

# *The Neoconservative Persuasion and Foreign Policy: An Interview with Joshua Muravchik*

Joshua Muravchik is a resident scholar at The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the author of *Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism* (Encounter, 2002). He has written extensively about democracy, human rights, and American foreign policy in *Commentary*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Weekly Standard* and *The Wall Street Journal*. His books include *The Future of the United Nations: Understanding the Past to Chart a War Forward* (2005), *Covering the Intifada: How the Media Reported the Palestinian Uprising* (2005), *The Imperative of American Leadership* (1996), *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny* (1991), and *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy* (1986). He serves as an adjunct scholar at the Washington Institute on Near East Policy and is an adjunct professor at the Institute of World Politics. The interview took place on July 11 and 15, 2007.

## **Personal and Intellectual History**

**Alan Johnson:** You were raised in a devoutly socialist family in the 1950s, and spent your adolescence running the US young socialist movement in the 1960s and early 1970s. As an adult you have been a leading figure in the neoconservative movement. People will assume a single rupture was involved in that journey but I suspect that it was not experienced like that.

**Joshua Muravchik:** I was raised in a home in which ideology was everything. As I wrote, 'Socialism was the faith in which I was raised. It was my father's faith and his father's before him.' [1] My grandparents on my father's side had been devoted socialists and my parents' lives revolved around their dedication to socialism and the New York Socialist party. Political activism was something I was exposed to from a very early age. I participated in my first presidential campaign in 1952 when I was five years old and my mother was campaigning for Adlai Stevenson. I remember she had a big sack of leaflets and took me to the subway station to hand them out. The station had two exits so she divided the sack of leaflets in half and placed me at the top of the stairs at one exit, telling me to hand one to every person who came out. I first visited Washington in 1958 when my parents packed me and my younger brother in the car to participate in the youth march for integrated schools. Over

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the next few years I went to lots of civil rights demonstrations until, by the time of the famous 1963 March on Washington, at which Martin Luther King gave his 'I have a Dream' speech, I was quite a veteran. I was the organiser and captain of two bus loads of marchers from New York that day. I became active in my college years in the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), the Socialist Party's youth section, and after two years I became the Chairman.

The transition in my beliefs to neoconservatism was a gradual one. There were no abrupt shifts, and it felt like a fairly natural progression. It started right at the beginning when I was active as a young socialist in the 1960s. It was a time of great radicalism on American campuses and everyone was on the left – most further to the left than I was. (There was no such thing as conservatism.) Even though I was very devoted to my idea of socialism and regarded myself as a Marxist, I spent the greater part of my political energies arguing with people further to my left. And I was really quite repelled by the student left of the sixties.

**Johnson:** What repelled you?

**Muravchik:** Two things. One was the attitude towards various Communist regimes and movements which were anathema to me. The student left did not usually identify with the Soviet regime but it did support all kind of third-world Communist regimes – Mao's, Fidel's, Ho's, and I looked on all of these as monstrous totalitarian regimes. Second, the New Left was contemptuous of civil liberties, and regularly silenced speakers whose political affiliations were disliked. Generally, I found nothing to like and much to dislike. That was the first push rightward.

The second push was this. I'd had a 'third camp' position – there were these two bad systems, capitalism and communism, and I stood for democratic socialism, which in my eyes was much more humane. But I came to realise that this was juvenile in the sense that, while I still thought both systems were bad, I realised they were not *equally* bad. Communism was infinitely and appallingly worse – much crueller and taking a much higher toll of human life. That realisation did not weaken my belief in socialism but it made me look at the world around me very differently.

There was something of an epiphany, I guess. I remember sitting up all night reading *Tell the West*, the memoirs of Jerzy Glikzman. [2] He was a Pole, active in the Jewish Labour Bund, who had ended up in a Soviet camp. He survived because as the Red Army pushed the Germans back towards the Polish border they entered

the camps, liberated a bunch of Polish prisoners and took them to the front and gave them guns to help fight the Germans in Poland. In the camp Glikzman had befriended the wife of one of the Old Bolsheviks who had been executed by Stalin. He said to her, 'I'm going to get out here. They have given me a notice to go to the Front. What can I do for you?' She laughed and said 'There is nothing you can do for me.' Glikzman said 'Well, maybe you can try to escape. I was raised on tales from my older brother about how he escaped from Siberia.' She asks, 'When was that?' Glikzman answers 'Under the Tsar.' So she laughs again and says, 'Ah, those sentimental Tsarist times. There is only one thing you can do for me. If you survive, tell the West.' And that phrase – 'those sentimental Tsarist times' – really hit me like a hammer. After all, Tzarism was regarded as the very epitome of reaction and repression. Realising that Communism was so much more terrible than Tzarism was an important moment.

