

Does One Right Make a Realist? Conservatism, Neoconservatism, and Isolationism in the Foreign Policy Ideology of American Elites

BRIAN C. RATHBUN

American society, it is now frequently stated, is more politically polarized than at any time in recent memory, and a prominent front in the ideological battle between left and right is foreign policy. Most notable is, of course, the war in Iraq, but divisions between Republicans and Democrats over the proper definition of the national interest have been a feature of the post-Cold War era since its inception.¹ Democrats and the left direct most of their ire at the neoconservatives who, they argue, have masterminded America's grand strategy since the terrorist attacks of September 2001. This partisan conflict, a genuine ideological difference, has somewhat distracted from divisions within the right. Neoconservatives have also faced significant criticism from other factions within the Republican Party. Condemnation from both traditional conservatives and isolationists has been as strident and vicious as that of the left.² This raises the question of whether there is any common set of fundamentals that defines the right's foreign policy in the United States, and if not, why these subgroups are considered to be on the same side of the political spectrum.

¹ Brian C. Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions: European Party Politics and Peace Enforcement in the Balkans* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), chap. 7.

² National Review Editors, "An End to Illusion" in Gary Rosen, *The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54–56; George F. Will, "Time for Bush to See the Realities of Iraq" in Rosen, *The Right War*, 67–69; Claes G. Ryn, "The Ideology of American Empire," *Orbis* 47 (Summer 2003): 383–397.

BRIAN C. RATHBUN is assistant professor of political science at the University of Southern California. He is the author of *Partisan Interventions: European Party Politics and Peace Enforcement in the Balkans*, as well as numerous articles published in leading journals of international relations.

The situation is further confused by the invocation of “realism” as a guiding set of principles by both neoconservatives and conservatives. As far back as E.H. Carr in the interwar years, scholars have hypothesized an affinity between the right and realism.³ However, if the differences between factions within the right are as severe as they themselves claim, how can both fit within the broader approach of *Realpolitik*?⁴ Making things worse is the frequent identification of neoconservatism with idealism, historically the province of the liberal, internationalist left and ostensibly the very opposite of realism! The policies of the administration of George W. Bush have added an empirical puzzle. The former Texas Governor’s campaign stressed a return to realism, away from President Bill Clinton’s foreign policy as “social work,” yet in office, his administration has embarked upon ambitious nation-building enterprises that the candidate had denigrated, only to be criticized by the Democrats. This prompted analysts to argue that the President’s optimism in fact made him the idealist par excellence, a genuine convert to the cause of democracy.⁵

Shoon Murray, Jonathan Cowden, and Bruce Russett have found that left-right ideology is critical for structuring foreign policy attitudes, yet the recent record of foreign policy practice might seem to indicate that it is fruitless to uncover any fundamental principles that guide the right, or the left for that matter.⁶ However, I find instead that these puzzles can be solved by better conceptualization. The presence of both interparty and intraparty divisions suggests that there are multiple dimensions of foreign policy conflict, a common finding in the literature on the belief systems of both the American mass public and elites.⁷ These scholars have identified three salient cleavages in American foreign policy. However, this work has developed in isolation from the discussion of foreign policy factions and their location on the American foreign policy spectrum, likely because much of it has proceeded inductively and has often lacked an explicit conceptual foundation. It seems that those three cleavages are each associated with a particular faction of the right in American foreign policy: conservative, neoconservative, and isolationist.

³ E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

⁴ Part of this problem owes to the indeterminacy of realism, but I offer a different answer.

⁵ Michael J. Mazarr, “George W. Bush, Idealist,” *International Affairs* 79 (May 2004): 503–522.

⁶ Shoon Kathleen Murray, Jonathan A. Cowden, and Bruce M. Russett, “The Convergence of American Elites’ Domestic Beliefs with their Foreign Policy Beliefs,” *International Interactions* 25 (April 1999): 153–180.

⁷ William O. Chittick, Keith R. Billingsley, and Rick Travis, “A Three-Dimensional Model of American Foreign Policy Beliefs,” *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (June 1995): 313–331; Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, “The Structure of Foreign Policy Attitudes among American Leaders,” *Journal of Politics* 52 (February 1990): 94–125; Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley, “How Are Foreign Policy Attitudes Structured? A Hierarchical Model,” *American Political Science Review* 81 (December 1987): 1101–1120; Shoon Kathleen Murray, *Anchors Against Change: American Opinion Leaders’ Beliefs After the Cold War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); E.R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

There are multiple understandings of what it is to be on the right in terms of foreign policy.

Only the first of those groups might be considered “realist.” Once we dispense with the mistaken but quite common definition of realism as *any* approach stressing the national interest, the role of power in international relations, and the potential dangers of international institutions, the distinction between conservatives and neoconservatives becomes clearer. Conservatives are realist in the sense that they define the national interest narrowly and materially, treat international politics as amoral, consider force a necessary but not universally appropriate instrument, recognize that a preponderance of power creates as many problems as it solves, and guard sovereignty so as to facilitate rapid adjustment to international realities while recognizing the possible instrumental use of international organizations. Neoconservatives, in contrast, define more grandiose national interests, justified by a belief in American moral authority, often think of force as the primary instrument for realizing international outcomes, advocate the achievement and maintenance of American preponderance, and oppose the involvement of multilateral institutions on principled grounds as illegitimate bodies inherently threatening to American sovereignty. Nor are the neoconservatives idealistic. Their stress on American values emerges from a deep sense of national pride that in its more exuberant form translates into a feeling of moral superiority in international affairs. Neoconservatives refuse to separate the pursuit of American self-interest and those of the greater international good, arguing that serving America’s cause is the world’s cause. They are not idealists or realists, but nationalists.

This conceptualization, while it distinguishes between the different rights, also offers an understanding of what unites them. Realism and nationalism both serve as poles on different identity dimensions that separate “us” from “them,” albeit in different ways. In all cases, the right is more egoistic. There are simply multiple ways of being so. The realist dimension concerns how narrowly foreign policy is defined. Realists are not humanitarians. They envision foreign policy as obliging no more than the pursuit of policies benefiting the self. Positions on this dimension capture the degree of *distinction* made between self and other. The second dimension also involves notions of self and other, but in terms of their *rank*, rather than their distinctiveness. The right in this dimension, the nationalist or neoconservative variety, pursues a preeminent position vis-à-vis the rest of the world. With this emphasis on position in an international hierarchy comes a tendency to define self-interest more expansively and ambitiously. And a feeling of being entitled to one’s rank serves as a moral justification for egoism. The final dimension concerns the *separation* of self from other, with the isolationist right seeking to detach itself from the rest of the world.

In the pages that follow, I offer a conceptualization of the three types of egoism and connect them to the ideologies of realism, nationalism, and isolationism. I then briefly review the historical manifestation of these ideologies in

American foreign policy. This conceptualization helps us to make sense of the points of overlap and contestation among these different rights and to explain why and when they have formed alliances with or against one another. The next section considers issues of measurement. I identify items in Ole Holsti and James Rosenau's 1996 survey of American foreign policy elites that tap into the three different notions of egoism and offer hypotheses about how they might load in a factor analysis of the beliefs of American elites if foreign policy is indeed constructed along these three dimensions. The results, presented in the penultimate section, largely bear these expectations out. The conclusion discusses some of the implications for what we know or do not know when we enter the ballot booth to select our next administration based on the simplistic label of the "right."

THREE EGOISMS OF THE RIGHT: REALIST DISTINCTIVENESS, NATIONALIST SUPERIORITY, AND ISOLATIONIST SEPARATION

In looking for guidance about what divides one right from other rights in foreign policy, I turn first to classics that have attempted to distinguish left from right in foreign policy and to identify key ideological foreign policy divisions. E.H. Carr identifies the right with realism, and Robert Osgood defines realism as egoism. This is an important link. What distinguishes the right from the left in foreign policy is indeed the degree of egoism. The right conceives of the national interest in exclusive, the left in more inclusive, terms.⁸

The left is generally the advocate of "liberal internationalism," historically equated with three tendencies: humanitarianism, antimilitarism, and multilateralism.⁹ All involve restraints, even if only partial, on the sole pursuit of egoistic self-interest. Idealism writ large "is the disposition to concern oneself with moral values that transcend the nation's selfish interests ... Every ideal demands that nations place some restraints upon egoism and renounce the more extreme forms of self-interest."¹⁰ Humanitarianism is concern for the fate of others. Antimilitarism is the desire to remove power and force as means for resolving disputes, which is tantamount to reducing inequalities in international politics. When advocated by the strong for non-expedient reasons, it indicates a less egoistic sense of the national interest. Multilateralism also rebalances international relations to make them more equal by the creation of generalized principles for decision making irrespective of the particularities of

⁸ Carr, *Twenty Years*; Robert Endicott Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations: The Great Transformation of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1953). I should be clear that these are *relative* differences between left and right. There are very pure self-abnegating altruists, just as there are few extreme sociopathic narcissists. It is a question of degree of emphasis, self-restraint, and trade-offs.

