*.

27. This argument broadly conforms to a "logic of appropriateness": U.S. political leaders act in terms of what is viewed as normatively appropriate or consistent with a given political identity, in this case defined in terms of the political values of the American Creed. On competing logics of social action, see Thomas Risse, "Constructivism and International Institutions: Toward Conversations across Paradigms," in Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner, eds., *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

28. Burns, *The American Idea of Mission,* p. 11.

and provided the underlying ethical and moral basis for American ideas on politics and society."[29]

Puritanism imbued U.S. nationalism with the belief that the United States was a chosen instrument of God, divinely appointed to introduce a government and society on the American continent in which individuals would possess the liberties God had granted them. The first Puritan settlers believed they were commissioned by God for a special purpose; as John Winthrop wrote in 1630, "The work we have in hand, it is by mutual consent through a special overruling Providence . . . to seek out a place of cohabitation and consorting under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical."[30] The conviction of religious mission and providential mandate, later secularized, provided a core tenet of U.S. national identity and sense of purpose. Biblical metaphor was common; as Herman Melville later wrote, "We Americans are a peculiar, chosen people, the Israel of our times; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world."[31]

The geographic isolation of the United States appeared to be further evidence of God's special partiality for Americans; and the concept of separation, and its implicit rejection of Europe, became a major theme in the formation of a U.S. national identity organized around liberal exceptionalism. The physical fact of separation appeared to impose a qualitative political and moral distinction between the Old and New Worlds; by virtue of its geographic position and possibly, it was thought, some higher design, the United States was removed from the corrupting politics of the European balance of power system, with its attendant ambition, aggrandizement, and amorality. Although elevated to the level of timeless grand-strategic doctrine under Washington and Alexander Hamilton, to the Puritans American isolation was not strategic but virtuous.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND UNIVERSALISM

The second major source of the U.S. moral commitment to democracy promotion was the influence of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Through an Enlightenment faith in a common rationality, a cosmopolitan spirit, and the

29. Huntington, *American Politics,* p. 15. On the Puritan influence on U.S. political history, see also Richard Hofstader, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968).
30. Quoted in Nye, *This Almost Chosen People*, p. 192.
31. Herman Melville, *White-Jacket: Or, the World in a Man-of-War* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), p. 151.

universal constancy of human nature, many of the liberal norms that came to define U.S. national identity were framed in absolute and universal terms. Early American leaders such as Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin regarded themselves as "children of the Age of Reason." Among the generation of U.S. revolutionaries, the belief was widespread that, as Jefferson wrote, they had acted "not for ourselves, but for the whole human race," suggesting that the political ideas that motivated the revolution were universal and exportable.[32] Enlightenment thought also contributed a specific set of political principles to the American Creed, including the belief in constitutionalism and a government limited by the rule of law, individualism, egalitarianism, and the Lockean social contract. Because these basic political values were considered universally valid and applicable, they inevitably provided a set of standards by which U.S. foreign policy could be evaluated, and goals toward which it was substantively oriented.

functional or historical necessity

The functional demands of creating a cohesive, national state from the early American colonies were the third source of democracy promotion. In addition to their philosophical origins in Enlightenment rationalism, framing the political-cultural norms that defined U.S. national identity in universal terms served an important functional purpose. The early American colonies lacked the factors that often served as sources of cohesion in other nation-states: ethnic solidarity, a distinct language, a common history, a church, a monarchy, or a military or aristocratic caste. In addition to lacking what Anthony Smith has termed a dominant or latent *ethnie,* an early commitment to religious pluralism precluded defining national identity exclusively in terms of traditional Protestantism.

Consequently, in an oft-noted distinction, U.S. national identity became defined in civic and ideational (or "creedal")—and not ethnic or organic—terms.[33] Civic ideology and institutions, and not a latent *ethnie,* were necessary to provide a source of political cohesion and national consciousness, both unifying the United States as a self-contained political community and meaning-

32. Quoted in Nye, *This Almost Chosen People,* p. 169.
33. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 140. On the civic/ethnic distinction in defining national citizenship, see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). On the ideational origins of U.S. nationalism, see Hans Kohn *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

fully differentiating it from others. Functionally, a set of universally framed political ideas were necessary to unite a regionally, ethnically, and religiously diverse state, providing the social cohesion and sense of national purpose necessary for consensual, liberal-democratic politics.[34] According to Gunnar Myrdal, these "general ideals" formed "the cement in the structure of this great and disparate nation."[35] Because of the historical unifying function of defining U.S. nationalism in terms of both universal political norms and a perceived national purpose to spread those norms, American national identity is inextricably linked with the liberal-exceptionalism premise of the United States as an agent of democratic change, that is, a promoter of democracy.

Two Schools of Democracy Promotion

As two sides of liberal exceptionalism, exemplarism and vindicationism are in effect competing sets of interrelated causal beliefs that aggregate into coherent doctrines relating liberalism to U.S. power, each privileging different mechanisms to achieve international democratic change. "Causal beliefs" can be defined as logical propositions held by policymakers about relations of cause and effect.[36] According to Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, they often serve as "road maps" for decisionmakers under conditions in which there is incomplete information about both the range of possible policy options and the likely effects of those policies.[37] Similarly, Barry Posen and Stephen Walt conceptualize "grand strategies" as aggregations of hypotheses on how to "cause" one's security; as a subset, exemplarism and vindicationism represent underlying causal logics, that, if implicitly, advance competing theories of how best to "cause" the promotion and consolidation of democracy abroad.[38]

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34. On nationalism as a rationalizing source of political cohesion in democracies, see Charles A. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), p. 116.
35. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma,* p. 3.
36. Two sets of "causal" claims are employed in the argument thus far: (1) the causal claims or hypotheses that constitute these competing nationalist traditions, and (2) propositions advanced to explain change in U.S. foreign policy, and specifically why one school (i.e., a set of interrelated hypotheses on how to "cause" democracy) became privileged over others.
37. Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993). See also Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).
38. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Germany, and Britain between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

EXEMPLARISM

Exemplarists argue that the United States should promote democracy by offering a benign model of a successful liberal-democratic state. The United States should focus on perfecting its own domestic political and social order, and close the gap between the ideals of the American Creed and the actual performance of U.S. political institutions. By this logic, the mechanism of change in international politics is the moral force of the U.S. example. Exemplarism appears to be a more passive and less ambitious approach to democracy promotion. Nonetheless, it advances the overtly strategic claim that the United States can "better serve the cause of universal democracy by setting an example rather than by imposing a model."[39]

Two corollary arguments tend to be grouped with the nationalist concept of mission as example. First, exemplarism makes the causal claim that an activist foreign policy undermines liberal domestic political culture and institutions. The external pressures generated by international political and security competition tend to concentrate power in the state, as the processes and mechanisms of creating military power—those institutions that connect the state to its society and enable it to transform societal resources into military capabilities—are also those that tend to promote strong, centralized states.[40] Because of its geographic insularity and the absence of immediate military threats, the United States was able to avoid these state-centralizing tendencies in its early political development, and a national political community developed around a set of liberal-democratic principles that necessarily conflicted with the functional, state-centralizing requirements of security and foreign policy institutions. Consequently, exemplarists acknowledge a paradox in which those security and power-creating institutions necessary to project power and advance liberalism abroad are precisely those that threaten liberalism and the American Creed at home, undermining the attraction of the U.S. example.

A second corollary is that improving the quality of the U.S. domestic political and social order, in addition to the intrinsic value of reducing the gap

39. Mead, *Special Providence,* p. 182.

40. Or as Otto Hintze argues, "Throughout the ages pressures from without have been a determining influence on internal structure." Hintze, "Military Organization and the Organization of the State," in Felix Gilbert, ed., *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 183. For two surveys of this style of argumentation, see Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization,* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Autumn 1978), pp. 881–912; and Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay," *International Security,* Vol. 17, No. 1 (Summer 1992), pp. 177–198.

between the American Creed in principle and in practice, serves the strategic purpose of strengthening the attraction of the U.S. liberal example. Exemplarists have historically been more skeptical toward U.S. institutions, or at least more cognizant of the capacity for reform and improvement. Rather than spreading U.S. institutions abroad, exemplarists counsel the somewhat indirect foreign policy strategy of strengthening them at home. The United States has a strategic interest in preserving and improving its own institutions, making its example more compelling.

Exemplarism also contains a claim about the efficacy of democracy promotion and the limits to U.S. power. Exemplarists have been comparatively skeptical toward the U.S. capacity to produce liberal change in the world. Because democracy is fragile and difficult to propagate, the ability of the U.S. government to directly promote and consolidate democratic institutions is limited and constrained.

VINDICATIONISM

Alternatively, vindicationists argue that the United States must move beyond example and undertake active measures to spread its universal values. It must, in Brands's phrasing, actively use its power to "vindicate the right" in an otherwise illiberal world.[41] The exemplarist expectation that other states will emulate the U.S. example is viewed as at best inefficient and at worst utopian; the United States should expedite this process of democratization, through intervention and force if necessary. Those advocating the concept of the United States as evangelic also tend to be more optimistic about the quality of democracy at home: U.S. institutions, if flawed, are comparatively superior and fit for export.