In the 1970s, because of Vietnam, the intellectual class completely abandoned anti-Communism (all the way up to the President of the United States when it was Jimmy Carter). It was felt that it was our obsessive, excessive anti-Communism that had gotten us into a terrible mess in Vietnam. In Carter's first major foreign policy speech he spoke of getting over 'our inordinate fear of Communism.' This was all appalling to me. I thought the fight against Communism was the essential task in defence of civilisation. That classified me as a 'neocon' – even though at that point I still thought of myself as a socialist.

I had spent my twenties as an activist and so had not had much education. I had a bachelor's degree, but I had spent most of my time on demos and had not studied much. In the end I got disgusted with myself so in my thirties I went to graduate school. In my first semester at Georgetown I took a course in Marxism taught by a good Professor who was a Marxist and who was very demanding – we read an important work every single week. But having this intense exposure to Marxist theory in a systematic way, presented by a very rigorous Marxist thinker, only led me to the realisation that it was all a crock of shit!

There was one other thing that encouraged me to move rightwards. An important political anchor for me and for many others had been the labour movement. My great heroes were the labour leaders George Meany and Lane Kirkland, and I thought of myself as standing in this wonderful tradition of American labour internationalism, anti-Communism and anti-Fascism. But that began to be eroded in the 1980s. The labour movement's internationalism and anti-Communism

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faded. Today, it has gone entirely, and the American labour movement is now ideologically akin to the British – kind of leftist. So what had anchored me to the left, and been central to my identity on the left, just vanished.

Through the 1970s virtually all ‘neocons’ were still to the left of centre. There was a change in the 1980s because of Reagan. I and all of my ‘neocon’ comrades liked Reagan so much we became more open to his conservative views on other issues.

### Part 1: The Fall of Socialism

**Johnson:** Let’s talk about your book on socialism, which was made into a TV series by PBS. You are not ashamed of your socialist past. You point out that the Socialist Party ‘had no blood on our hands’ and ‘fought communists tooth and nail, often when few others would.’ But you admit to a feeling of embarrassment at having been ‘enthralled by a seductive but false idea that has done a lot of harm to the world.’ [3] The totalitarian impulse, you argue, was ‘there from the beginning’ in ‘socialism’s role as a redemptive creed, a substitute religion.’ Marx’s idea of a leap from a realm of necessity to a realm of freedom, for example, was ‘utterly messianic,’ and ‘set the stage for the twentieth century’s great experiments in mass murder by Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and Hitler.’ This is your argument:

Monotheism had linked cosmology – the understanding of which is a universal human craving – to an ethical system. The establishment of that linkage constituted the single most important step in the progress of mankind. Socialism severed that link. Socialism denied that the path to the kingdom of heaven lay in individual righteousness. Rather it was to be found in political outcomes. The individual could reach it not by striving for moral goodness but by planting himself on the right side of history or of the barricades. [4]

**Muravchik:** I kept wrestling with the central mystery of socialism. How could something that desired to make things better have instead made things so much worse? Was it that socialists were bad people? From my own experience I am still convinced that most people who embraced the idea of socialism did so from a humane feeling – they wanted the world to be kinder and gentler. Yet socialism’s most important results were quite the opposite. Of course, social democrats did things to humanise society when they were in government, but the overall record of socialism, when you add up both sides of the ledger, is quite appalling.