⁹ Charles Krauthammer, "In Defense of Democratic Realism" in Rosen, *The Right War*, 186–200; Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*.

¹⁰ Osgood, *Ideals*, 4–6.

the case, and thereby the relative power dynamics between the contending parties.¹¹ It might be argued that pursuit of these aims might instrumentally serve the long-term self-interest of powerful states, as it enhances the legitimacy of their power and sends signals of benign intent that lengthen the period of their predominance. But it is likely that only liberal countries, comfortable with democratic norms of compromise and checks on power, are able to take this far-sighted view. Empirically, that has been the case with hegemons.¹² There are contradictions inherent in liberal internationalism that lead to different lefts, particularly those that emerge over the question of peace enforcement in which leftists must choose between pacifism and human rights.¹³ However, my focus is the right.

While the entire right embraces some kind of egoism, it can take three different forms, depending on how the self is contrasted with the other. Carr is correct that the right is not idealist, but this does not *necessarily* make it realist. In thinking about the ways in which some self, whether it be a state or any other unit, might relate to others, it is useful to think in spatial terms. A necessary basis for any egoism is a *distinction* between the self and the other, a conception of individuality.¹⁴ Without the distinction, the self is merely absorbed into a broader whole. Distinction separates the foreign policy approach of the right from that of the left. Once that distinction is made, however, other possibilities emerge. Units might regard themselves as, or desire to be, better or somehow superior to others on some dimension or another, such as morality or power. This might be represented spatially as a self-placement on some vertical scale. This is a *vertical egoism of rank* or hierarchy, what Jacques Hymans calls the “status dimension.”¹⁵ Alternatively, units might manifest egoism by longing for *separation* from others, putting literal or figurative distance between self and other. This is dependent on but nevertheless different from distinction, which simply constitutes individuality. Separation can be represented graphically as placement along an axis of *horizontal egoism* that indicates desired detachment. Vertical egoism and horizontal egoism presuppose prior distinction between units, but egoism can exist without rank or separation.

¹¹ John Gerard Ruggie, “Multilateralism: Anatomy of an Institution,” *International Organization* 46 (Summer 1992): 561–598.

¹² G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹³ Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*.

¹⁴ Hymans uses a similar but not identical concept, what he calls a “solidarity” dimension. Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22–23. Chittick, Billingsley, and Travis (1995) call it an “identity” dimension. It also resembles Holsti and Rosenau’s (1990) “cooperative internationalism,” although their concept is inductively defined without a firm sense of its meaning.

¹⁵ Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation*. Judging by the choice of indicators, others seem to be capturing the same concept, albeit more inductively, without a firm sense of what holds together the concept. Chittick, Billingsley, and Travis (1995) find a “security” dimension, and Holsti and Rosenau (1990) markers of “militant internationalism.”

Are there tangible sets of foreign policy practices that exhibit these three different expressions of egoism? One candidate is obviously realism. Its foundation is indeed national egoism, a restricted notion of the national interest focused only on yielding tangible benefits for the nation-state, distinguished from an idealistic one of humanitarianism, antimilitarism, and multilateralism. Egoism is the foundation of realist theory.¹⁶ However, from this point, realism develops its own logic and unique critique of these elements of liberal idealism. For the realist, the pursuit of this national interest is inhibited by the constraints of the environment in which states operate, constraints that are difficult if not impossible to change. Whether it is the lack of an external enforcer of the peace that might exist in domestic society, or the natural lust for advantage endemic to the human species, international politics is a dangerous arena. Foreign and defense policy is the process of constant adaptation to these forces somewhat beyond one's control. Realism is always structural, never voluntaristic, regardless of what adjective (classical, neo-, neoclassical) one applies to it. Even if not all states are inclined toward naked aggression, the fact that some are forces them to take certain actions.

As a result of its structural nature, realism has particular understandings of the concepts of sovereignty, power, and morality. Foreign policy must be flexible and adaptive to circumstances. As a result, realists focus on the importance of retaining freedom of action. Sovereignty is a watchword.¹⁷ Yet it is not an ideological unilateralism, but rather a pragmatic one. States do not hoard sovereignty for its own sake, but because the world is potentially dangerous. Multilateral institutions should not be allowed to inhibit freedom of reaction. However, to the extent that they do not remove autonomous decision-making authority or create vulnerability, they might be useful instruments. This was the realist understanding of the League of Nations.¹⁸

For the same reason of flexibility, international standards of morality cannot (and will not) be allowed to play any real role in world politics, as principles identify common standards of restraint that apply regardless of situation and might impede the pursuit of the national interest. However, realism is not immoral but rather amoral.¹⁹ All are simply trying to make their own way in an uncertain world of scarce resources and security. Amorality also means that no state should consider itself more moral than or superior to another. Realism cautions against self-righteousness. Hans Morgenthau writes that realism "refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral

¹⁶ Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Osgood, *Ideals*.

¹⁷ Donnelly, *Realism*.

¹⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19 (Winter 1994/1995): 9–49; Carr, *Twenty Years*.

¹⁹ Donnelly, *Realism*, chap. 6.

laws that govern the universe.”²⁰ Morgenthau, Carr, and other realists adopt a kind of moral relativism in which no side is morally superior, and morality merely cloaks the pursuit of egoistic interests.²¹

Realism stresses the importance of perceiving the international environment coldly and objectively, free of emotion and bias, which serves the adaptability necessary for the realization of vital interests. Understanding that others are also seeking to promote their interests is a key to realizing your own. In this sense, realists might be called instrumentally empathetic. Therefore, while potentially a useful tool for power mobilization, the force of nationalism is also associated with an inability to objectively view facts and a sense of moral superiority and ultimately leads to the pursuit of foreign policies not in a state’s interests.²² It inflates a nation-state’s ambitions in a way that structural circumstances dictate against.

Finally, the threat or use of force is an indispensable instrument for the realization of the national interest, but it is not always the appropriate one. Due to its focus on power, realism is often inappropriately equated with quick resort to the use of force. However, realists are not militarists who resort to force as a first option. True realists do not have any ideological predisposition toward the carrot or the stick. They simply insist that the latter never be far from hand. States must use it judiciously. Osgood writes that while “coercion is an indispensable instrument of national policy ... the power of coercion is, in fact, most effective when it is used with restraint and circumspection and in conjunction with noncoercive measures.”²³ Prudence, humility, and caution are all important to realism.²⁴

Even unexercised power has its disadvantages. Although realists are not sanguine about the ability of states to transcend the security dilemma, most believe that the accumulation of power might undermine long-term interests and security by provoking fears in other states needlessly. This is the recurring pattern of the balance of power. This does not mean that power and the ability to use force are not important. Indeed, they are a fundamental means of foreign policy. But they are not all-purpose instruments. Even those realists who describe the international system most pessimistically, such as John Mearsheimer, and consequently argue that the maximization of power

²⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1954), 4.

²¹ Morgenthau notes the parallels with post-modernism! See Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

²² Barry R. Posen, “Nationalism, the Mass Army and Military Power,” *International Security* 18 (Summer 1993): 80–124; Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Jack Levy, *Myths of Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Stephen Van Evera, “Why Cooperation Failed in 1914,” *World Politics* 38 (October 1985): 80–117.

²³ Osgood, *Ideals*, 13.

²⁴ Mazarr, “George W. Bush.”

is necessary, also argue that global hegemony is not possible, as balancing coalitions will always prevent it.²⁵

In sum, realism is best thought of as a foreign policy approach that simply distinguishes the self from the other. It does not think in terms of moral superiority, and even military superiority has its disadvantages. The application of power must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Realism is agnostic about the utility of force, only stressing that it must be a part of the tool kit. Therefore it is not a vertical egoism. Separation from others might be an appropriate course, but this depends on circumstances. In many cases, states can simply not allow themselves to disengage. There might be other ideologies that emphasize distinction over rank, but realism certainly fits this category.

Egoism is not confined to realism. Often, any ideology or policy that stresses power and the national interest or denigrates the importance of international institutions and morality is mistakenly considered realist.²⁶ This distracts from profound differences within the right about the uses of power, the definition of the national interest, and the use of multilateral organizations. Realism is not simply “anti-idealism.” It is a particular form of it, among many. The most notable egoism falsely associated with realism is nationalism, which under the conceptual framework developed above, might be considered a vertical egoism.

