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Just another charade

De-cloaking the neoconservative farce

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Posted: 4/4/05

Now that freedom and democracy are apparently "on the march," Republicans are gleefully preaching triumph for President Bush's neoconservative foreign policy philosophy. Pointing to the recent Iraqi elections as a catalyst, Bush and his ilk argue that its invasion of Iraq triggered a region-wide movement toward democratization in the Middle East. Yes, events in Iraq are improving, but Bush and his cabal deserve no credit for it; Iraq is on its way to democracy in spite of an inept U.S. administration of the country. Bush's actions in the world thus far suggest that further pursuit of his arrogant neoconservatism will only hinder, rather than improve American national security.

The Bush team now claims they are the ideological heirs to Wilsonian internationalism. Such an analogy is tantamount to blasphemy; in invoking the name of the greatest liberal idealist of the twentieth century, Bush has once again generated rhetoric disguising his conservative-realist ideas in a powerful liberal-idealist cloak.

To the neoconservative, seemingly liberal ideas such as promoting democracy abroad are just tools in the expansion of U.S. power and global influence. Unlike true liberal internationalists, neoconservatives largely do not support democratization to improve the lives of those affected for the sake of it. Rather, they do so under the assumption that action will serve narrow U.S. power objectives. There is no reason for Bush's gaze to be fixated on Iraq - a country that while headed by a brutal dictatorship was not an exporter of Islamist terror - when U.S. allies such as autocratic Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have provided the most fertile ground for al Qaeda recruits. Like a realist, Bush is willing to forge ties with sympathetic dictators, no matter the means of repression they heap upon their populations, to meet any number of short term goals such as access to oil or someone providing lip service to the war on terrorism. If Bush really wished to stake a claim to the Wilsonian tradition, he would have confronted the Saudi democracy problem at the same time as he addressed the Iraqi problem.

Noam Chomsky's argument of an imperial America was never particularly persuasive in the development of my worldview. Despite my aversion to such blatant postmodern sophistry, I have come to believe neoconservatism is hinged on an imperialism of ideas. Bush believes that forging a bloc of semi-loyal democracies, under U.S. policy tutelage, in volatile areas will be useful in preventing terrorists for using those places as bases of attack against the United States. Adopting such a cynical goal for democracy ignores what is so profoundly powerful about it. The goal of democracy should not be freeing people for the benefit of one nation, but rather done out of a genuine desire to improve the lives of the repressed.

Neoconservatives see American power as a positive influence in the world - and I agree. Where we diverge, however, is on how America wields that power. Neoconservatives simply do not understand that global leadership requires restraint, humility and global collaboration. No matter how right or seemingly virtuous, the world will always resent U.S. power when its leaders wield that power without self-control or concern for others. No one disputes that the U.S. can do whatever it wants, whenever it wants. A true global leader would recognize that while America is powerful when acting alone, its

power is multiplied exponentially when it takes time to enlist the world in its efforts.

History's great world powers all trace their decline from prominence to a point when they became infatuated with their own global dominance and flaunted their power excessively. Neoconservatives have brought America to a similar precipice. At this critical juncture in history it is imperative that policy makers return to the American tradition of supporting democracy to improve the lives of people, rather than merely for narrow power objectives. The Democratic Party must emerge from its post-Vietnam malaise and reclaim the liberal internationalism of Wilson, FDR and Kennedy - for all our sakes.

-The writer, a junior majoring in international affairs, is The Hatchet's opinions editor.

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