I concluded that the central problem is asking politics to do something it can't do – to provide the 'leap' that Marx wrote about. This ambition departs entirely from the realities of human existence, which is imperfect and tragic. Life may not be nasty and brutish but it is short and it will always have its share of sadness and disappointment. Religion offers answers to both the shortness of life and the disappointments it contains – whether or not you accept the truth of any particular religion or religion per se. Politics can't do that. If you understand that, you feel a certain constraint on what you seek to achieve in politics, which at the most can offer amelioration. But the socialist thinks that through politics you can transform human life itself. Michael Harrington – a leader of mine back then whom I admired – once wrote that socialism would create 'an utterly new society in which some of the fundamental limitations of human existence have been transcended.' [5] But no political system can do that. Worse, once you say it can you have a logically sound utilitarian argument for killing some people in order to get there. If those people are standing in the way of the new, higher, happier level of human existence, well... Someone who wrote about this and whose insights influenced me was Milovan Djilas – not in *The New Class* but in his later book *The Unperfect Society*. [6]

History tells us of people with supernatural beliefs doing very terrible things – human sacrifice, and so on. But, beginning with the Old Testament, the cardinal feature of the monotheistic religions is that there is a power greater than us, and the way to make out best in the face of this power is to behave according to a moral law. As I think about it now, I think that's the seminal transformation in human history. Socialism – certainly Marxist socialism – sought to cancel that. It offered this whole mystical narrative (it was never 'scientific'!) absent any moral instruction or law. In fact it ridiculed the very idea of a moral law, insisting that all the outcomes that would affect human happiness had to do with class struggle and who came out ahead in the political arena.

**Johnson:** And the flip-side to that excessive hope about the transcendent 'socialist' future is an excessively, even morbidly, critical attitude to the 'bourgeois' present? In a speech you argued that socialism created a European culture in which 'bourgeois society had been systematically discredited ... doomed to be replaced by a new and glorious epoch.' This world view, you suggested, served as 'the incubator that hatched Italian and German Fascism just as it hatched Russian and Chinese Communism.' [7] Is this anti-bourgeois sensibility also to blame for socialism's failures and crimes?

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**Muravchik:** I think that's right, but the other factor at stake in radical politics of all kinds is narcissism. Perhaps the most important motivation among radicals is thinking of themselves as better than other people. It is often wrapped up in love of humanity or love of nature, but I think it's mostly love of self. This denigration of and hatred for the ordinary imperfect society around us is really just a way of saying 'I am better than other people, the world is stupid and clumsy and fat and homely and I am so much better than all of this. I dream of a world that is worthy of me.' We get the term 'bourgeois' from Marx, so there is a pretence that it is to do with class or economics. But really it's just a stand-in for ordinary people, ordinary life, ordinary problems and ordinary imperfections.

**Johnson:** Let me put a case for remaining a social democrat. Towards the end of *Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism*, you write 'The parties of the mainstream Left may pour the cream that lightens the coffee of capitalism, but they are not offering any other beverage.' [8] I think that's true, but it leaves a vital role for social democracy. Liberal capitalist democracies are the best societies the planet has ever seen in terms of their combination of freedom and prosperity, but they tend to erode their own foundations – i.e. they breed ecological crises, gross and destabilising social inequalities, and a cultural breakdown involving narcissistic individualism, the collapse of civility, the retreat to infantilism and fantasy, and a cult of violence. Because of that, the public philosophy that liberal capitalist democracies need to survive is still something like social democracy. Your late father, I think, was right when he said 'the one thing that our poor battered world needs right now is a vigorous and creative social democratic movement.' [9]

**Muravchik:** I would say two things. One is that your last phrase about 'the survival' of the system requiring social democracy is a needless leap to apocalypticism. The survival of the system is not in any uncertainty. Look, I guess I prefer empiricism. I do not hold with, and have no use at all for, libertarians who believe that the income or inheritances that people have are something that they own by sacrosanct right and that any time the government taxes them and takes their wealth and income for social purposes it is a violation of their rights and morally dubious. I don't believe that. But neither do I believe that economic inequality, in and of itself, is something that needs to be corrected. And neither do I believe that it is good or useful to create government programmes or social services or wealth transfers just because there are some people in wealth and some people in poverty. I guess my attitude is that I am happy to see those government activities that will be genuinely helpful to people supported by taxation, but let's be empirical about it – some are and some are not.

**Part 2: Neoconservatism – the rebellion against the rebellion**

**Johnson:** Irving Kristol famously quipped that neoconservatives were ‘liberals who had been mugged by reality.’ [10] What did he mean?

**Muravchik:** I’ve never liked that quip because it ruined a good joke, told perhaps by Johnny Carson, at a time of a rise in violent crime. Question: What is the definition of a conservative? Answer: A liberal who has been mugged. That’s quite funny. ‘Mugged by reality’ is not funny. It’s sanctimonious, as if we have experienced reality and other people have not.