Nationalism is a form of intense egoism based on a feeling of strong attachment to others within a nation-state’s borders. Yet, this pride can easily escalate into a belief in national superiority. Social psychologists have found that strong in-groups have equally strong out-groups, the double-edged sword of social identity.²⁷ This leads groups to accentuate their positive values in comparison to others. As a result, one’s own nation is considered “better” than others—more moral, more powerful, more clever, and oftentimes more peaceful. Pride provides a sense of national efficacy, which means that nationalists are always voluntarists who believe in their ability to remake their environment. Vertical egoism leads to an inflated sense of power and capability. Intense feelings of national identity provide the psychological basis for concern about others’ intentions as well as the moral justification for the egoistic pursuit of one’s own interests. Nationalists fall into a category of individuals that exhibit both intense fear and pride.²⁸ Nationalism is marked by a combination

²⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001); Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30 (January 1978): 167–214; Mazarr, “George W. Bush.”

²⁶ Mazarr (2003) and Legro and Moravcsik make this mistake. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Faux Realism,” *Foreign Policy* 125 (July/August 2001): 80–82.

²⁷ Jonathan Mercer, “Anarchy and Identity,” *International Organization* 49 (Spring 1995): 229–252.

²⁸ Hymans, *Psychology*, 33. This conflates the realist separation between absolute and relative gains. Concerns about relative gains are the result of the intensity of egoism, which is usually thought of as falling under the rubric of absolute gains. Defining interests in relative terms in vertical egoism is borne of identity rather than the structural situation, driven by disposition rather than the strategic nature of the interaction.

of a deep pessimism about the intentions of others (sometimes leading scholars and policy analysts to confuse it with realism) with a fervent optimism about the ability of the nation to prevail.²⁹ This seeming paradox is the natural result of intense group identity.

Fears of others' intentions leads naturally to the pursuit of power justified as a necessity to hold off adversaries with jealous interests. As a result, nationalism does not share the realist maxim that power is not a cure-all. Rather than balance, nationalists aim for preponderance, at least vis-à-vis perceived threats and enemies. Not to establish superiority in power is to invite aggression. Hence, nationalists are key advocates of what Robert Jervis calls, in something of a misnomer, the "deterrence model"—the belief system that emphasizes the importance of both military advantage and resolve in achieving interests in international politics, whether offensive or defensive.³⁰ Realists caution against this, claiming that it will lead to a "spiral" of hostilities. In the nationalist line of thinking, egoism is no longer structurally constrained. There is no such thing as too much power. And whereas in realism, inferiority in power leads (or should, at least) to caution, in the nationalist mind-set, even superior power can be overcome by the collective will of the nation. And this is buttressed by a belief in the superiority of the cause. Resolve is a function of national will, best provided by an intense feeling of national solidarity.

Unilateralism, in this particular egoistic mind-set, is just as much ideological as it is instrumental. Nationalists are unilateralist by disposition. They want to act autonomously, regardless of whether this cooperation is easier and more productive.³¹ Feelings of moral superiority and the inherent legitimacy of one's interests, when taken to an extreme, are naturally accompanied by a belief that those of others are illegitimate. International organizations are symbols of efforts by others to restrain the pursuit of those interests. They are threatening even if they are powerless. Since politics is as much a battle of wills as a test of power, they are symbolically dangerous. They threaten the identity of the nation-state as they water down national interests in an effort to discover the will of an illusory international community. Again, the contrast with realism is striking. Realists do not find international organizations threatening. States would never allow them to be.

²⁹ Levy, *Myths*; Stephen Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

³⁰ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976). Ironically, these concepts are generally associated with the cold, unemotional approach of rationalism. Yet empirically, they are associated with groups that do not exhibit those traits but rather the romantic notions of nation and spirit. I should note that nationalism is not the same as "offensive realism," which argues that states are power maximizers, rather than security maximizers. Rank in nationalism is not driven solely by fear as it is in these approaches, but also by pride. Power in nationalism is partly accumulated for its own sake as part of a general search for prestige. Offensive realism believes power is accumulated because the environment is extremely dangerous, more so than in "defensive" realism.

³¹ Hymans, *Psychology*, 34; Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, chap. 6.

Feelings of national superiority, however, can also lead to a retreat inward rather than a projection outward. Isolationism attempts to separate the self from the other. Osgood calls this a “passive egoism.”³² This impetus to disengage might be based on a sense of national superiority, but not necessarily. When it is, however, isolationists draw a different policy conclusion than the more assertive nationalists, one of retreat rather than dominance. “To the degree that ethnocentrism fosters a self-centered or parochial view of the world, the tendency may be to draw inward into an isolationist shell rather than to push outward in the world,” write Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley.³³ Isolationists do not want to rule others. They want to be left alone and to leave others alone. There is a firm distinction between self and other, as is true of all self-regarding ideologies, but it manifests itself in a desire for distance, captured by the notion of horizontal egoism. Just like nationalism, it can have pathological foreign policy consequences, albeit of a completely different sort. Isolation is not an appropriate strategy in situations of genuine strategic threat and can result in a lack of effective defenses.

Isolationism as a particular type of egoistic disposition must be distinguished from other belief systems that have the substantive policy effect of disengagement. Pacifism often leads to isolationist sentiments based on a moral injunction against intervening in others’ affairs. A narrow view of the national interest, what we have simply called distinction, is sometimes mistaken for isolationism. Isolationism also contrasts with realism, as the latter is based on a notion of egoism in which the self is distinguished sharply from others, but still has to deal with them. Isolationists try to avoid that. While realism and nationalism involve a choice within the right about *how* one’s nation relates to the world, isolationism involves a decision about *whether* to do so, and a preference not to do so.³⁴

THE THREE AMERICAN RIGHTS: CONSERVATIVE REALISTS, NEOCONSERVATIVE NATIONALISTS, AND ISOLATIONISTS

All three egoisms have played a major role in the foreign policy of the United States, even if they have taken on uniquely American features. Isolationism enjoyed its predominance earlier in its history, fading somewhat naturally as American power expanded and the ability of others to threaten its security increased, both a natural consequence of changing military technology. Yet it still influences a significant bloc of American opinion. Nationalism might now be known as neoconservatism in U.S. foreign policy circles, yet it has a history that dates back at least a hundred years to America’s first tentative bid at

³² Osgood, *Ideals*, 5.

³³ Hurwitz and Peffley, “How Are Foreign Policy Attitudes Structured?” 1108.

³⁴ Charles W. Kegley and Eugene Wittkopf, *American Foreign Policy: Patterns and Processes* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1982).

imperialism under the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt and others. Realism is often argued, even by realists themselves, to have a weak hold in American political culture, owing to America's inherent optimism and idealism, but it has been present consistently during the twentieth century.³⁵

Realism has traditionally found a home on the right of the political spectrum among conservatives as part of their general skepticism about reform and change in both domestic and foreign affairs. Just as conservatives generally resist efforts on the part of the left to create a more egalitarian social order at home, they have opposed or scoffed at efforts to mitigate the effects of power on international politics, whether through disarmament, collective security, or international law. Many prominent conservatives, such as George Will and William F. Buckley, have defined conservatism in terms identical to how Carr has defined realism, that of seeing the world as it is, not as it might or should be. The nation-state cannot really be expected to understand its interests in anything other than self-interested terms.³⁶

This was the ideology of the George H. W. Bush administration, the George W. Bush campaign in 2000, and the self-professed attachment of its major foreign policy figures. Condoleezza Rice openly embraced "realism" in 2000 and complained of the Clinton administration's "overly broad definition of the national interest," in which "the 'national interest' is replaced with 'humanitarian interests.'" The Democrats believed in an "illusory international community." The Republicans would restore a more selfish definition of the national interest, it was implied. In this foreign policy context of limited threat, the central foreign policy plank of the Republican platform was to end the Clinton administration's fixation with nation building in places in which U.S. vital interests were not involved. Rice wrote that "there is nothing wrong with doing something that benefits all humanity, but that is, in a sense, a second-order effect."³⁷ This same fixation on the national interest is also evident in the contempt held for ideological commitments to internationalism. Rice complained that the Democrats concluded "multilateral agreements for their own sake." These were dangerous not because they were multilateral, but because they did not represent American interests. The left had an ideological commitment, whereas the right would be more pragmatic. Republicans would draw a firm distinction between the self and the other.³⁸

³⁵ Osgood, *Ideals*; Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁶ Gary Rosen, "Introduction" in Rosen, *The Right War*, 1–6; Kim R. Holmes and John Hillen, "Misreading Reagan's Legacy: A Truly Conservative Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75 (September/October 1996): 162–167; Will, "Time."

³⁷ Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (January/February 2000): 47.