Vindicationism also contains an underlying claim about the efficacy of U.S. power to produce democratic change. According to this school, the expansion of U.S. power tends to correlate positively with the expansion of democracy internationally. Huntington, for example, argues that "any increase in the power or influence of the U.S. in world affairs generally results . . . in the promotion of liberty and human rights in the world."[42] Vindicationists are comparatively less concerned about the potential for abuse inherent in any missionary exercise. American power is less likely to be misused or corrupted than that of any other government, both because American leaders are gener-

41. Brands, *What America Owes the World*, p. 2.
42. Huntington, "American Ideals versus American Institutions," p. 25.

ally committed to liberal-democratic values and because of the constraints impose by the American political system's institutional dispersion of power.[43]

Two central philosophical issues—a Puritan sense of mission and a belief in progressive change—underlie these two positions.

CALVINISM

Exemplarism and vindicationism share a Puritan sense of mission, but are rooted in different aspects of the early American Calvinist ethos. These coexisting Puritan traditions have historically offered distinct perspectives on the character of American political life and the precise nature of its moral obligation to the world.

One aspect of Calvinism stresses the innate imperfection and weakness of the human character, as well as the "awful precariousness of human existence."[44] The human condition is conceived as an endless and immutable process of trials, tests, and probations. Harriet Beecher Stowe captured this Calvinist ethos as it permeated early New England: "The underlying foundation of life . . . in New England, was one of profound, unutterable, and therefore unuttered melancholy, which regarded human existence itself as a ghastly risk, and, in the case of the vast majority of human beings, inconceivable misfortune."[45] This Puritan tradition resulted in what political scientists would now recognize as a realist view of human nature; according to John Winthrop, the Puritan settlers "were not of those that dream of perfection in this world."[46]

Two political implications derive from the mind-set that Americans were not exempt from the universal imperfection of human character and striving. First, early American leaders took a historically conscious and pragmatic view of the American life. The U.S. polity was understood as an inherently problematic and precarious experiment, and its mission was thus limited to testing the hypothesis that an experiment in constitutional self-government could actually succeed. The United States was at best an example to emulate; hence the focus should be on perfecting and improving the domestic political order, and not attempting to spread those institutions through divine mandate. This Calvinist

43. This argument is made explicitly by Huntington, but is similar to many of the causal mechanisms debated in the democratic peace literature. Huntington, *American Politics,* p. 257.
44. Ibid., p. 4. See also Burns, *The American Idea of Mission,* p. 26.
45. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Oldtown Folks* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869), p. 368.
46. Quoted in Loren Baritz, *City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 13.

tradition regarded the United States as "involved in a test case which would determine whether men could live on Earth according to the will of the Lord,"[47] or whether, in its later secular variation, "a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal . . . can long endure."[48]

A second political implication was that U.S. interests and motives were not exceptional in their purity or benevolence. Americans were not immune from potential corruption and temptation; according to George Washington, no nation, including the United States, can be "trusted farther than it is bound by its interest."[49] The U.S. mission is to provide an experiment to be emulated; to attempt to act on a more general basis invites a potential abuse of power and private interest.

The second broad Calvinist tradition, from which vindicationism draws, is less pragmatic and more millennialist. In this interpretation, Americans are an elect people, more immediate to God than others, chosen to redeem an otherwise unregenerate world. Arthur Schlesinger traces the distinction between these two competing traditions to Augustine, who compared the idea of "providential history"—the rise and decline of groups within history—to "redemptive history"—the journey of the elect to salvation beyond history.[50] To some the United States clearly resided in the latter, chosen to actively lead the world toward a millennium of liberty. According to early American minister Increase Mather, "God hath covenanted with his people . . . without a doubt, the Lord Jesus hath a peculiar respect unto this place, and for this people."[51] "God has still greater blessings in store for this vine which his own right hand hath planted," sermonized Ezra Stiles in 1783, and "the Lord shall have made his American Israel high above all nations which he hath made."[52]

Whereas the first tradition regarded the United States as a precarious historical experiment, it was through this tradition that Americans began to conceive

47. Baritz, *City on a Hill.*
48. Abraham Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, November 19, 1863," in Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953).
49. Washington to Henry Lawrens, November 14, 1783, *The Writings of George Washington,* Vol. 10, John Fitzpatrick, ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1931–44), p. 256.
50. Schlesinger, *The Cycles of American History,* p. 13.
51. Quoted in ibid., p. 13.
52. Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor: A Sermon* (1783), in Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy,* Vol. 1: *Documents and Essays* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1995), p. 38. Also quoted in McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State,* p. 18.

of themselves as, according to American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, "tutors to mankind in its pilgrimage to perfection."[53] Again, certain political conclusions follow from this view. The United States conceives of itself not as within history but outside of it, exempt from the political and historical factors that bear on other nations, and most notably that of European balance of power iniquities. Its redemptive mission allows it to act benevolently on behalf of common interests. The intentions of the United States are benign, and its political heart is pure. Power can be exercised without risk of abuse, and the United States can assume for itself the public and international interest, beyond its private ones. It is this Calvinist tradition that lends vindicationism its missionary, evangelic edge; not only are Americans the new Israelites, according to Melville, but the "political messiah has come," and "he has come in us."[54]

PROGRESS AND THE EFFICACY OF U.S. POWER

Divergent exemplarist and vindicationist propositions about the U.S. capacity to effect political change abroad are also rooted in contending underlying claims about progress and the essential character of political life. Exemplarism, drawing on a long political realist tradition, is fundamentally "pessimistic" about the capacity to produce progressive (small-p) change.[55] The prevalence of power and political struggle are believed to limit and condition human progress and the capacity to qualitatively change history. In his account of the rise and collapse of the Greek moral and civilizational order, for example, Thucydides wrote that "the plain truth is that both past events and those at some future time, in accordance with human nature, will recur in similar or comparable ways."[56] The fundamental conservatism of exemplarism with respect to the capacity of the United States to actively promote democratic change abroad derives from this realist skepticism about the possibilities of achieving a radically better world.

Vindicationism, in contrast, is comparatively "optimistic" about the essential nature of politics. Its adherents implicitly assume that the character of social and political life is basically harmonious, and any difficulties are momentary and superficial. Qualitative changes can be achieved through purposive, assertive action. According to Russell Nye, the U.S. "doctrine of progress,"

53. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner, 1952), p. 71.
54. Melville, *White-Jacket*, p. 151.
55. On "optimism" and "pessimism" in international relations, see Waltz, *Man, the State, and War,* pp. 18–19.
56. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War,* bk. 1, p. 14.

derived from an enlightenment faith in universal reason, holds that "if the obstacles to man's advancement are removed, and the flaws in his institutions corrected, progress will be swift and sure; otherwise it will be slow and uncertain."[57] Although fundamentally optimistic, progress requires the exercising of political agency. Vindicationism and exemplarism therefore reach different conclusions about the efficacy of U.S. power and the limits to its capacity to compel or effect significant social and political change.

The Founders: An Early Exemplarist Consensus

There is substantial evidence that the founders regarded the American Revolution and their subsequent political system as a liberal-democratic model and precedent for others. Consistent with a prevailing enlightenment universalism, the American Revolution was viewed as exerting a moral influence through the sheer force of example. As the Continental Congress expressed in 1789, the success of the revolution granted "the cause of liberty . . . a dignity and luster it has never yet enjoyed, and an example will be set which cannot have but the most favorable influence on mankind."[58]

Why did the founders reject any nascent vindicationist ambition and embrace a wider democratic agenda? Their belief in the exceptional character of the United States and its revolution was tempered by a number of factors, all squarely within—and to a large degree came to define—the U.S. exemplarist tradition: a skepticism toward the capacity of the United States to promote democracy abroad, rooted in a fundamentally realist worldview; a Calvinist conception of the U.S. exceptionalist mission as problematic and experimental; and a fear of the corrupting impact of an activist foreign policy on fledgling republican institutions.