Irving is taken as the ‘godfather’ of neoconservatism, and there is one really important truth to that. In his generation of left intellectuals who moved rightwards it was he who went the furthest the fastest. So he was a real leader – the first to vote Republican, to defend capitalism, and so on. [11] But his focus was almost always on domestic issues. When Irving talked of being ‘mugged by reality’ he was referring to the domestic root of neoconservatism, not the other, foreign policy root.

The domestic root of neoconservatism began with a wide-ranging critique of the Great Society programs and the War on Poverty of President Johnson from the mid-1960s. These were programs that had been designed by liberal intellectuals, but which seemed to work out very badly. On the one hand, they did not achieve the goals they aimed at. On the other hand, they produced side-effects that were harmful, and which people were very surprised by. I don’t think it’s true that the War on Poverty was a complete failure – the poverty rate was reduced a little – but on the whole it was disappointing. So Irving, in his journal *The Public Interest*, began publishing a lot of critiques of the War on Poverty showing that it had failed, analysing why it had failed, and so on. That’s what the phrase ‘mugged by reality’ alluded to – the discovery that government welfare programmes don’t work in practice as they do on paper. Now all that is important but it’s not very important in considering the neoconservatism that people are talking about – and loathing and fearing – today.

The second root of neoconservatism concerns foreign policy and can be called a rebellion against the rebellion. The neocons were those people who rebelled against the Sixties rebellion against anti-Communism. Here Norman Podhoretz was probably the single most important figure, although Jeane Kirkpatrick was also very important. [12] The neocons were a group of the liberal or radical intellectuals who believed that despite what had happened in Vietnam, anti-Communism was

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still a noble cause and the most important cause of our era. That's where the idea of neoconservatism started.

**Johnson:** At this point it's a battle inside the Democratic Party?

**Muravchik:** Yes, in the political world it was *entirely* within the Democratic Party. The most important organisation in the formative development of neoconservatism was the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), a Democratic Party group that argued that Democrats would lose elections if we moved too far to the left. Senator Henry Jackson was the main stalwart of CDM, although Senator Hubert Humphrey was also involved and later Senator Daniel Moynihan. For several years there was a great battle for control of the Democratic Party. And CDM lost, very badly!

**Johnson:** The McGovernites become dominant?

**Muravchik:** Yes. McGovern's nomination in 1972 was a big triumph for the anti-anti-Communists. But he lost so badly to Nixon that we were hopeful that we could fight back. And when Jimmy Carter was elected in 1976 he was not a McGovernite. He was a centrist and we were not terribly unhappy. But when this Georgia Governor who had been a party centrist embraced the McGovern wing lock, stock and barrel and gave us the complete cold-shoulder, we realised that the victory of the McGovernites in the Democratic Party had been much more profound than we had understood.

Then, in the 1980s, there was a very happy marriage with Ronald Reagan and that tended to pull the neocons rightward. We liked Reagan so much we were susceptible to being influenced by him.

**Johnson:** Reagan was a demonised figure in Europe. What was so attractive about Reagan to the neocons?

**Muravchik:** That he was a deeply committed and serious anti-Communist. More attractive than anything else was his rhetoric. When he called communism an 'evil empire' it was the truth and something that desperately needed to be said. The word 'evil' is very important, by the way. There was a brilliant essay, published in 1982 in *Encounter* by two Irish scholars that argued the overarching meaning of George Orwell's work was to rehabilitate the category of evil as a concept in political



discourse. [13] And when Reagan used that term – the validity of which no one could dispute – he returned political discourse to the essential realities: the Soviet Union was (a) evil (b) an empire. And when he said that communism is a ‘sad, bizarre chapter in human history, whose last pages are even now being written,’ this was wonderful to us neocons. He was mounting a challenge – the first at this level – to the historicist claims of communism. And then, of course, Reagan brought us to the most perfect possible triumph in the cold war – victory without shedding blood. I might add without shedding the blood of those Europeans who hated him! Had the Cold War developed into a hot war it would have been Europeans who would have done the largest part of the dying. (By the way, in the US there is now a big effort by liberals to claim Reagan’s mantle. Turns out he was a hero, but also a wise liberal who can be contrasted to the benighted conservatism of George W. Bush.)