³⁸ Rice, "Promoting"; Mazaar, "George W. Bush"; Legro and Moravcsik, "Faux Realism"; James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy towards Russia After the Cold War* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

It is this idea—that American foreign policy must first and foremost serve the strategic interests of the United States—that neoconservatives and conservatives can agree on. It formed the basis of their alliance during the Cold War and is the source of their mutual admiration of figures like Ronald Reagan. Beyond vital interests, however, conservatives offer no inspirational vision of American purpose.³⁹ President George H.W. Bush famously lacked “the vision thing,” which might have been a problem of personality, but was just as much a fault of the realist approach and the circle he identified and consorted with. Neoconservatives want to do more than create stability, promote normalcy, and contain adversaries, all realist watchwords.⁴⁰ Charles Krauthammer complains that realism offers no vision beyond power. Neoconservatives call for “national greatness” instead. William Kristol and Robert Kagan, two leading neoconservatives write, “Without a broader, more enlightened understanding of America’s interests, conservatism will too easily degenerate into the pinched nationalism of Buchanan’s ‘America First,’ where the appeal to narrow self-interest masks a deeper self-loathing.”⁴¹

The solution reveals neoconservatives as nationalists, vertical egoists, albeit in a somewhat unique American form. Neoconservatives find their inspiration in a belief in the greatness of the American nation, which justifies its preeminent rank in the global hierarchy, defined in terms of both military and moral power. Neoconservatism is not a nostalgic patriotism. Irving Kristol, the intellectual father of modern neoconservatism, writes that “neoconservatism is not merely patriotic—that goes without saying—but also nationalist. Patriotism springs from a love of the nation’s past; nationalism arises out of hope for the nation’s future, distinctive greatness.”⁴² Nationalism provides the greater purpose needed to mobilize societal virtue and prevent the slide into decadence. Kristol and Kagan argue that such a sense of commitment is necessary even to preserve basic vital interests. This is why the movement so embraced Ronald Reagan. The President vanquished the Vietnam syndrome that had sapped America’s self-confidence and crippled the administration of Jimmy Carter in its dealings with Iran and the Soviet Union. In doing so, Reagan drew a strict moral line that neoconservatives respect between virtuous American democracy and an evil totalitarian empire. Realists argue and even

³⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, “Robust Nationalism,” *National Interest* 58 (Winter 1999/2000): 31–40; Michael C. Williams, “What is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory,” *European Journal of International Relations* 11 (September 2005): 307–337; Holmes and Hillen, “Misreading”; Mazarr, “George W. Bush,” 513.

⁴⁰ Stefan A. Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13; Gideon Rose, “Present Laughter or Utopian Bliss,” *The National Interest* 58 (Winter 1999/2000): 41–46.

⁴¹ Quoted in Williams, “What is,” 324; Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 42; Krauthammer, “In Defense.”

⁴² Quoted in Williams, “What is,” 317.

admire that Reagan's democratic program was mere propaganda in a global power struggle.⁴³

Neoconservatism is not a nationalism of the soil as is the case with American isolationism or other nationalisms across the globe.⁴⁴ Rather, it is based on the superiority of American ideals and values, a universal nationalism. As a result, even more than others, American nationalism has a strong moral component that distinguishes it sharply from the amorality of realism. Realism is simply pragmatic, while neoconservatism puts great stress on the importance of American ideas and the strength it derives from them. Neoconservatives take what might be considered a constructivist approach to world politics that is sharply distinguished from the realists' austere materialism. Hence, they are highly engaged in the media battle over the course of American foreign policy.⁴⁵ The belief in the superiority and universality of American national values leads them to a vigorous promotion, at least rhetorically, of American institutions and ideals, most notably democracy. However, they do so in a unilateral way, in keeping with their nationalism, as argued below.

The consequence of this moral self-confidence is a tendency to perceive the world as a struggle for power between good and evil. This was the sustaining force of the neoconservative nationalists during the Cold War, who saw the ongoing competition with the Soviet Union as more than just a realist struggle for power or survival. It was a moral crusade as well.⁴⁶ The sense of moral superiority shared by neoconservatives is most clearly seen in their repeated insistence that there is no distinction between the national interest and that of the international community. Kristol and Kagan write that American "moral goals and its fundamental national interests are almost always in harmony."⁴⁷ American power is good for the world. The United States is a "custodian" and a "benign hegemon." Democracy, writes Krauthammer, serves not just a moral but a strategic purpose as well, by making America safer. Where the values conflict, neoconservatives, as egoists, give pride of place to national interests, as explained below.⁴⁸

Among its more vehement adherents, the belief in American superiority and the stress on ideas and morals show that American nationalists are

⁴³ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75 (July/August 1996): 18–32; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 56–57; Holmes and Hillen, "Misreading." I should note that many have criticized neoconservatives in foreign policy for departing from the key principles of its intellectual advocates and progenitors, but I do not concern myself with that here, choosing to focus instead on what it has meant in practice. See Fukuyama, *America*. One might call it "pop neoconservatism."

⁴⁴ Williams, "What is"; Lieven, *America*; Ryn, "Ideology."

⁴⁵ Rose, "Present Laughter"; Williams, "What is," 308; Mazarr, "George W. Bush"; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 35.

⁴⁶ Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 11; Rosen, "Introduction," 3; Fukuyama, *America*, 48.

⁴⁷ Kristol and Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite," 27. See also Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*; 17; Ryn, "Ideology," 395.

⁴⁸ Fukuyama, *America*, 102; Krauthammer, "In Defense."

voluntarists who seek to remake the world in America's image. Ken Jowitt has called them Leninists, not because of their ideological goals, but because of their belief that agency is necessary to bring about progress.⁴⁹ This forms another cleavage dividing them from realists, although it is somewhat obscured by mutual accusations of pessimism. Realists are correct to characterize neoconservatives as pessimistic in the sense that the latter's Manichean view of the world creates a perception of America surrounded by hostile enemies. However, although neoconservatives might regard the environment as more hostile than realists do, the former are more sanguine about the possibility of changing it. In this sense, neoconservatives are also right to understand realists as cynics who believe fundamental change in international politics is impossible. Neoconservatives are short-term pessimists but long-term optimists. They could even arguably be characterized as embracing a truly teleological worldview.⁵⁰

For American nationalists, the tool for promoting American superiority is military power. Their fervent patriotism provides them with a firm belief that American superiority is justified and legitimate and leaves them free of the fears of counterbalancing that make realists pause. The best way of obtaining and preserving preeminence is through the pursuit of preponderance rather than a balance in military power, about which nationalists are unapologetic. Realists often accuse them of embracing military force as a first option.⁵¹ This lack of flexibility is evident historically in the neoconservatives' criticism of Henry Kissinger's pursuit of détente in the 1970s (which also attracted the support of the idealistic left) as it sought accommodation of the Soviet Union and an end to the pursuit of American predominance.⁵² Following the end of the Cold War, Kristol and Kagan advocated the maintenance of American power, lest the United States dismantle the "spiritual foundations" that served its interests.⁵³ However, this element of American nationalism is hardly new, not even to the last half-century. Neoconservatives draw their lineage back to William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, those Presidents who first made the United States a great power with worldwide military and economic interests and justified it by reference to the superiority of American moral ideals.⁵⁴

Power must also be accompanied by strong resolve, another indication of their voluntarism. Patriotism is a key reservoir. Kristol and Kagan advocate a

⁴⁹ Ken Jowitt, "Rage, Hubris and Regime Change: The Urge to Speed History Along," *Policy Review* 118 (April/May 2003): 33–42.

⁵⁰ Rose, "Present Laughter"; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 11–12.

⁵¹ Rose, "Present Laughter"; Fukuyama, *America*, 61–63; Michael Desch, "Liberals, Neocons and Realcons: The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention," *Orbis* 46 (Fall 2001): 519–533; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 4, 26.

⁵² Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 43; Rosen, "Introduction," 3; Fukuyama, *America*, 50.

⁵³ Kristol and Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite"; Ryn, "Ideology," 392.

⁵⁴ Kristol and Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite"; Rose, "Present Laughter"; Max Boot, "Think Again: Neocons," *Foreign Policy* 83 (January/February 2004): 20–28; Williams, "What is."

strategy of “military supremacy and moral confidence.”⁵⁵ The failure in Vietnam, détente, and the hostage crisis were failures of American will, not its power, and are not to be repeated. For neoconservatives, the maintenance of American hegemony after the demise of the Soviet Union would deter future challengers before they arose. Through an active and assertive policy drawing on American resolve, rather than an adaptive and reactive realist one, American would send strong signals to potential threats. Neoconservatives constantly appeal to the lesson of Munich that the appearance of weakness emboldens enemies. In the post–September 11 environment, this has become the dominant mantra.⁵⁶ Terrorists or states that deal with them must know that the United States will act, a probable reason that the Bush administration publicized its notion of preemptive war in its National Security Strategy in 2002. Domestic criticism of American policy in Iraq is said to embolden insurgents and undermine servicemembers’ morale. Although many leftist critics treat this as merely a convenient political argument to stifle criticism, it has real and genuine ideological roots as part of the nationalist worldview.