THE EFFICACY OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

The founders' views on politics and human nature were influenced by a profound political realism and a particular interpretation of Calvinism, both of which conditioned their expectations about the U.S. liberal mission and the likelihood of promoting democracy abroad. The founders constructed a system of government around a fundamentally pessimistic view of human nature. This underlying worldview was succinctly stated by Washington: "A

57. Nye, *This Almost Chosen People,* p. 1.
58. Quoted in ibid., p. 169.

small knowledge of human nature will convince us that with far the greatest part of mankind, interest is the governing principle . . . no institution not built on the presumptive truth of this maxim can succeed."[59] John Adams was similarly skeptical about the prospects of changing an otherwise depraved human nature; tyranny is rooted in "passions of men" that are "fixed and timeless."[60] This view of human nature was complemented by intense suspicion of power. According to Bernard Bailyn, the founders believed the essential attribute of power was its "aggressiveness: its endlessly propulsive tendency to expand itself beyond its legitimate boundaries," and thus organized a system of government around its institutional dispersion.[61]

Thus, like the first Calvinist tradition, the founders' understanding of U.S. democracy was grounded in a worldview that stressed the inherent fragility of republican institutions and the experimental nature of the U.S. polity, and not a teleological mission to expedite the inevitable triumph of liberalism. According to Schlesinger, the founders maintained "an intense conviction of the improbability of their undertaking."[62] A certain foreign policy humility followed: the United States was not viewed as immune to the laws of power and interest that, according to Washington and American philosophical descendents of Calvin, govern the behavior of both individuals and states. Consequently, U.S. ambition was limited to testing the historical experiment, both secular and religious, their political community represented.

This skepticism about the viability and difficulty in propagating democracy both at home and abroad was reinforced by a number of other factors. The study of the classics was widespread among the first generation of U.S. leaders; they were well aware of the fate of democracy in ancient history, from the Thirty Tyrants overthrowing democracy in Athens to Caesar subverting the Roman republic.[63] Moreover, the violent degeneration of the revolution in France and the failure to consolidate democratic change in Latin America fol-

59. Washington, *The Writings of George Washington,* Vol. 13, p. 363. Lest the realist pedigree of this view be doubted, note the striking similarity in language between Washington and the Corcyreans in book 1 and the Mytileans in book 3 of *The Peloponnesian War.*
60. Quoted in Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), p. 40.
61. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). See also Huntington, *American Politics;* and Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).
62. Schlesinger, *The Cycles of American History,* p. 7.
63. The founders and the Greek and Roman classics are discussed in ibid., chap. 1; and Mead, *Special Providence,* p. 182.

lowing various anticolonial movements corroborated pessimism about democratic change and the limits of U.S. influence.[64]

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AT HOME

The second broad set of arguments advanced by the founders in favor of exemplarism involved concern for the domestic effects of a vindicationist foreign policy. Originally, this included the fear that active international engagement would produce domestic disunity and factions, undermining and even corrupting U.S. political institutions. As John Jay warned in *Federalist 3*, political disunity was an invitation for foreign influence to subvert the integrity of domestic affairs. Fear of foreign subversion and the corrupting influence of Old World power politics, even if incurred in advocacy of liberal causes, was seemingly confirmed by the Citizen Genet and Randolph affairs, in which the French attempted to influence American public opinion and support the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania, respectively.[65] Intervention in the politics of other states thus risked foreign powers "inflaming" factions within the United States.

As U.S. institutions stabilized and the fear of faction correspondingly subsided, the founders' exemplarism was motivated by a second domestic concern: that an activist foreign policy would concentrate power within the state and executive in particular, especially with respect to the centralizing effects of crises and the use of force. True to exemplarist form, they explicitly recognized that the foreign policy and security institutions necessary to project power in the service of liberal ends were precisely those that undermined liberal government at home. Having denounced standing armies as "engines of despotism" in *Federalist 8*, for example, Hamilton continued that security threats "compel nations the most attached to liberty . . . to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights."[66]

For these reasons, the first generation of U.S. political leaders resolved the debate over the nature of U.S. liberal exceptionalism in favor of the concept of the United States as an example, a tradition largely continued throughout the early nineteenth century. Vindicationism was largely in defeat for the remainder of the century. What accounts for the turn away from this early nationalist

64. Mead, *Special Providence*, p. 182; Burns, *The American Idea of Mission*, p. 16; and Brands, *What America Owes the World*, chap. 1.
65. On the effects of these two affairs on U.S. neutrality and unilateralism, see McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, pp. 30–31.
66. *The Federalist*, No. 8 (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 39.

legacy, from example to mission, almost a century later, beginning in the 1890s? Why did the millennial displace the exemplarist as the premise of national purpose? Had the founders not controlled a weak, disunited, and consolidating state contending with the European great powers, would they have opted for vindicationism as a democracy-promotion strategy? Is variation in democracy promotion contingent on these dimensions of state power, independent of ideational change?

Case 1: The 1890s

The 1890s is widely acknowledged as representing a major shift in U.S. foreign policy.[67] During this decade the United States emerged as a great power; commensurate with a spectacular growth in material power in the decades after the Civil War, the United States acquired the capabilities to project military power overseas in the form of a modern navy, began to exert political influence beyond its immediate hemisphere, and initiated a program of territorial annexation, culminating in the 1898 Spanish-American War and the subsequent colonial interest in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Hawaiian islands, and the Cuban protectorate. The period also witnessed the first attempt to export democracy, directly to the Philippines and indirectly through a humanitarian interest in liberating Cuba from an imperial European power. Although not the height of U.S. vindicationism, the 1890s was the first period in which the nationalist concept of the United States as mission had a major influence on the conduct of foreign policy.

A number of explanations have been advanced to account for the grand-strategic change and expansion of the period: geopolitical interest, commercial expansion, social and cultural change, bureaucratic and institutional politics, and shifting regional alignment.[68] Although all are posited as explanations for broad strategic adjustment and the emergence of the United States as a great power, they do not advance competing accounts of the specific political outcome in question: the broad shift from exemplarism to vindicationism evident in the ostensibly humanitarian reasons for the war with Spain, and the subsequent attempt to export democracy to the Philippines. Rising U.S. power led to

67. For a broad survey of the foreign policy of the decade, see Robert L. Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New* (New York: Cromwell, 1975).
68. For an attempt to evaluate competing explanations situated at different levels of analyses, see Peter Trubowitz, Emily O. Goldman, and Edward Rhodes, eds., *The Politics of Strategic Adjustment: Ideas, Institutions, and Interests* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

a more assertive foreign policy, but what accounts for the centrality of democracy promotion to this period of U.S. expansion?

The argument in this section is that the vindicationist character of imperialism and political expansion in the 1890s is explained by the confluence of a tremendous expansion of material power and the Progressive movement, which produced subtle but significant changes in the nationalist ideology of liberal exceptionalism. This coalition of reform movements, representing a political reaction to post–Civil War industrialization and modernization, produced underlying ideational changes in prevailing beliefs toward the nature of progress in political life, the U.S. liberal-exceptionalist mission, the efficacy of social and political reform, and the role of the federal government and political power as an instrument of change.

material expansion

In the decades between the Civil War and World War I, the United States engaged in a sustained period of economic growth and industrialization. By virtually any significant economic measure, the United States had by the 1890s established itself as a major industrial power. Between 1865 and 1898, coal production increased 800 percent, steel 523 percent, railway track mileage 567 percent, and agricultural production 256 percent. The rapidly expanding iron and steel industry, stimulated by railroad growth, became the foundation of an industrial U.S. economy. The U.S. population more than doubled, augmented by the influx of immigration and the rise of major urban centers, primarily in the North and East.[69] U.S. economic growth was even more dramatic in relative terms. By 1885 the United States surpassed Britain in total world share of manufacturing output and steel production. The United States outpaced Britain in energy production, often identified as a key measure of industrial power, by 1890, and by 1900 surpassed Germany, France, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Japan, and Italy combined.[70] In terms of material resources, the Gilded Age established the United States as a great power.

the political effects of rising power

The rapid increase in relative material power accounts for the broad contours of U.S. grand-strategic adjustment in the 1890s. Realism expects that the rela-

69. On economic growth in this period, see Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1865–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).
70. Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power,* p. 46; and Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers.*

tive power possessed by a state will shape the magnitude of its political interests abroad. U.S. expansion in the 1890s is largely consistent with this empirical prediction: the United States expanded its international political, security, and economic interests in a manner commensurate with its newfound great power status. George Kennan's observation that many influential policymakers "simply liked the smell of empire and felt an urge to range themselves among the colonial powers of the time . . . to bask in the sunshine of recognition as one of the great imperial powers of the world" confirms this basic realist logic.[71]

U.S. strategic adjustment was also a consequence of more specific strategic concerns motivated by the security dilemma and international political competition. Policymakers believed that if the United States failed to expand its security and political position in the Philippines and the Caribbean, other great powers would.[72] Beginning in the 1890s, influential figures such as Alfred Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry Cabot Lodge argued that technological and political changes had rendered an insular, continental approach to national security obsolete. "Where formerly we had only commercial interests," stated John Basset Moore, a U.S. government official in the late 1890s, "we now have territorial and political interests as well."[73] Contrary to a previously regional strategic orientation, the United States began to develop an interest in the balance of power in regions outside its immediate hemisphere.