#### Neoconservatism after the Cold War

**Johnson:** In 1996, with the Cold War won, Norman Podhoretz – whom you have called ‘the conductor of the neocon orchestra’ – asked if neoconservatism had lost its distinctive identity and merged into plain old conservatism. Well, it didn’t turn out that way – foreign policy reunited the neocons as a distinctive tendency in the 1990s, the war in Bosnia serving to ‘crystallise a post Cold War approach to foreign policy that might fairly be described as neoconservative.’ You found that ‘almost everyone who had been a neocon supported US military intervention in Bosnia. We were reunited, not by a fixed platform but by a mindset distinct from that of traditional conservatives or liberals.’ [14] Why did the Bosnian conflict have that effect? What were the defining characteristics of this neoconservative ‘mindset?’

**Muravchik:** Well, imagine a triangle. At its three points are traditional conservatives, traditional liberals, and neoconservatives. The dividing line between neoconservatism and traditional conservatism is Wilsonianism. ‘Wilsonian’ is a term usually taken to mean ‘utopian’ or ‘fuzzy-headed’ and I would certainly grant that some of President Wilson’s ideas were misconceived – in particular the League of Nations. But I think a deeper insight, and the real essence of Wilsonianism, was that America could not separate its destiny from the rest of the world. We had a long history of isolationism, or at least of restricting our focus to our own hemisphere. But around the turn of the century the United States emerged as the greatest industrial power and therefore had to reconsider its place in the scheme of things. Wilson had campaigned for President on the promise of keeping America

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out of the war, and had done so for three years. But then he decided he simply had to lead the US into the war in Europe. And then he generalised from that experience, concluding that given the new position we occupied as the potentially mightiest country, we had to play a new role on the world stage. As conflict and turmoil in other countries *was going to draw us in eventually*, it was better to get ahead of the curve by using our power to shape the world and make it a safer place for everyone, including ourselves.

The traditional or 'realist' way of looking at American interests had been to establish, for any given part of the world, what natural resources lay there or passed through there, and what geography was relevant to the deployment of military force. From that you made a kind of mechanical assessment about the size of our 'stake' in that area. In contrast, the essence of Wilsonianism is that we try to shape the world to make it a more harmonious place. This is morally good but it is also essential to our self-interest. And it means looking at American interests in a much more contingent way

In terms of Bosnia the traditional conservative view was set out by two successive secretaries of state. First by the Republican James Baker who famously said 'we have no dog in that fight,' and, later, by the Democrat Warren Christopher, who, when he announced the abandonment of our lift-and-strike proposal, said, 'we are doing the most we can consistent with our interests' – meaning we did not have many interests there.

I can't speak for all neocons, but it was my view that when President Bush took the US to war against Iraq in Kuwait in 1991, and proclaimed a 'new world order,' he meant that in this new unipolar world the US would use its preponderant power to try to enforce article 2.4 of the UN Charter – the law against aggression. The overwhelming issue in the case of Iraq's absorption by force of Kuwait was not oil but the principle that raw aggression of one state against its neighbour should not be allowed – and that as the most powerful state we would take the lead in disallowing it. To my mind the same principle arose in Bosnia. To some extent it was a civil war but it was also a war of Serbian aggression against Bosnia. I had applauded the principle that Bush articulated in regard to Iraq's aggression against Kuwait and I thought it urgent and important that the same principle be applied in the Bosnian case. I think most neocons agreed or came to agree with that assessment. So, neoconservatives are Wilsonian, and believe US fate is bound up with the fate of the rest of the world. That distinguishes us from traditional conservatives.

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What distinguishes neoconservatives from traditional liberals is that we're more ready to resort to the use of hard power and we are less trusting in the UN. So on the question of ends you might say we are more at one with the traditional liberals, but on the means we are more at one with the traditional conservatives.

### Neoconservatism after 9/11

**Johnson:** Neoconservatism played a decisive role in shaping Bush's foreign policy after 9/11. Most Europeans seem to think this was the result of a 'plot' by a 'cabal.' So what did happen?

**Muravchik:** Well, keep the triangle that I just described in mind. When 9/11 happened it was not something entirely new. There had been a previous attack on the WTC by Islamists and lots of terrorist attacks had targeted Americans. But 9/11 established a consensus among Americans that something serious had to be done to put an end to this. Once they were killing thousands of us in a single day we had to rally ourselves to confront the threat. The question was *how*?