Neoconservative focus on American ideals and morality has led some to mistakenly define neoconservatism as an expression of Wilsonian idealism, albeit a muscular and unilateralist one.⁵⁷ Nationalists, like idealists, allow ideas about morality and democracy to influence their foreign policy and are optimistic about the possibility of change in the international system. Both groups are voluntarists, but this is not the same as idealism. There are significant differences. I would argue that neoconservatism, as a variant of egoism, always begins with the national interest. Its deep patriotism leads to a belief in the goodness and morality of American political practices. Nationalism leads to a self-confidence in the universal worth of liberal principles. It is a bold claim that one’s own form of government is good for the world, and nationalism helps neoconservatives make it. This is not to say that neoconservatives are not genuine believers in democracy and its virtues, but only that pride is what causes them to give it a place in foreign policy. However, the national interest always comes first, and if the United States must make friends with dictators or rely on unsavory means of foreign policy to realize American security, neoconservatives will heartily endorse these methods, as would realism. Leading neoconservatives during the Cold War made their name by ridiculing the Carter administration’s tough-handed approach to the human rights policies of Latin American allies.⁵⁸ And there has been no neoconservative revolt against U.S. policy toward detainees in the war on terror or the practice of extraordinary rendition to countries that practice torture.

⁵⁵ Kristol and Kagan, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite”; Huntington, “Robust.”

⁵⁶ Mazarr, “George W. Bush”; Norman Podhoretz, “World War IV: How it Started, What It Means, and Why We Have to Win” in Rosen, *The Right War*, 102–169.

⁵⁷ Rose, “Present Laughter”; Mazarr, “George W. Bush”; Fukuyama, *America*, 41.

⁵⁸ Jeanne Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards,” *Commentary* 68 (November 1979): 34–46.

Woodrow Wilson, in contrast, sought to demonstrate the greatness and selflessness of the United States by tying it down in an institution devoted to collective security. To practice democracy at the international level was to place restraints on the exercise of power and to pledge help to others whose security might not implicate tangible American interests. This selflessness is what made America morally great.⁵⁹ American nationalists will not allow this. In fact, they oppose these very institutions for limiting the exercise of sovereign national prerogatives, even when only symbolically. It is doubtful that there can be genuine idealism without some sort of multilateralist constraint, whether formal or informal, on the exercise of power. It is the only true evidence of self-restraint and belief in democracy.

Finally, the United States arguably has a more pronounced tradition of isolationism than any other great power. In its true form, it has been an ideology of the right and historically associated with a more ethnocentric, chauvinistic nationalism than that of neoconservatism. Walter Russell Mead is referring to this group when he talks of a Jacksonian tradition that stresses the “folk community” of the United States.⁶⁰ Isolationists also sometimes have a Jeffersonian streak that objects to international involvement since it leads to bureaucratic centralization and a large military that pose threats to American democracy and the maintenance of the division of powers between the legislative and the executive branch. This argument was very salient during the “great debate” over American commitment of armed forces to NATO in Europe in the early 1950s, with isolationists preferring a cheaper strategy of strengthening America’s Air Force fleet of nuclear bombers.⁶¹ Isolationists tend to be slow to wake to dangers, but when there are direct threats to U.S. security, they are difficult to distinguish from nationalists, dealing decisively with threats

⁵⁹ Osgood, *Ideals*.

⁶⁰ Lieven, *America*; Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World* (New York: Knopf, 2001).

⁶¹ Levy, *Myths*. My conceptualization overlaps with but nevertheless differs from Mead’s well-known typology of four American traditions in foreign policy (*Special Providence*). The Jacksonian tradition, in particular, seems to straddle neoconservatism and isolationism. It is neoconservative in its emphasis on American will and resolve, the utility of power, moralizing in international affairs, endorsement of patriotism, and contempt for international organizations. However, it veers toward isolationism in that it embraces the idea of a “folk community” and does not necessarily define grand goals for American foreign policy beyond security and prosperity, even though this requires international engagement. The analysis that follows does not find evidence of a distinct Jacksonian dimension, perhaps because it tends to be anti-elitist and might not find significant representation in the study. Although this falls outside of the rubric of this paper, one possibility is that Jacksonianism, if it exists, provides a basis of support for either neoconservatism or isolationism, depending on the strategic situation. When faced with threats, Jacksonians might move easily from isolationism to neoconservatism, awakened by patriotism, as both of the former are driven by a notion of American superiority. It could also be conjectured that neoconservatism provides an intellectual apparatus for what are to Jacksonians gut instincts and common sense. This might explain the transformation of President Bush’s personal views, which are, after all, not the result of a careful reading of Irving Kristol or neoconservative theorists.

so as to return quickly home. It is when the threat or the response is ambiguous that divisions with realists and neoconservatives are most prominent. However, it is often difficult to distinguish isolationism as an ideology from other approaches whose policies have the effect of limiting American engagement in the world. Pacifist opponents to American involvement in the League of Nations are sometimes regarded as isolationists, as are contemporary realists who argue that the United States has no reason to participate in humanitarian operations.⁶²

Isolationism's association with the right is also somewhat obscured by the fact that the realist, and the nationalist right even more so, are decidedly internationalist. For a significant portion of the history of the United States, there was little distinction between a realist and an isolationist policy. America's strategic interests were largely dictated by its geography, which until the twentieth century allowed the United States to pursue a foreign policy relatively free from the affairs of other great powers. Only when the nature of technology began to make the world a smaller place did true tensions among the rights emerge. The British could interfere in Latin America; German submarines could sink American commercial vessels; the Soviet Union could strike the United States with intercontinental missiles. It was at the point in history in which the question of the necessity of American participation in great-power politics was most ambiguous, immediately after World War I, that the debate was most vigorous. Nationalists continued to favor the promotion of American imperial interests and resisted even moral restraints on its sovereignty, symbolized by the debate over Article 10 of the League of Nations covenant. They favored instead a concert-like arrangement that would confer upon the United States the status of a great power but without any implication that it would defend those countries unrelated to its egoistic interests, lest American honor be called into question. Isolationists wanted a complete withdrawal into the western hemisphere, free from European affairs.⁶³ Realists and isolationists came together again, after a long separation, over the issue of post-Cold War humanitarian interventions, which both opposed. On the war in Iraq, both also expressed opposition.⁶⁴ In sum, isolationists tend to be on the right, but the right does not necessarily tend towards isolationism. And there are internationalists on both the left and right, albeit of different sorts.

⁶² Ralph A. Stone, *The Irreconcilables: The Fight Against the League of Nations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970); Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*.

⁶³ Stone, *Irreconcilables*; Osgood, *Ideals*; John Gerard Ruggie, "The Past as Prologue: Interests, Identity and American Foreign Policy," *International Security* 21 (Spring 1997): 89–125; Jeffrey W. Legro, "Whence American Internationalism," *International Organization* 54 (Spring 2000): 253–289; Nicholas John Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942).

⁶⁴ Rosen, "Introduction"; Michael P. Noonan, "Conservative Opinions on U.S. Foreign Policy," *Orbis* 44 (Fall 1999): 621–632; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 100; Patrick J. Buchanan, "'Stay the Course!' Is Not Enough" in Rosen, *The Right War*, 201–203.

Measuring the Three Forms of Egoism

The Holsti and Rosenau data set offers the opportunity to discover whether the three rights reviewed above manifest themselves in elite opinion in the United States. The most comprehensive survey of foreign policy attitudes today, it is based on an elite mail survey with over 2,500 respondents randomly selected from *Who's Who in America*, including State Department officials, labor officials, foreign policy experts, military officers, and media leaders. The most recent survey, used in this article, was undertaken in 1996. Ideally, the data would be more recent, as it does not capture opinions on the contemporary international context, which has changed dramatically since the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, if we see signs of these cleavages already before the terrorist attacks of 2001 and the Iraq war of 2003, it makes the argument that much more powerful. This would be consistent with other findings. Shoon Murray has shown that the structure of elite opinions has changed little following the Cold War. Core values are simply applied anew to new issues.⁶⁵

As there are hypothetically three egoisms that have in practice often been confused with one another, questions must be selected carefully in order to reveal the cleavage structure of foreign policy opinion. I proceed in two stages. First, I choose items from the data set that capture the concepts of distinctiveness, rank, and separation that should structure the three dimensions of foreign policy conflict. The latter are what are known as latent variables, abstract core concepts that cannot be directly observed. The items from the survey serve as proxies. These core values are hypothesized to vary along a continuum; that is, there are opposites of separation, rank, and distinctiveness. Second, I select other questions that have historically been markers of realism, neoconservatism, and isolationism in order to gauge if they are associated with the other variables in the way that I hypothesize. This is more of an inductive move.

Generally, respondents are asked to express their opinion on a particular subject by choosing from four responses that range along a scale. These responses are then allocated a numerical value from 1 to 4. Variable names are italicized in the discussion below, and Table 1 lists the question phrasing and the direction of the coding. For instance, the highest score for the variable *Democracy* indicates a belief that promoting democracy in other countries is “not at all important,” so that the higher the score for this variable, the less the respondent believes in exporting democracy.