Although relative power can account for an increasingly assertive U.S. grand strategy, it cannot capture the liberal character of its political expansion in the 1890s, and particularly with its acquisition and management of the Philippines. The rise of vindicationism correlates with material expansion—the capability to project power is clearly a precondition to actively promoting democracy abroad—but the underlying ideational shift it represents is not entirely reducible to power. Changes in nationalist ideology intervene between relative power and how the United States manages the interests that power is intended to secure. Therefore, as Tony Smith argues, a realist "lust for power" largely explains "the American conquest of the Philippines in the first place," but an imperial state that defines its national identity in terms of universal lib-

71. Kennan, *American Diplomacy,* p. 17.
72. See Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Imperialism: The United States, Great Britain, and the Late-Industrializing World since 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Kennan, *American Diplomacy,* p. 16.
73. Quoted in Kupchan, *The End of the American Era,* p. 175.

eral values "had no choice thereafter but to govern with a serious commitment to the island's democratization."[74]

A VINDICATIONIST IDEOLOGY: PROGRESSIVISM

During this period of U.S. material expansion, a vindicationist ideology emerged in the form of Progressivism, a loose set of reform movements that developed in response to the changing social and economic conditions associated with post–Civil War industrialization and urbanization. Its general theme was to restore the economic individualism, political democracy, and civic purity that had been undermined by the United States' transition from a predominantly agrarian society to a modern, urban, industrial nation. These values were believed to have been destroyed by factors associated with modern life: large and unaccountable corporations, corrupt political machines, urban poverty and vice, and social conflict. In this broader sense, Progressivism was not confined to a single political party or president, but dominated the politics of the period, producing a change in "the whole tone of American political life."[75] Although the Progressive reform movement reached its height from approximately 1902 to 1917, many of its key ideas emerged in the antecedent decade. With the exception of certain leaders such as Robert LaFollette, Jane Addams, and William Borah, Progressives tended to support an activist foreign policy informed by liberal-democratic ideals, and the movement culminated—and ultimately declined—with Woodrow Wilson and the vindicationist manner with which he prosecuted U.S. involvement in World War I.[76]

For Progressivism, the reform impulse at home and abroad were linked. There are four dimensions to the nexus between Progressivism and vindicationism. First, Progressives represented a subtle but important shift in how progress itself was understood. The founders were generally pessimistic toward politics and human nature, and elevated this pessimism to an organizing

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74. Smith, *America's Mission*, p. 43.
75. Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform,* p. 5.
76. See William E. Leuchtenberg, "Progressivism and Imperialism: The Progressive Movement and American Foreign Policy, 1898–1916," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* Vol. 39, No. 3. (December 1952), p. 500; Fred Harrington, "The Anti-Imperialist Movement in the United States, 1890–1900," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* Vol. 22, No. 2 (September 1935), pp. 211–239; and McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State.* For an alternative view, see Barton J. Bernstein and Franklin Leib, "Progressive Republican Senators and American Imperialism, 1898–1916: A Reappraisal," in John Silbey, ed., *To Advise and Consent: The United States Congress and Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carson, 1991). Bernstein and Lieb's analysis is limited to Midwestern Republican senators and concedes the broader point that few prominent Progressives joined the anti-imperialist movement in the 1890s.

principle of government. To the extent that Enlightenment thinkers such as Jefferson and Paine believed in progress, it was a passive, general optimism about the inevitability of improvement in the political condition: away from recurrent political struggles of the Old World, and toward a politics based on law and universal reason.

Progressive reformers assumed, in contrast, that progress could be expedited with the positive, purposive action of political agents, and especially government. Progress was no longer a remote historical process, but accessible and subject to manipulation. If the illiberal obstacles to improvement were removed and the flaws in political and social institutions corrected—whether through science, education, government, or human association—then rational progress could be hastened. Man was no longer a helpless sinner in the hands of a Calvinist (or political-realist) God, but had the capacity to effect a more perfect social and political order.

Progressive views on progress were augmented by the concurrent rise of the Social Gospel, or the movement to apply Christian teaching to resolving contemporary social and economic problems.[77] The Social Gospel's belief in the capacity to achieve an improved or more perfect social order complemented changes in secular liberalism's concept of progress; like millennial Calvinism, "the very heart of the social gospel," according to Washington Gladden, one of its chief exponents, was the message that the "kingdom [was] a possibility within history."[78]

Even after its sixteenth-century cultural hegemony, the Puritan tradition continued to influence U.S. political culture through periodic religious revivals and Great Awakenings, which focused on reforming both the individual and society. Although confined mostly to New England, eclectic reform groups flourished in the antebellum period, including abolitionists, suffragists, Sabbatarians, and advocates of temperance and public health.[79] These movements accelerated substantially after 1880; like other progressive reformers, the Social Gospel movement responded to the social pressures of poverty,

77. Two excellent accounts of the Social Gospel are Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865–1915* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940); and Robert Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).
78. Quoted in Handy, *The Social Gospel in America, 1879–1920,* p. 10.
79. Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Timothy Lawrence Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). Sabbatarians, for the curious reader, lobbied to make Sunday an officially recognized holy day.

vice, crime, and general dislocation generated by industrialization and urbanization.[80]

Religious reform movements reinforced vindicationist democracy promotion in a number of key ways. The Social Gospel argued for the efficacy of social reform and the U.S. capacity to bring about a more perfectly ordered system of social and political relations. This American idea of progress can be traced as much to the religious thought of Social Gospel reform as a secular liberal tradition; as Timothy Smith writes, "Insofar as perfectionist optimism is a spiritual inheritance in America, John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Samuel Hopkins more than Benjamin Franklin or Jean Jacques Rousseau were its progenitors."[81]

Second, and perhaps more important, the Social Gospel suggested that power wielded by Americans was inherently virtuous and benign. Progressives believed themselves to be, according to Arthur Link, "custodians of the spirit of righteousness, of the spirit of equal-handed justice, of the spirit of hope which believes in the perfectablity of the law with the perfectibility of human life itself."[82] This Protestant tradition advanced a view of power that sharply contrasted with that of the founders, which stressed that the United States was not exempt from the lessons of history and the corrupting influence of power. Because the United States was an agent of progressive historical change, it was a benign custodian of power. As Albert Beveridge, a leading Progressive who campaigned for the regulation of child labor, trusts, and the railroads, stated: "God has marked the American people as His chosen Nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world."[83] While the exceptionalist sense of mission has previously been limited to example and experiment, these two reform movements produced a faith in progress and the American capacity to effect liberal change abroad.

Third, Progressivism privileged an activist federal government as the instrument of liberal change. Instead of the state being limited to the negative, laissez-faire functions of preserving a basic legal and political order in which individuals can compete and pursue self-interest freely, Progressives advanced the Hamiltonian concept of positive government, directing national power on

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80. Early popularizers of the Social Gospel, especially with regard to the poverty and vice generated by the cities, included Josiah Strong, *Our Country* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1963).
81. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform,* p. 10.
82. Arthur Link, *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War, and Peace* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1979), p. 6.
83. Quoted in Schlesinger, *The Cycles of American History,* p. 16.

behalf of liberal ends both domestically and internationally.[84] Progressivism and vindicationist imperialism were grounded in the same philosophy of government: a strong, efficient, central government asserting the national interest both at home and abroad.[85] Domestically, the national government shattered monopolies, corporate abuse, and political machines, extending political and economic democracy against the contending forces of strict construction, limited government, and states' rights. Internationally, the Hamiltonian state challenged authoritarianism and colonialism, advancing the U.S. democratic mission against the contending forces of isolationism and exemplarism. Herbert Croly, whose *The Promise of American Life* became an influential Progressive work, made the link between the positive national state and liberal-exceptionalist mission explicit: "Not until the Spanish War was a condition of public feeling created which made it possible to revive Hamiltonianism. That war . . . represented both the national idea and the spirit of reform."[86] For Croly, vindicationism abroad and reform at home were connected: U.S. democratic leadership "constituted a beneficial and a necessary stimulus to the better realization of the Promise of our domestic life."[87]

Finally, Progressives argued that the order, efficiency, and rationality they applied to domestic problems could be projected internationally. Progressivism was largely an attempt to rationalize the social and political world; early Progressive philosophers such as John Dewey and Lester Frank Ward developed a concept of "social engineering," in which social problems and sources of illiberalism were resolved through the application of reason and good government. These same techniques were thought to be applicable internationally. In a 1900 speech, President William McKinley asked: "Is it not possible that seventy-five million of American freemen are unable to establish liberty and justice and good government in our new possessions?"[88] Similarly, Roosevelt argued that "our proper conduct toward the tropic islands we have wrested from Spain" follows from the same "civic honesty, civic cleanliness, [and] civic

84. Frank Ninkovich refers to this idea as "neo-federalist." Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 10.
85. This connection is made persuasively in Leuchtenberg, "Progressivism and Imperialism," p. 500.
86. Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1965), p. 289.
87. Ibid., p. 290.
88. Quoted in Akira Iriye, *From Nationalism to Internationalism: U.S. Foreign Policy to 1914* (Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1977), p. 323.