On the one hand it seemed clear to many, including President Bush, that it would require the use of hard power – force – by the United States. But the outlook of traditional conservatives, known in the foreign policy jargon as 'realism,' is rooted in a model of the state system that comes from the 19th century. Whatever true value it had then, realism had almost nothing to say about tackling non-state actors, or ideological or religious movements. Traditional realism had helped produce 9/11!

On the other hand traditional liberals had no answers, or poor answers, such as the '911' response to 9/11. And, in any case, George Bush was not a liberal.

So Bush came up with a two pronged idea. One prong was the necessity of hard power – 'we are going to fight these bastards as hard as we can.' We will call it a war, and treat it as a war, and are prepared to use whatever means are necessary to fight and to win. The other prong was the understanding that we could not defeat this enemy by military means alone. There were so many young Muslims willing to sacrifice their lives as long as they could kill a lot of us in the process, and so many millions who sympathised and regarded them as heroes, that we had to face the broader question of our relations with the Muslim world and the pathologies of the region.

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The phrase ‘root causes’ was used by *The New York Times* in the first week after 9/11, and by Kofi Annan and some European leaders. But they all took the root cause to be poverty. This was silly (as recent events at Glasgow Airport where the terrorists were middle class professionals have shown yet again). You could see the killers were not poor. And even if poverty had something to do with 9/11, we did not need terrorism to make us aware that governments should seek to make their countries better off. This was not a goal that had eluded us up to that point! The neoconservatives offered an alternative analysis of the root causes, and Bush embraced it. We said that the question was not what the terrorists’ grievances were (after all, there will always be grievances). It was why, when they have grievances, do they think a good solution is the mass murder of innocent civilians? What was unique was not the existence of grievances or poverty but the belief that mass murder was a legitimate way to seek redress. In our analysis *the problem lay in the political culture of the Middle East*. The question was how to change it. One of the defining features of that political culture was tyrannical government. We argued that if we can spread democracy as a form of government in that region, then the process of socialisation that occurs in democracies will lead people away from thinking murder and suicide are the way to carry on an argument, and foster more political and peaceful ways.

Bush adopted this argument after 9/11, and from that came the idea that ‘the neocons have taken over.’ But there were very few neocons *inside* the Administration – maybe a handful. I’ve never thought of Wolfowitz as a neocon by the way – he was a government person all his career, not primarily an intellectual. I knew him perfectly well, and my pigeon-hole for him was that he was the person in the foreign policy establishment who was most open to neocon ideas, but was not himself a neocon. There were a few people at lower levels who were neocons, but they didn’t make policy. Policy was made by Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Condi, maybe Colin Powell, and George Tenet. None of these people were neocons by any stretch. It was not that the neocons took over but that Bush adopted policies that were neocon policies. And I don’t think anyone on the outside really knows how it is that Bush hit upon those policies. I suspect that what conditioned his decision was that there was no other approach on offer. And, by the way, there still isn’t. That’s why those expecting the imminent demise of ‘neoconservatism’ are in for a disappointment. [15] Whether we should have gone into Iraq or not, the fact is we have a very violent enemy who has to be fought first with hard power, and second by trying to influence how the Middle East and the Muslim world looks upon the rest of us, and that means, in part, promoting the spread of democracy in the region.

**Neoconservatism and Democracy-Promotion**

**Johnson:** Let's talk about democracy promotion. You have been writing about this issue for a long time – *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny* was published back in 1991. [16] I want to ask about three dilemmas of democracy-promotion: means, consequences and agencies.

Many argue that implanting democracy by the means of US military force has inflamed the region, acted as a recruiting sergeant for the terrorists, tarnished for a generation the US image overseas (diminishing its ability to project soft power), while weakening the deterrent effect of US military force (diminishing its ability to project hard power). How do you respond to that view?

**Muravchik:** Well, there is a lot of truth there. I don't believe that military power is the way to spread democracy in the region. I certainly don't believe there is a right to use military power just to change the political system of another country. In the case of Iraq, I think there was a legal and moral basis for using military power because of the aggression of 1990 and Iraq's defiance of the disarmament terms set at the end of hostilities in 1991.