So as to reveal egoism defined in terms of *distinctiveness*, I selected a number of items that capture opinions on the extent to which the United States has obligations to help others beyond its borders or instead should draw a strict line between self and other. They include support for *International aid*, alleviating *World hunger*, promoting *Human rights*, promoting *Democracy*, and *Protecting the weak* against aggression. Support or opposition to these elements

⁶⁵ Murray, *Anchors*.

TABLE 1
Variables, Question Wording, and Core Values

<i>Variable Name</i>	<i>Highest Value</i>	<i>Question Wording</i>
Distinctiveness		
Democracy*	Not at all important	Helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations
Human rights*	Not at all important	Promoting and defending human rights in other countries
International aid*	Not at all important	Helping to improve the standard of living in less-developed countries
Protecting weak*	Not at all important	Protecting weaker nations against foreign aggression
World hunger*	Not at all important	Combating world hunger
Rank		
Domino effect*	Agree strongly	There is considerable validity in the "domino theory" that when one national falls to aggressor nations, others nearby will soon follow a similar path.
Maintaining forces*	Very important	The United States needs to maintain substantial military forces in order to cope with security threats in the post-Cold War era.
Military superiority for peace*	Very effective	How effective is the military superiority of the United States as an approach to world peace?
Patriotism*	Agree strongly	Declining patriotism at home undermines the effectiveness of U.S. policies abroad.
US first*	Agree strongly	What we need is a new foreign policy that puts America first, and second and third as well.
Separation		
Burdensharing*	Agree strongly	Our allies are perfectly capable of defending themselves and they can afford it, thus allowing the United States to focus on internal rather than external threats to its well-being.
Problems at home*	Agree strongly	We shouldn't think so much in international terms but concentrate more on our own problems.
Scaleback*	Agree strongly	America's conception of its leadership role in the world must be scaled down.
U.S. involvement*	Agree strongly	The United States should be involved in world affairs only to the extent that its military power is needed to maintain international peace and stability.
Other variables		
Anarchy*	Very important	How important is an international system in which there is no central authority to settle disputes as a cause of war?
Balance of power*	Very effective	How effective are political efforts to achieve a balance of power within regions and between great powers as an approach to world peace?
CIA*	Agree strongly	There is nothing wrong with using the CIA to try to undermine hostile governments.
Cold War morality	Disagree strongly	There was no moral difference between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold war; all superpowers seek to enhance their direct interests.
Communication*	Very effective	How effective are better communications and understanding among peoples as an approach to world peace?
Dictators*	Agree strongly	The United States may have to support some dictators because they are friendly to us.
Efficacy of force	Disagree strongly	Military threats and the use of force are no longer effective means of coping with international issues.
Expansion*	Agree strongly	The United States should take all steps, including the use of force, to prevent aggression by any expansionist power.

(Continued)

TABLE 1

Continued

<i>Variable Name</i>	<i>Highest Value</i>	<i>Question Wording</i>
Human nature*	Very important	How important is human nature (aggressive, irrational, selfish, etc.) as a cause of war?
Interdependence*	Very effective	How effective are trade, technical cooperation, and economic interdependence as an approach to world peace?
New world order*	Agree strongly	The United States is capable of channeling the course of change toward a new world order.
Preempt*	Agree strongly	Rather than simply countering our opponent's thrusts, it is necessary to strike at the heart of an opponent's power.
Regime change*	Agree strongly	The Persian Gulf War should have continued until Saddam Hussein was removed from power.
Sovereignty	Disagree strongly	The time is ripe for the United States and other countries to cede some of their sovereignty to strengthen the powers of the UN and other international organizations.
Strong UN*	Very important	Strengthening the United Nations
Traditional interests*	Agree strongly	Despite all the changes of recent years, the underlying nature of world affairs remains the same, suggesting that states will continue to adhere to traditional definitions of their national interests.
Vietnam syndrome*	Agree strongly	The Persian Gulf War put the Vietnam War behind us.
World government*	Agree strongly	An effective world government with the authority to settle disputes is likely to emerge within the next 50 years.

"Not sure" or "no opinion" treated as missing data. *Indicates variable recoded from original data set so that higher values are now lower and vice versa.

should help extract the latent variable of distinctiveness, with realists at one end and cosmopolitans at the other.

A number of other questions measure the vertical egoistic dimension based on *rank*, the feeling that the United States is superior to others. *U.S. first* asks respondents to assess whether American foreign policy must put the United States first, second, and third, suggesting rank (although the variable might capture a general egoism true of all the rights). More directly, *Patriotism* asks respondents whether national pride is necessary for American foreign policy success. Vertical egoism should also be evident in questions about the importance of retaining America's privileged position in the international distribution of power. *Maintain forces* taps into respondent opinions about the necessity to remain preeminent in the post-Cold War era. *Military superiority for peace* evokes ideas about predominance as a strategy for maintaining peace. As was argued above, vertical egoism should be associated with the "deterrence model," a belief that military advantage deters future threats. It should also be evident in a belief in the *Domino theory* that failure to meet aggression in the present leads to future aggression. All of these items should help reveal a latent variable of *rank*, with nationalists at one end and egalitarians at the other.

The horizontal egoism of *separation*, or isolationism, can be measured by questions that capture generic objections to international involvement, such as *Problems at home*, in which respondents express views about whether the United States should disengage and focus on its own internal problems. *Burdensharing* expresses the same view, only articulated in the sentiment that allies should pay the costs of their own defense so the United States can devote its energies to domestic affairs. *Scaleback* captures opinions on U.S. responsibility in international affairs generically defined, which should elicit isolationist objection. *U.S. involvement* asks interviewees whether the United States should be involved in international affairs only to the extent that its military power is needed to preserve international peace and stability. All of these questions tap into generic attitudes toward international engagement without specifying the content of that interaction—peaceful or militaristic, or humanitarian or selfish. These items should help uncover a commitment to separation, with internationalists at one end and isolationists at the other.

When placed in a factor analysis, these sets of variables should indicate the existence of three separate dimensions of political conflict over foreign policy. As a technique, factor analysis uses the statistical association of measured opinions on particular issues in order to draw out the unmeasured core concepts or latent variables. Each actual variable has a relationship with all of the others, called the covariance. For instance, promoting democracy and promoting human rights should have a strong positive relationship that owes to their being the reflection of common underlying values, whereas humanitarianism and beliefs about preemption probably do not have much of a relationship, because they emerge from different values. Factor analysis estimated through maximum likelihood finds the underlying value structure of attitudes that make all of these different covariances most likely to occur.

The technique estimates factor loadings, essentially the correlation of particular, measured variables with the more fundamental concepts called latent variables that are not directly measured—in this case, distinctiveness, rank, and separation. They range from -1 to 1 . The items selected as proxies should have high factor loadings on the same factor as others in their category, as they are all hypothesized to be manifestations of a more fundamental concept. When a variable has a high factor loading on a particular factor, it indicates that individuals at opposite ends of the continuum of that particular latent variable are likely to have different opinions on that issue. High in this case is indicated by distance from 0 (which indicates no real association), and can be positive or negative. When a variable does not have a high factor loading on a particular factor, it means that individuals at opposite ends of the continuum of that latent variable do not differ significantly on the issue. They might all generally be high or low or average.

For instance, I expect that *Patriotism* is a key manifestation of the core concept of rank, which is not directly observed. The variable should have a high factor loading on the same dimension or factor as other variables that capture rank. (Statistically, this means that all of those variables are themselves highly

correlated.) A high positive loading indicates that those who would score highly on feelings of superiority, were it to be capable of measurement, would generally report in their survey responses a higher belief in the importance of patriotism, while those who are more egalitarian dispositionally would give lower weight to and lower scores on its importance. If *Patriotism* has a low factor loading on the factor of separation, this would indicate that internationalists and isolationists each are no more patriotic than the other, although it says nothing of the general level of patriotism.

Although all of these variables should load primarily on one dimension, there might be some secondary associations. American isolationists have chauvinistic roots, so they should score highly on items that gauge feelings of superiority but do not involve extensive engagement with the outside world, such as *U.S. first* and *Patriotism*. Feelings of superiority and rank also are argued to lead to a belief and confidence in the universality of American values and institutions, so that promoting *Human rights* and *Democracy* might load positively on the rank factor.