good sense" with which domestic affairs are administered.[89] For Roosevelt, U.S. imperialism was the international expression of Progressive order and rationality; imperialism served as the functional equivalent of civic order in international politics, ensuring that "each part of the world should be prosperous and well-policed."[90]

It may seem counterintuitive to identify progressive vindicationism as a primary feature of the McKinley presidency; he and his closest adviser, Ohio industrialist Mark Hanna, were largely pro-business and conservative on the defining economic issue of the era, the gold standard, and by many historical accounts were pressured into war by congressional and popular opinion. This argument is misleading in three respects. First, many of the key figures within the McKinley administration—especially Roosevelt—were strongly motivated by Progressive ideas. Second, the sensationalist journalism largely responsible for creating popular and political pressure on McKinley was the direct predecessor to the Progressive, "muckraking" journalism in the early 1900s; both were motivated by reform impulses. Finally, McKinley and Hanna may have been pursuing conservative and business interests, but were compelled to do so in the context of constraints established by a liberal-exceptionalist political culture. Having acquired the Philippines, McKinley was forced to justify its acquisition and manage the territory in a manner consistent with vindicationist democracy promotion.[91]

Progressivism was not the exclusive cause of foreign policy change in the 1890s, but the ideational changes associated with the Progressive movement, in conjunction with growing U.S. power, produced a gradual shift away from the exemplarist consensus of the early nineteenth century and toward a more assertive vindicationism. Material power broadly accounts for U.S. foreign policy expansion, but a belief, both secular and religious, in liberal progress and the United States as an agent of that progress produced what Kennan described as an "overweening confidence in our strength and our ability to solve problems."[92]

Why did vindicationism prevail over exemplarism? Why did the U.S. gov-

89. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life* (1899), in Ernest R. May, ed., *The American Foreign Policy* (New York: George Braziller, 1963), p. 121.
90. Quoted in Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power,* p. 8.
91. For arguments on culture as a constraint, see Peter J. Katzentsein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
92. Kennan, *American Diplomacy,* p. 3.

ernment not concur with Carl Schurz, a German revolutionary turned U.S. senator, that if the United States "deliberately resists the temptation of conquest, it will achieve the grandest triumph of the democratic idea that history knows of . . . its voice will be heard in the council of nations with more sincere respect and more deference than ever"?[93] Part of the explanation is power: due to the pressures of the international political system, states rarely decline opportunities to expand in the absence of countervailing force. As realism predicts, powerful states are generally not content with doctrines of moral example. The second part of the causal story is ideational: the Progressive reform movement, a political reaction to industrialization and modernization, produced an underlying shift in how the United States understood national power, progress, and liberal exceptionalism. The combination of ideology and power meant the United States could now use its foreign policy to produce democratic change.

Case 2: The Bush Doctrine

The Bush administration represents the perfect vindicationist storm: internationally, it commands overwhelming, unbalanced power; domestically, its dominant policymaking coalition conceptualizes the United States through the exceptionalist prism of liberal evangelism, and not liberal exemplarism. Although there are clear ideological divisions within the administration, there also appears to be convergence on an irreducible set of normative and causal ideas about liberalism and power in international politics, an essential set of beliefs from which policy choices follow.[94] After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration increasingly defined U.S. security requirements in terms of the U.S. capacity to influence the domestic political structures and societies of failed and threatening states. Vindicationism has thus been elevated to one of the central organizing principles of post–September 11 grand strategy, and, as evidenced by two regional wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, is a major element of the U.S. response to the strategic threat posed by international terrorism.

That what can informally be called the "Bush Doctrine"—for our purposes

93. Quoted in David Healy, *U.S. Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), p. 217.
94. James Mann's *Rise of the Vulcans* offers an example of an interpretation of this core set of beliefs; I am presenting a particular subset as they relate to democracy promotion. Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004).

an operationalization of neoconservatism—defines U.S. security interests in terms of the expansion of U.S.-style liberalism is not unique, and its nationalist vision of the United States as a redeeming force in international politics provides an essential point of continuity with preceding generations of grand strategy. Where the Bush Doctrine and its underlying neoconservative disposition diverge from tradition, however, is in the particular vehemence with which it adheres to a vindicationist framework for democracy promotion, in which the aggressive use of U.S. power is employed as the primary instrument of liberal change. The United States' nationalist obligation to the world is discharged, and its security and political interests defended, through the policy mechanism of mission, and not example.

Like the 1890s, the foreign policy outcome in question is not broad grand-strategic change, but the centrality of vindicationism to the Bush administration's approach to security policy and grand strategy. In this section I argue that the convergence of unipolarity and key ideological dimensions of neoconservatism have produced a particularly aggressive iteration of vindicationist democracy promotion. This case builds on the previous section in two ways. First, the same explanatory model is applied to both cases, providing further evidence that variation in U.S. democracy-promotion strategy is a function of both a system-level causal factor (relative power) and a domestic-level factor (the nature of U.S. nationalism). Second, the actual ideological content of neoconservatism contains significant parallels with earlier waves of vindicationist thought and the Progressive movement, including a broad optimism about progress in international politics, a belief in the benign and virtuous nature of U.S. power, and a belief that the United States has the capacity to effectively promote liberal change abroad. These assumptions are augmented by a series of causal suppositions about the exercise of power and the importance of resolve in international politics.

MATERIAL EXPANSION

Like imperialism in 1898, the Bush Doctrine follows a period of enormous material expansion. The United States was widely believed to be in relative decline in the mid-to-late 1980s, and many observers expected the end of the Cold War to result in a multipolar international system with rising centers of power in Asia and Europe.[95] Instead, the United States ended the 1990s at the

95. See, for example, Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers;* and Kenneth N. Waltz, "The

top of a unipolar distribution of power, commanding a greater share of world capabilities than any state in modern international history. U.S. economic dominance is surpassed only by its own position immediately following World War II. U.S. military dominance is even more asymmetrical: U.S. defense spending in 2003 was more than the combined defense spending of the next twenty-five military powers, many of which are U.S. allies, and it conducts approximately 80 percent of the world's military research and development. The United States dominates across most of the quantitative dimensions of power traditionally used by political scientists to measure polarity, as well as in many qualitative, information-age measures. The extent of current U.S. preponderance is difficult to overstate: it is the only state with global power projection capabilities, and the post–September 11 exercise of U.S. military force has made these asymmetries in power—somewhat latent during the 1990s—even more apparent.[96]

THE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF UNIPOLARITY

U.S. behavior under the Bush Doctrine broadly corroborates the basic realist hypothesis that variation in political expansion is a function of relative changes in material capabilities. Particularly since September 11, the United States has engaged in a massive projection of power and an extension of its political and security interests abroad, as well as published an official strategy document in which it proposes to maintain its position of primacy by adding to its margin of superiority and dissuading peer competitors. Realism suggests that this outcome follows inexorably from the U.S. unipolar position; states rarely observe voluntary restraint on their behavior in the absence of countervailing power. According to Robert Jervis, for example, "The forceful and unilateral exercise of U.S. power is not simply the by-product of September 11. . . . It is the logical outcome of the current unrivaled U.S. position in the international system."[97] The contingent effects of September 11 may account for the specific direction of U.S. policy and the timing of political expansion, but realism generally expects that under the permissive conditions of unipolarity, a

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Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security,* Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 44–79.

96. See William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security,* Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5–41. On military dominance, see Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security,* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003), pp. 5–46. On latent U.S. power being revealed after September 11, see Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *National Interest,* No. 70 (Winter 2002/2003), pp. 5–17.

97. Robert Jervis, "The Compulsive Empire," *Foreign Policy,* No. 137 (July/August 2003), p. 82.

doctrine sanctioning the aggressive use of power is likely. Although occurring in a widely different international environment than the 1890s, the expansionary political effects of structural change are similar. As was also the case with the 1890s, however, realism cannot capture the liberal character of this expansion. Realism is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition in explaining the contemporary rise of U.S. vindicationism.

A VINDICATIONIST IDEOLOGY: NEOCONSERVATISM

Neoconservatism emerged in the mid-1970s as a faction of Cold War anticommunism disillusioned with détente and the post-Vietnam distrust of U.S. power, although many of its central strategic ideas can be traced to early Cold War debates over rollback and strategic superiority. Over time, neoconservatism has come to embody a distinctive and somewhat coherent set of causal and normative beliefs organized around the assertion of U.S. military strength, resolve, and political values.