These variables form the backbone for identifying the different types of egoism. Given the strong evidence in past literature on the existence of these three dimensions and the use of similar indicators, I constrain the analysis to three factors. However, even if these dimensions emerge, additional questions are necessary to elicit whether the individuals at the poles are in fact the realists, neoconservatives, or isolationists that are so often written about. This link has not been made by others in the literature. For instance, an opponent of promoting democracy is not necessarily a realist (although a realist should be an opponent). The latter assumes a broader cluster of attitudes. The data set asks respondents to assess the utility of different strategies for maintaining peace, including *Interdependence* and *Communication*, classic cosmopolitan strategies that should elicit objections or skepticism among realists, in particular. *Balance of power* as a strategy for managing international affairs should draw realist support. All of these variables should load solely on the distinction dimension. Nationalists should be agnostic about all of these issues, as they do not figure in defining their approach. "Structural" realist scholars also attribute conflict to *Anarchy*, and it is possible that practitioners do the same.

I added in questions about the importance of preserving *Sovereignty* and the importance of a *Strong UN* that should appeal to both realists and nationalists and load on both the distinctiveness and rank dimensions, although for different reasons. I argued above that the source of opposition to multilateralism varies for the two groups. Realists do not necessarily fear international organizations; they are just skeptical about their utility. Therefore, they should be more likely to disagree with the neutral statement that a *World government* is likely to emerge in the next fifty years, as this expresses skepticism rather than hostility toward international cooperation.

Realists and nationalists also differ on the characterization of the international system and the prospects for change. Realists are dubious of the prospects

for fundamentally reorienting international politics, and should be skeptical about the ability of the United States to channel the course of change toward a *New world order*, while nationalists should be sanguine. Realists might exhibit the belief that *Human nature* is a cause of war, as this is a core element of classical thought in that tradition. They are also likely to believe that the post-Cold War era is no different from any other period, in that all states are simply pursuing their *Traditional interests*. All of these variables should load on the distinctiveness dimension. Nationalists might be generically pessimistic about human nature, although their pessimism is more likely to be applied to particular groups that mean harm to the United States. And neoconservatives are a particular type of nationalist, a highly voluntarist type whose optimism might permeate his or her conception of human nature.

In terms of the use of force, both nationalists and realists should believe in the continued *Efficacy of force* as a means of foreign policy, although realists might display less commitment, given their general pragmatist nature. Force is not a panacea. Nationalists should be more inclined to believe in *Preemption*, striking at the heart of an opponent's power for a decisive victory, rather than simply countering thrusts, which is more akin to realism. This variable should load on the rank but not the distinctiveness dimension.

Questions about morality can help us identify realists, isolationists, and nationalists and distinguish them from one another. *Cold War morality* allows respondents to take a stand as to whether the Cold War was simply about each side pursuing its own interests or whether there was a moral difference. Realists should be hostile or indifferent to the notion of moral superiority, while nationalists and isolationists should endorse it. However, this does not mean that nationalists are idealistic moralists. Both realists and neoconservatives should endorse the use of the *CIA* in overthrowing hostile governments and the necessity of supporting *Dictators* if it is strategically necessary. All means are necessary in a dangerous environment. However, the loading for nationalists might be particularly strong, as their sense of moral confidence might convince them of the justness of their cause, further reducing any moral qualms.

Finally and most concretely, the survey asks questions about the first Gulf War that enable us to identify neoconservatives and realists. Realists are likely to disagree with the notion that the war should have continued until *Regime change* in Iraq, whereas neoconservatives should agree. Realists should be opposed to the sentiment that the Gulf War ended the *Vietnam syndrome*, as they are not inclined to believe in the importance of will and resolve, whereas neoconservatives should embrace this notion.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the results of a factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation and constraining the structure to three factors with an oblique rotation that takes into account the correlation among the dimensions. The results

TABLE 2
Factor Analysis

Variable Name	First Factor	Second Factor	Third Factor
	Cosmopolitan–Realist Dimension	Egalitarian–Nationalist Dimension	Internationalist–Isolationist Dimension
Distinctiveness			
Democracy	0.55	–0.29	0.07
Human rights	0.73	0.03	0.06
International aid	0.60	0.11	0.15
Protecting weak	0.56	–0.28	0.13
World hunger	0.71	0.14	0.03
Rank			
Domino theory	–0.10	0.41	0.30
Maintaining forces	0.07	0.65	–0.07
Military superiority for peace	–0.01	0.65	0.04
Patriotism	–0.02	0.31	0.33
U.S. first	0.14	0.32	0.56
Separation			
Burdensharing	0.07	–0.25	0.57
Problems at home	0.13	–0.07	0.67
Scaleback	0.09	–0.43	0.41
U.S. involvement	0.02	0.06	0.57
Other variables			
Anarchy	–0.39	–0.13	0.03
Balance of power	–0.37	0.04	0.01
CIA	0.10	0.54	0.14
Cold War morality	0.07	0.41	–0.24
Communication	–0.51	–0.10	0.12
Dictators	0.18	0.34	–0.01
Efficacy of force	0.19	0.50	–0.22
Human nature	–0.11	0.17	0.09
Interdependence	–0.34	–0.05	–0.03
New world order	–0.32	0.26	–0.07
Preempt	0.03	0.44	0.29
Regime change	–0.14	0.25	0.33
Sovereignty	0.37	0.47	–0.03
Strong UN	–0.59	–0.28	–0.08
Traditional interests	0.09	0.13	0.16
Vietnam syndrome	0.0	0.32	0.04
World government	–0.41	–0.20	0.17

Table entries indicate factor loadings from a factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation performed by STATA 9. The author used a promax rotation. Analysis was constrained to three factors. N = 1,281.

indicate strong support for the hypotheses offered in the discussion above. The first dimension appears to be a cosmopolitan–realist dimension. The underlying factor correlates highly with lack of support for international aid, fighting *World hunger*, promoting *Human rights*, fostering *Democracy*, and *Protecting the weak*. This cluster of variables contains most of the highest-loading variables, ranging from 0.55 to 0.73, all of which concern the importance of sepa-

rating the national interest from the international interest. All of these variables are scaled so that higher scores indicate declining commitment to these causes.

Opposition to international concerns alone does not prove conclusively that this a realist dimension. However, other variable loadings imply that this is in fact the case—the negative loadings on support for a *Strong UN*, pessimism about the possible development of a *World government*, and lack of confidence in the ability of *Interdependence* and *Communication* to help alleviate conflict. As would be expected, realists and cosmopolitans appear to be equally internationalist, given the low factor loadings on the entire battery of separation questions. Realists and cosmopolitans are almost both by definition internationalist, so these variables would not divide them.

The structuralism of realism is evident in their perspective on power. Realists only weakly endorse the notion that the United States should be *Maintaining superiority* after the Cold War with substantial military forces or that policymakers must put the *U.S. first* above all others. In terms of means, they do not believe in *Military superiority for peace* any more than cosmopolitans do, and they are negatively inclined toward the *Domino* notion of how international politics operates. Nor do they endorse *Preemption*, which does not load highly on this factor at all. This all indicates that realism takes a cautious approach to power. As regards their notion of the components of power, the low loading for *Patriotism* indicates that this is not a significant concept in realism's understanding of power, as does the weak loading for the effect of the Gulf War on the *Vietnam syndrome*. Realists are also slightly more skeptical about *Human nature* than are cosmopolitans and more inclined to believe that the nature of international affairs has not changed considerably, with states continuing to pursue their *Traditional interests*, although the scores are fairly low.

Surprisingly, at first glance, cosmopolitans are actually much more supportive of the use of the *Balance of power* as a means of creating peace than are realists, although this could speak to a desire to level the playing field, that is, an idealistic rather than a realist motivation. The phrasing of the question as “political efforts” working towards “peace” implies diplomacy and reconciliation. Realists would be more inclined to endorse politico-military efforts working toward “security” and “stability.” Given that this group of respondents does not embrace preponderance, which would be the opposite of balancing power, this interpretation seems quite plausible. They are likely reacting against the words that prime the notion of cooperation. Cosmopolitans are also more inclined to believe that *Anarchy* is a key cause of war, but this again could reveal an idealistic desire to remedy this structural defect, one evident in their embrace of and optimism about multilateral institutions seen above. That is, respondents consider the question in prescriptive rather than empirical terms. After all, realists and cosmopolitans do not disagree about the fact of anarchy, which is what the question asks about, but rather about the implications, which the question does not probe. In sum, these puzzling results are likely artifacts of question wording.

The second factor appears to capture a nationalist–egalitarian dimension. The most striking cluster of variables is that concerning American political power and the importance of elevating U.S. interests above others. Beliefs that the United States should be *Maintaining superiority*, that it can use its *Military superiority for peace*, and that not standing up for its national interests leads to falling *Dominos* all load strongly in the same direction on this factor, ranging from 0.41 to 0.65. The positive signs indicate that the latent variable increases as individuals become more nationalist. Neoconservatives believe in acting more decisively, evident in the support for *Preemption*. This is all very different from the cluster of variables associated with realism. The ambitions of nationalists are also evident in the high degree of opposition to the *Scaleback* of U.S. security interests.