Although occasionally dismissed as temporary or aberrant, neoconservatism falls squarely within the vindicationist wing of U.S. nationalism. The Bush administration clearly subscribes to the nationalist premise of the United States as a force for democracy; much in the way Pericles described Athens as a "school for Hellas," Bush contends that the United States represents the "single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise."[98] In this view, democracy promotion is inextricably linked with national identity; as Bush stated in his acceptance speech at the 2004 Republican Convention, "Our nation's founding commitment is still our deepest commitment: In our world, and here at home, we will extend the frontiers of freedom."[99] Bush has been consistently forceful in his belief that "the United States is the beacon for freedom in the world," and that he has "a responsibility to promote freedom that is as solemn as the responsibility [to protect] the American people, because the two go hand-in-hand."[100]

Like missionary Calvinism, like Progressivism, and like the Social Gospel, neoconservatism appeals to what Walter Lippman identified as the "persistent evangel in Americanism."[101] There are three core dimensions to the administration's missionary take on liberal exceptionalism, from which a vindic-

98. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 20, 2002), p. 3.
99. George W. Bush, "Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in New York City," *Public Papers of the Presidents*, September 6, 2004.
100. Quoted in Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), p. 89.
101. Walter Lippman, *U.S. War Aims* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1944).

ationist policy follows: liberal optimism, a belief that U.S. power is inherently benign, and a belief that the exercise of U.S. power and leadership can effectively promote democratic change. In conjunction, these ideas constitute the neoconservative "theory" of democracy promotion.

LIBERAL OPTIMISM. Consistent with the history of vindicationist thought in the United States, neoconservatism contains an underlying view of progress that is fundamentally optimistic about the possibilities for liberal political change in the international system. Although often couched in the language of security and threat, the neoconservative view of democracy promotion implicitly suggests that the essential character of political life is harmonious, and that qualitative improvement in a political and social order can be achieved through purposive, assertive action.

Progressivism assumed that liberal rationality spread when illiberal obstructions were removed. Similarly, principal Bush administration policymakers presuppose that, far from being a product of rare or unusually favorable conditions, democracy is spontaneous and natural in the absence of some artificial obstacle, such as self-serving elites or a subversive, violent minority. Part of the optimistic tone struck by the Bush administration is directly traceable to the personal and political style of Ronald Reagan; as one editorial eulogized upon his death, "Optimism is ultimately what the Gipper was all about."[102] Reaganesque optimism about the spread of American ideals is evident in the 2002 National Security Strategy's statement that American power can be used to create "conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty." States can be compelled to embrace liberalism because it is unlikely that, given a choice, any competing political model would be freely chosen. As the National Security Strategy continues, "No people on earth yearn to be oppressed, aspire to servitude, or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police."[103] The implication of this view of progress—rooted in Progressivism and the Social Gospel—is that any obstruction to this default position can be resolved through the application of political power, and that liberal institutions can therefore be advanced at little to moderate cost.

This liberal optimism is reinforced by a belief that the political values and

102. Suzanne Fields, "The Enduring Legacy of Ronald Reagan," *Washington Times,* June 7, 2003, p. A23. On Bush's desire to personally emulate Reagan, see Woodward, *Plan of Attack.*

103. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,* p. 9. On liberal optimism in international politics, see Waltz, *Man, the State, and War.* On liberalism in the Bush doctrine, see Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," p. 365.

institutions that have traditionally defined U.S. national identity are universal and exportable. Bush has consistently and conspicuously employed a diplomatic language of right and wrong; the "values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society." This univeralist belief creates certain expectations about the viability of a program of active democracy promotion: if "the self-evident truths of our founding are true for us, they are true for all," then it follows for the Bush administration that "freedom is stirring in the Middle East and no one should bet against it."[104]

The widely recognized inadequacy in postwar planning in Iraq is evidence of an underlying Progressive faith in progress and liberal rationality. The assumption that democracy is a universal system, and therefore spontaneous in the absence of some specific illiberal obstruction, resulted in the belief that military victory in Iraq was the equivalent of democratization. Fundamentally optimistic assumptions about Iraq underpinned initial Bush administration planning for troop levels to be reduced from about 140,000 to 30,000 within six months of the invasion, and its initial expectation that a functioning interim Iraqi government would be established within thirty to sixty days.[105] Administration planners appeared to believe that the ousting of Saddam Hussein would itself provide the conditions in which democracy could begin to emerge in Iraq; as Bush told Australian Prime Minister John Howard in April 2003, "The psychology inside Iraq is that Saddam has his fingers around the throat of the Iraqi people and he has two fingers left and we are prying them loose."[106] According to Penn Kemble, a former director of the U.S. Information Agency, "The distinction between liberation and democratization . . . was an idea never understood by the administration."[107] This misunderstanding followed directly from a liberal optimism about the possibilities of democratic change.

THE BENIGN NATURE OF U.S. POWER. Like Progressivism, neoconservatism is motivated by the belief that U.S. power is an inherently benign and redeeming force in international politics, and regards U.S. foreign policy as exceptional in character. Apart from traditional great powers, U.S. foreign policy is believed

104. "Remarks by the President in Commencement Address to United States Coast Guard Academy," White House press release, May 21, 2003.
105. Michael Gordon, "The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a Second War," *New York Times,* October 19, 2004. On the failure to provide security in Iraq in the months after the military action, see Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 83, No. 5 (September/October 2004), pp. 34–57.
106. Quoted in Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* p. 407.
107. Quoted in Lawrence Kaplan, "Springtime for Realism," *New Republic,* June 21, 2004, p. 20.

to be based on a "distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests."[108] Echoing the neoconservatives of the 1970s, Bush argued in his West Point commencement speech that "wherever we carry it, the American flag will stand not only for our power, but for our freedom. Our nation's cause has always been larger than our nation's defense."[109] Charles Krauthammer concurs that "the American claim to benignity is not mere self-congratulation. We have a track record."[110] These arguments would not surprise Niebuhr, who observed that the United States is almost perpetually "inclined to pretend that our power is exercised by a peculiarly virtuous nation."[111]

Although Bush contends that the United States has no "utopia to establish," and can thus be trusted to wield power without constraint in international politics, these arguments are grounded in the millennialist—as opposed to pragmatic—side of the sixteenth-century Calvinist legacy discussed above. The United States is conceived of as a favored, elect people, mandated with a redemptive mission and thus exempt from the lessons of history and immune from the political factors that bear on and corrupt other states. Bush employs classic millennial language, informed by Puritanism and the Social Gospel tradition: "Today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom's triumph over all these foes. The United States welcomes our responsibility in this great mission."[112] This rhetoric is similar to the missionary Calvinism of the Social Gospel, for example Josiah Strong's 1886 *Our Country.*[113]

Two political implications follow from the vindicationist belief that the United States is, as Melville wrote, a "political messiah" in international politics. First, U.S. power can be exercised without risk of abuse or domination. Its intentions are benign. As an agent of liberal change, it acts benevolently on behalf of common and universal interests, and can thus assume international interests beyond its private ones. Rather than view excess power as corrupting, the neoconservatives follow in the tradition of Progressivism and the Social Gospel in their belief that the United States can be trusted to benignly, virtuously, and without risk of abuse exercise power on behalf of liberal ends.

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108. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,* p. 7.
109. "Remarks by the President at the 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy," White House press release, June 1, 2002.
110. Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," p. 14
111. Quoted in Robert D. Kaplan, "World of Difference," *New Republic,* March 29, 2004, p. 20.
112. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,* p. 5.
113. Josiah Strong, *Our Country* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1963).

In addition, it follows that the United States can legitimately reject constraints—whether legal, negotiated, or imposed through countervailing power—on its own behavior and freedom of action. This belief stems not only from a strategic judgment about the constraining effects of rules and institutions, but from a set of normative ideas that follow from a liberal-exceptionalist sense of mission.

The neoconservative claim to benevolence in part derives from the tendency to conflate U.S. national interests with what are asserted to be common, international interests. It is common for hegemonic states, necessarily having a greater stake in world order, to identify their national interests as consistent with international ones.[114] This dynamic, however, can be a function of ideology as well as power. Neoconservatism assumes that when the United States acts in its own interests, it necessarily serves the interests of the international system. It is therefore not only legitimate but virtuous for the United States to deploy its power on behalf of nationally defined goals. According to Condoleezza Rice, for example, "America's pursuit of the national interest will create conditions that promote freedom, markets, and peace. Its pursuit of national interests after World War II led to a more prosperous and democratic world. This can happen again."[115] Lest this conflation of private and public interests appear self-serving, Robert Kagan and William Kristol assure Americans that "their support for pre-eminence is as much a boost for international justice as any people are capable of giving."[116]

In the diplomacy preceding the Iraq war, the Bush administration's belief that it was acting on behalf of international, and not exclusively national, interests strongly shaped its approach to the United Nations and the Security Council process. Key U.S. decisionmakers perceived their actions as defending the credibility of the United Nations. As Rice argued in early 2003, "It isn't American credibility on the line, it is the credibility of everybody that this gangster can yet again beat the international system." Regarding the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) inspections process, Rice believed that allowing Iraq to "play volleyball with the international community this way will come back to haunt us someday. That is the reason [to invade] . . . Iraq is critical to reestablishing the bona fides of the Security Council."[117] The United States as-

114. Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine"; and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* chap. 9.
115. Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 75, No. 1 (January/February 2000), p. 3.
116. Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "The Present Danger," *National Interest,* No. 59 (Spring 2000), p. 57.
117. Quoted in Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* pp. 251, 308.

sumed for the UN the defense of its credibility, and thus empowered itself to pursue those interests at its unilateral discretion, not constrained by the withholding of consent by the organization itself.

Neoconservatives therefore operate in the absence of the ideational factors that traditionally temper liberal exceptionalism, resulting in a lack of humility in exercising power. An entirely different set of assumptions, supported by political realism, Calvinism, and a reading of the classics, informed the founders' worldview that that the political world is governed by interest and power, that the United States is not exempt from these motives, and that the sobering lessons of history bear on the United States as well as nondemocratic states.

THE EFFICACY OF AMERICAN POWER. Neoconservatism contends that U.S. power can be effectively deployed as an instrument of liberal change in the international system. This belief in turn relies on a series of causal suppositions—that is, assumptions about relations of cause and effect—about the operation of power and coercive force in international politics. Two assumptions in particular underlie the Bush administration belief that the exercise of power can be an effective mechanism of liberal change: that bandwagoning is more common than balancing, and that technological change and a preponderance of U.S. military power allow the United States to overcome previous constraints on vindicationist democracy promotion. These two assumptions are couched within neoconservatism's traditional agenda of restoring the U.S. will to use its power on behalf of its political values. The neoconservative "theory" of democracy promotion is thus that the assertion of U.S. power and leadership can effectively produce democratic change abroad.

Neoconservatism as grand-strategic perspective has historically been organized around the basic premise that the assertion of power is an effective means to some policy end; put simply, strength works. This expectation is implicitly based on the causal logic of bandwagoning. According to Jervis, one property of a political system is the interconnection of its parts: trends in one part of the system "feed back" to others. In international politics, balancing is a kind of negative feedback—disequilibria in power are restored through balancing. In a positive feedback system, the accumulation or projection of power is accelerated or reinforced as other states "bandwagon" with the forceful or leading state. Within the administration, Bush in particular has consistently articulated a strongly held personal belief that exercising leadership, projecting power, and demonstrating resolve generates "positive feedback" at all levels of politics. To borrow Norman Ornstein's phrase, Bush acts on the causal belief that "winners win": by demonstrating leadership and acquiring a reputation

for success, in both domestic and international politics, others will follow.[118] For example, Bush observed to Britain's prime minister, Tony Blair, upon Blair's victory in a key parliamentary vote on Iraq, that "not only did you win, but public opinion shifted because you're leading . . . that is why the vote happened the way it happened. It's the willingness of someone to lead."[119]

The causal logic of bandwagoning is central to how neoconservatism understands the mechanics of power in international politics, and thus the efficacy of U.S. power in promoting democracy. Implicit in the logic of the 2002 National Security Strategy, for example, is the assumption that states will bandwagon, and not balance, against the projection of U.S. military and political power on behalf of liberal ends.[120] Although the NSS uses language consistent with the concept of the balance of power, it in actuality employs a bandwagoning logic: the stated intent of the NSS is to use "a position of unparalleled military strength" to "maintain a balance of power that favors freedom," suggesting that the exercising of U.S. primacy will attract a bandwagon of support that creates an imbalance of power in favor of the United States and liberal change.[121]

All levels of the administration's Iraq policy, war planning, and assessments of success were infused with the underlying assumption that decisive U.S. leadership and the assertion of power would generate a bandwagon of support in favor of U.S. policy goals. In Bob Woodward's *Plan of Attack*, Bush posits the causal claim that "confident action will yield positive results [and] provides a kind of slipstream into which reluctant nations and leaders can get behind."[122] Internationally, this assumption shaped the administration's expectations about the effects of the military action on postconflict support. If winners truly do win in international politics, broad international support—both political and material—would be forthcoming following a successful U.S.

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118. Ornstein's phrase is similar to what international relations scholars would recognize as bandwagoning. Norman Ornstein, "Congress Inside Out: High Stakes and an Overloaded Agenda," *Roll Call*, September 10, 2001. Using a very simple anarchy-hierarchy distinction, however, Kenneth Waltz shows why the effects of "winning" are different in domestic politics than international politics, and why bandwagoning should be comparatively rare in the latter. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

119. Quoted in Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 377.

120. Robert Jervis, *Systems Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997). See also Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*.

121. This aspect of the 2002 NSS is noted by Jack Snyder, "Imperial Temptations," *National Interest*, No. 77 (Spring 2003), pp. 29–41. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, p. 3.

122. Quoted in Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 162.

military operation, even from those states that had not initially supported, or even actively opposed, the direction of U.S. policy. In one account, the Bush administration expected four divisions of foreign troops—both from NATO and Arab states—to assist with peacekeeping and stabilization operations.[123] A 2003 planning document entitled "U.S. and Coalition Objectives," written by Defense Undersecretary for Policy Douglas Feith, suggested that the administration also expected to obtain international participation in the reconstruction effort, as well as the "political support of the international community."[124] Assumptions about the political effects of exercising power shaped the Bush administration's belief that the U.S. action could effectively produce a stable democratic outcome in Iraq.

Bandwagoning assumptions also generated the expectation that U.S. military power would produce a benign form of the domino dynamic in the region itself: the demonstration effect of regime change in Iraq would embolden liberals and deter authoritarians throughout the Middle East.[125] As Bush argued, a "free Iraq can be an example of reform and progress to all the Middle East."[126] In his June 2004 commencement speech to the Air Force Academy, Bush advanced a clear empirical prediction based on the causal logic of bandwagoning: "Freedom's advance in the Middle East will have another very practical effect. The terrorist movement feeds on the appearance of inevitability. It claims to rise on the currents of history, using past American withdrawals from Somalia and Beirut to sustain this myth. . . . The success of free and stable governments in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere will shatter the myth and discredit the radicals."[127]

Weapons of mass destruction–related concessions by Libya were construed as apparent confirmation of the positive feedback in credibility that follows from a regional demonstration of power. In his 2004 State of the Union address, Bush stated that "nine months of intense negotiations succeeded with Libya, while twelve years of diplomacy with Iraq did not. . . . Words must be credible, and no one can now doubt the word of America."[128] Similarly, Max

123. Gordon, "The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a Second War," p. A1.
124. The document is discussed in Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* p. 328.
125. Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," p. 365.
126. Quoted in David Sanger and Thom Shanker, "Bush Says Regime in Iraq Is No More; Syria Is Penalized," *New York Times,* April 16, 2003.
127. "Excerpts from President Bush's Remarks at the Air Force Academy Graduation Ceremony," *New York Post,* June 3, 2004, p. 33.
128. Quoted in Martin Indyk, "Iraq War Did Not Force Qadaffi's Hand," *Financial Times,* March 9, 2004, p. 21.

Boot argues that newfound post-Iraq credibility "helps explain [Libyan leader] Muammar Qaddafi's sudden willingness to give up his WMD arsenal . . . and the Iranian mullahs willingness to accept greater international scrutiny of their nuclear program."[129]

Key administration decisionmakers also appeared to believe the positive results of demonstrating resolve (i.e., a bandwagoning dynamic) would operate within Iraq itself, increasing the likelihood and accelerating the pace of democratization. In Woodward's account of the war planning process, major figures in the Bush administration assumed that "the Iraqis would join in if it looked like the U.S. was coming . . . the first steps toward war and demonstration of resolve would make winning the war that much easier. And as they all knew, little was more appealing to President Bush than showing resolve."[130] Hence the appeal of a "shock and awe" strategy, in which it was assumed that the overwhelming display of U.S. military power would create domestic conditions in Iraq conducive to democratization.[131]

Beliefs about the political effects of exercising power were augmented by the notion that U.S. technological superiority made military power a usable and low-cost instrument of democratic change. As Bush declared in his infamous "mission accomplished" speech, "we have witnessed the arrival of a new era. In the past, military power was used to end a regime by breaking a nation. Today, we have the greater power to free a nation by breaking a dangerous and aggressive regime."[132] The campaign in Afghanistan demonstrated the effectiveness of the U.S. military in projecting the power necessary to rapidly and decisively overthrow a weak regime, and in a manner that corroborated Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's agenda of transforming the military such that it relied less on heavy weaponry and ground troops and more on technology, intelligence, and special operations forces.

After Afghanistan, similar assumptions about technology and military power continued to shape the Iraq war planning process. The "off the shelf" war plan in December 2001—known as Op Plan 1003—assumed a scenario similar to the Persian Gulf War, and called for a force level of 500,000 to be

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129. Max Boot, "The Bush Doctrine Lives," *Weekly Standard,* February 16, 2004.
130. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 81.
131. On this expectation, see Gordon, "The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a Second War," p. A1; and John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).
132. Quoted in James Lindsay and Ivo Daalder, "Shooting First: The Preemptive War Doctrine Has Met an Early Death in Iraq," *Los Angeles Times,* May 30, 2004.

built up over approximately six months. Both Tommy Franks, commander in chief of United States Central Command, and Rumsfeld agreed that a mass army strategy was unnecessary; Rumsfeld observed that he was "not sure that much force is needed given what we've learned coming out of Afghanistan."[133] The expectation that a minimum of military force would be needed to accomplish U.S. political objectives in Iraq made the use of force a more attractive policy option.