In addition to these variables, there are other more-specific markers of neoconservatism, the uniquely American manifestation of nationalism. Nationalists believe that *Patriotism* is an important source of national strength. The importance of national will is concretely expressed in support for the sentiment that the Gulf War exorcised the *Vietnam syndrome*, something which does not load significantly on the realist–cosmopolitan dimension. This belief in American values is also evident in the positive loadings for *Protecting the weak* and promoting *Democracy*.

Table 3 offers some more-easily interpretable results that highlight the contrasts and similarities between nationalists and realists that make for shifting alliances. I used the results of the first fourteen items of the factor analysis in Table 2 to generate scores for all respondents on the first two continua. I then separated out the top and bottom quartiles for each scale, creating four subgroups of respondents—realists, cosmopolitans, egalitarians, and nationalists. Table 3 shows how these subgroups answered a number of questions concerning morality in international politics, the possibility of agency, the role of international organizations, and the use of force.

Realists, those in the upper quarter of the first-dimension scale, are only marginally more likely than cosmopolitans to believe that the United States held the higher ground in *Cold War morality*. Around 58 percent of realists disagreed strongly with the statement that there was no moral difference between the superpowers during the Cold War, but over 50 percent of cosmopolitans did as well. This is in keeping with their relatively more amoral notion of international politics. In contrast, over 76 percent of nationalists disagreed strongly with the idea of moral equivalence. Nationalists believe relatively more in American moral superiority, although the level in all groups is quite high.

This moral hierarchy seems to translate into a belief that ends justify means. Over 72 percent of nationalists agree that supporting dictators is sometimes necessary in the service of American interests. Over 66 percent of realists believe the same, indicating that the two groups can align on using unsavory means in foreign policy, although the results of Table 2 indicate that nationalist support for undermining governments through the *CIA* is significantly stronger

TABLE 3

Conservative Realists and Neoconservative Nationalists: Shifting Alliances

<i>Position</i>	<i>% Disagree Strongly</i>	<i>% Disagree Somewhat</i>	<i>% Agree Somewhat</i>	<i>% Agree Strongly</i>
<i>No moral difference in Cold War</i>				
Cosmopolitans	50.4	26.8	15.2	7.7
Realists	57.8	17.3	17.5	7.4
Egalitarians	28.5	31.2	26.6	13.7
Nationalists	76.1	8.7	8.4	6.8
<i>Supporting dictators</i>				
Cosmopolitans	32.5	33.4	29.9	4.2
Realists	9.8	24.4	60.0	5.9
Egalitarians	31.1	34.9	31.1	2.8
Nationalists	7.7	20.3	62.0	10.0
<i>Force no longer effective</i>				
Cosmopolitans	18.9	33.3	36.2	11.6
Realists	37.4	36.5	20.7	5.4
Egalitarians	8.6	36.9	41.4	13.1
Nationalists	53.3	30.4	13.4	2.8
<i>Ceding sovereignty</i>				
Cosmopolitans	26.8	19.7	35.6	18.0
Realists	57.3	23.2	16.4	3.1
Egalitarians	20.3	21.7	36.8	21.2
Nationalists	65.5	18.9	12.6	3.0
<i>Creating new world order</i>				
Cosmopolitans	4.3	22.9	55.9	17.0
Realists	17.0	25.6	47.9	9.6
Egalitarians	13.4	33.1	45.3	8.2
Nationalists	9.6	15.6	56.0	18.9
<i>Regime change in Iraq</i>				
Cosmopolitans	10.7	14.5	31.5	43.4
Realists	11.2	17.1	25.0	46.7
Egalitarians	19.7	17.1	32.2	31.0
Nationalists	8.9	12.5	23.8	54.8

than among realists. It appears that neoconservatives' belief in their moral cause allows them to have fewer qualms about their actions, given the ultimate goal.

Realists and nationalists can also unite on the importance of force. Significant proportions of both groups disagree with the statement that force is no longer an effective means of realizing foreign policy aims. Almost 84 percent of nationalists disagree with that claim, 53 percent strongly so. Realists are also careful to dismiss force, but their percentages are lower, consistent with their more pragmatic, case-by-case approach to politics. About 74 percent disagree that force is no longer useful, and many fewer strongly disagree. Realists and nationalists also share an aversion to international organizations, even though the underlying sources of these attitudes are different. Over 80 percent of realists and 84 percent of nationalists disagree with the statements that states should cede more of their sovereignty to international institutions. Similarities are also evident in the factor loadings on creating a *Strong UN*. The factor

loadings in Table 2 show that realists are skeptical of the development of a *World government* in a way not true of the neoconservatives, suggesting that realist dismissal of them is based on their irrelevance, not antipathy.

Realists are noticeably less voluntarist than cosmopolitans, as would be expected. They are less inclined than cosmopolitans to believe in the ability of the United States to create a *New world order*. Almost 73 percent of cosmopolitans agree that the United States should channel its energies in this direction, as compared to 57 percent of realists. The former form a kind of Baptist–bootlegger coalition with neoconservatives on this question, as similar numbers agree on *New world order*. Questions of regime change also highlight the differences between realists and nationalists on structure vs. agency in international politics. The belief of nationalists in the ability to remake international politics is apparent most concretely in the opinion that the United States should have fought the first Gulf War so as to effect a *Regime change*. Over 78 percent believe the battle should have been carried to the end, 55 percent of them strongly. Realists are less convinced, and less supportive than cosmopolitans of what was then simply a counterfactual question.

Turning back to Table 2, the strong factor loadings on *Home problems*, *Burden*, *U.S. involvement*, and *Scaleback* make it clear that the third dimension is an international–isolationist continuum. They range from 0.41 to 0.67. As argued above, the desire for separation in the United States has roots in feelings of superiority, evident in the strong positive loadings of *Patriotism* and *U.S. first* (although not, interestingly, vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in terms of *Cold War morality*). Yet isolationists seek to disengage from international politics. Therefore they slightly oppose *Maintaining superiority* of the American military in comparison to internationalists. In fact, they are generally skeptical about the *Efficacy of force*, as evident in the relatively high negative coefficient. Interestingly, though, in specific cases, such as the first Gulf War, isolationists do rally around the flag when American power is mobilized to protect vital American interests, in keeping with their chauvinism. They are much more likely than internationalists to have supported *Regime change* during the first Gulf War. And when force is used, they appear to believe that it should be decisive, given the high positive loading of *Preemption*. “Get in and get out” is the isolationist approach.

Confident that the three dimensions are capturing realism, neoconservatism, and isolationism, we can use all the factor loadings in Table 1 to generate factor scores, essentially creating a score for each respondent along the distinctiveness, rank, and separation continua. We can then calculate the correlation of those scores with self-placement along a seven-point liberal–conservative scale, another item in the data set. Conservative self-placement is positively correlated with nationalism (0.58), realism (0.43), and isolationism (0.31). The latter is probably the weakest, because many of the internationalists include not only liberal idealists but also realists and nationalists, thereby weakening the association. Of the top quarter of respondents on the realist

scale, 61.4 percent identify themselves as at least somewhat conservative, whereas only 38.2 percent of the entire group of respondents in the survey do so. Of the top quarter of respondents on the nationalist scale, 69.2 percent are self-described conservatives. For the top quarter on the isolationist scale, the figure is 60.1 percent. The results indicate that there are in fact three rights, but only one makes a realist.

The results also have implications for the broader literature on foreign policy cleavages. Given that many of the indicators of the core values of the different types of egoisms overlap with those used to generate the two dimensions found in research by Holsti and Rosenau and Eugene Wittkopf, we can strongly conjecture that what they call the “cooperative internationalism” dimension is capturing the concept of realism, and the “militant internationalism” cleavage that of nationalism. This puts those findings, generated mostly inductively, on stronger conceptual foundations.

THE THREE RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

The results of this paper give us a sense of what we know and do not know when we enter the ballot booth to cast our vote. If we choose a conservative, we are likely opting for someone who will vigorously defend the national interest, take power seriously, and hold international institutions at arm’s length. All of these are symptomatic of a more egoistic conception of the national interest than that held by liberals.

However, much remains uncertain unless we more finely understand different varieties of egoism. Conservatives (or better stated, “the right”) are not all realists. As Osgood cautioned already in a very different era, realism cannot include an “inflated sense of national pride” or “a xenophobic fear of contamination.” Nationalists are likely to seek a higher level of power due to their desire for rank, their more fearful nature, and their tendency to inject morality into international politics. Their relationship with international institutions is prone to more hostility for the same reasons. While nationalists might project American power outward, isolationists could retract inward. The difference between the rights is not just a question of means. While nationalists place more faith in military force, they also set their aims higher. Neoconservatives in particular are marked by a high degree of voluntarism, a belief that the United States can remake the international environment. This optimism means much more ambitious goals. This means that it is of paramount importance that we scrutinize the beliefs of key figures before we make our choice. The shortcut of “conservative” or “right” only tells us so much.