Neoconservative views on the efficacy of U.S. power in promoting democratic change are embedded in a broader post-Vietnam agenda of restoring the faith of the United States in its capacity to usefully project power and reversing the perception, both domestically and internationally, of U.S. weakness and failure of will. The neoconservatism of the 1970s argued that détente and the failure in Vietnam resulted from, and in turn contributed to, the belief that there were clear limits to U.S. power, resulting in a retrenchment that prominent neoconservative writer Norman Podhoretz characterized as "Finlandization from within" and a "culture of appeasement."[134] Perception of decline and constraint were paralleled by academic debates over the usability of power and the structural diffusion of military and economic capabilities from bipolararity to multipolarity, and resulted in a gradual drift toward exemplarism that, particularly as practiced by President Jimmy Carter's administration in the late 1970s, neoconservatives regarded as a failure of will and resolve.[135] Neoconservatives argued that this psychology about U.S. power and the use of force continued throughout the 1990s, culminating in President Bill Clinton's risk aversion, reluctance to take casualties, and overreliance on airpower.[136]

However, the confluence of primacy, acute threat, and the political environment created by September 11 provided an opportunity in which U.S. power could again be rendered usable. The military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq

133. Quoted in Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* p. 41.
134. Norman Podhoretz, "Making the World Safe for Communism," *Commentary,* April 1976, pp. 31–41; and Norman Podhoretz, *The Present Danger: Do We Have the Will to Reverse the Decline of American Power?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980). On the neoconservative belief that U.S. power was never in decline, and the resulting continuity this brought to neoconservative thought from the 1970s to 2001, see Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans.* See also Brands, *What America Owes the World,* p. 268. Andrew Bacevich argues that the belief in "no limits" has become one of the "three no's" in contemporary U.S. foreign policy. See Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).
135. For an example of an academic work of this kind, see Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).
136. For a survey of neoconservative thought in this period, see Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans.*

and the ensuing democracy-promotion program, in addition to their immediate security motivations, were driven in part by the neoconservative desire to restore U.S. strength and credibility, domestically by reversing popular reluctance about the use of force, and internationally by reversing perceptions of U.S. weakness and failure of will. Figures within the Bush administration were cognizant of this purpose in using force in Iraq. Bush's speeches rhetorically emphasized action and will: "The only path to safety is the path of action. This nation will act."[137] Within the Bush cabinet, Rumsfeld in particular "was insistent upon boots on the ground to change the psychology of how Americans viewed war."[138] As a result, Max Boot argues that the Afghan invasion "provided a vital boost for U.S. security, not only by routing the terrorist network, but also by dispelling the myth of U.S. weakness," and the Iraq invasion "will be another vital step towards restoring a healthy fear of U.S. power."[139]

Like progressivism, the result of these ideological dimensions in conjunction—liberal optimism, the virtue of U.S. power, and the capacity of U.S. power to effect democratic change—place contemporary neoconservatism squarely in the vindicationist tradition of U.S. liberal exceptionalism. To the extent these ideas represent the dominant policymaking coalition within the Bush administration, U.S. national security policy favors mission over example as the primary means of extending democracy to strategic areas.

AN EXEMPLARIST OPPOSITION?

Is there a viable policy alternative to the contemporary dominance of vindicationism, or does exemplarism no longer have any relevance to U.S. foreign policy in an age of unipolarity? Some historical elements of the exemplarist position are absent and not likely to return. The military, despite the Iraq prison scandal, remains one of the most trusted public institutions in the United States,[140] and in the absence of a viable isolationist political faction, the

137. "Remarks by the President at the 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy."
138. Quoted in Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* p. 26.
139. Quoted in G. John Ikenberry, "The End of the Neo-conservative Moment," *Survival,* Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring 2004), p. 14; and Max Boot, "Iraq War Can Make Up for Earlier U.S. Missteps," *USA Today,* March 25, 2003.
140. According to a recent Gallup poll, 75 percent of respondents say they have a "great deal" of confidence in the military, substantially greater than in Congress, business, unions, and the media. See Suzanne Fields, "The Enduring Legacy of Ronald Reagan," *Washington Times,* June 7, 2003, p. A23.

necessity of a foreign policy bureaucracy to manage international engagement is no longer questioned.

Nonetheless, certain exemplarist themes are reemerging. The traditional tension between the functional requirements of security and military institutions and liberal distrust of concentrated authority remain, a dilemma as acute as ever in the war on international terrorism and the domestic security issues it raises. For example, in her rejection of the assertion of presidential authority to designate and detain "enemy combatants" indefinitely, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor employed classic exemplarist arguments: "A state of war is not a blank check for the president when it comes to the rights of the nation's citizens. . . . We must preserve our commitment at home to the principles for which we fight abroad."[141]

A second dimension of the exemplarist critique is skepticism about the capacity of U.S. power to promote and consolidate democratic change abroad. Although the Iraq debate has been dominated by the issues of preemption, systemic intelligence failure, and strategic miscalculation, arguments have also been advanced against the coercive promotion of democracy. Not surprisingly, much of this critique has come from the political Right in the United States. Exemplarism has traditionally contained a deeply conservative belief that progress and democratic change are fragile and difficult to consolidate. The conservative focus on culture, incrementalism, and the organic nature of political change suggests a pessimistic view toward the efficacy of liberal statebuilding: that societies are unable to democratize by force, that beliefs are slow to change, and that the demand for effective public institutions cannot be compelled externally.

Interestingly, some of the most well known statements of this exemplarist view were articulated by earlier generations of neoconservative thinkers. For example, Jeane Kirkpatrick, an ambassador to the United Nations in the Reagan administration, argued that democracy is the result of a complex set of conditions that can be achieved only through a process of political evolution, and that attempts to change political systems by force not only often fail to achieve their objectives, but frequently produce unintended consequences that undermine their benign intentions.[142] Writing in the context of the late Cold

141. Quoted in Anthony Lewis, "The Court v. Bush," *New York Times,* June 29, 2004, p. 27.
142. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards.* For a survey of Kirkpatrick's writings in the 1970s, see John Ehrman, *Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1994* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 117–121.

War, Kirkpatrick provided as damning a critique of Bush-style vindicationism as any contemporary observer: "The political temptation . . . in believing that [our] intelligence and exemplary motives equip [us] to reorder the institutions, the lives, and even the characters of almost everyone—this is the totalitarian temptation."[143] In unwitting exemplarist fashion, Kansas Republican Senator Pat Roberts emphatically updated this view: "Liberty cannot be laid down like so much AstroTurf."[144]

Why does this set of exemplarist ideas not gain more political traction? Like the 1890s, the answer is a combination of power and nationalism. There are powerful structural incentives for the United States to expand in the absence of countervailing restraint. But although realism can account for a more assertive U.S. grand strategy under the Bush administration, it cannot account for the liberal character of that assertion. Contemporary American vindicationism is a function of both unipolarity and a series of ideological commitments about democracy promotion that follow from the neoconservative brand of liberal exceptionalism, in which it is contended that U.S. power can effectively be deployed as an agent of democratic change in international politics.

Understanding Democracy Promotion in U.S. Foreign Policy

Despite what the recent public debate over Iraq might lead one to believe, democracy promotion is not a new idea in U.S. foreign policy; in fact, it is probably the oldest. This article developed a model to explain variation in U.S. democracy-promotion policy, and used two cases to illustrate the argument: the 1890s and the Bush administration.

This history of U.S. democracy promotion illustrates the explanatory payoff to be gained from approaches that combine both ideological and material factors—often posed as mutually exclusive sources of foreign policy behavior—situated at different levels of analyses. Vindicationism is inextricably linked with power: a precondition for the use of intervention or coercion as a mechanism of democratic change is the capability to project political influence and military force. Moral suasion and the power of example are not usually the preferred policy instruments of hegemonic states. But in both the 1890s and the Bush administration, the rise of vindicationism was also associated with

143. Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Politics and the New Class," *Society,* Vol. 16, No. 2 (January–February 1979), p. 48.
144. Quoted in George Will, "Politics and Prose in Iraq, *Washington Post,* May 24, 2004, p. A31.

underlying ideological changes toward the nature of progress, the U.S. liberal-exceptionalist mission, and the efficacy of U.S. power. Scholars are gradually coming into consensus that both power and ideas interact to produce outcomes of interest in international politics, and these cases demonstrate the utility of this approach in producing a more theoretically sound and empirically comprehensive understanding of this vital dimension of U.S. foreign and security policy.[145]

145. See, for example, Steven G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas," *International Security,* Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 5–53; and Peter J. Katzenstein and Nobuo Okawara, "Japan, Asia-Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytical Eclecticism," *International Security,* Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 153–185.