There are cases – Germany and Japan being the most obvious – in which we did quite successfully democratise countries through military occupation. However, in those cases the *rationale* for going to war was not to democratise, so I'd like to separate two things. First, the project of spreading democracy should be carried out by peaceful means, not by war. Second, if there is a cause for war based on security reasons or a threat, and we are going to get into another country, then the question arises of how we are to leave that country. In that instance, and Iraq is a case in point, seeking to democratise the country – as far as we are able to do so – is a sensible idea.

Now, I'm not sure that it was a good idea to attack Iraq. I supported it and I oppose drawing down US forces at this point. I enthusiastically supported the idea of a war against terror with military and political components. But it was not obvious to me that Iraq should have been our second target after Afghanistan – it's possible we would have been wiser to focus our attention on Iran, rather than Iraq. But I was not making that decision and since I supported the war as a whole I supported the action. It's hard to say whether if we'd done it differently we could have had a more successful outcome. If we had sent many more troops could we have averted what has happened? I just don't know.

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I am prepared to concede error on Iraq – certainly in the execution and perhaps even in the decision to do it. And I think there is a partial truth in the litany of bad consequences that you presented – certainly there are more people angry at us in the Middle East than there were before, and there is a lot of turmoil in the region. It remains to be seen how this will turn out. In terms of the goal of promoting democratisation there is cause for hope – democracy may not be marching forward but it is on the agenda for the states of the region much more than it was before.

As for the argument that says ‘there are more terrorists now, so we were wrong to fight back,’ well, that is really poor. If people attack you, and you fight back, they are likely to get enraged and fight harder. That is normal and I’m not sure that it has any meaning in and of itself. It’s how the war ends that matters. When the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbour, we fought back, and because we did so they attacked us more. As we started defeating them they got more desperate and used suicide bombers. But if we see it through and win the broader war against terror then we will be much safer, and so will the people of the Middle East.

**Johnson:** Should democracy be promoted when the likely consequence is the election of Islamists? When you debated Martin Kramer of the Washington Institute you argued for ‘democratic universalism’ while he took the view that free voting among Arabs only stokes up radicalism. Kramer coined the term ‘consensual authoritarianism’ to sum up what he thought was the most we could aim for in the Middle East, for now at least. [17] How should democrats deal with what we might term ‘the Hamas problem?’

**Muravchik:** The essential question is whether there are material and psychological forces in place that would prevent Islamists who win an election from making that the last election. It’s the same issue that we faced with the Communists. The phrase now widely repeated – ‘one man, one vote, one time’ – was coined in South Africa in fear at the consequences of an ANC election victory. Well, I am not afraid of Islamists winning an election if there will be another election. We can hypothesise a situation – say in Egypt – where after a long struggle for genuine free elections the Islamists come to govern. But it would be extremely difficult for them to prevent the next election. I am inclined to take more risks in this regards than some people, including Martin Kramer.

**Johnson:** When you debated Robert Leiken and Steven Brooke about how democrats should relate to the Muslim Brotherhood they argued for engagement

on the grounds that 'jihadists loathe the Muslim Brotherhood ... for rejecting global jihad and embracing democracy.' [18] When I interviewed the Egyptian reformer Saad Eddin Ibrahim he said something similar. You are unconvinced, I think. Why?

**Muravchik:** It's important to distinguish between two positions. One is the position that Saad Eddin used to espouse, and which I believe he has gone back to, and which Amr Hamzawy espouses, which is that we should have dialogue with the Brotherhood. The other is the position which Leiken espouses, which is 'I just had a dialogue with the Brotherhood and they told me they are all moderates so I am willing to vouch for that.' The first seems to me a reasonable and even necessary step. This is a movement that has a lot of followers in the Arab world, and it has grown up under conditions of the absence of political freedom and open discourse – we can only gain by talking to them. The Leiken position seems to me to be foolish. We should not take what they say at face value.

The 'initiative' launched in 2004 by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood could be constituted as a shift on their part in a more liberal direction. They certainly want it to be thought that they now believe in democracy, human rights for non-Muslims, and rights for women. But it is still not all that clear which rights they believe in. For starters, I greet with extreme scepticism any movement that proclaims democracy but is not itself democratic. The Communist parties practised 'democratic centralism' and called themselves democratic but they weren't. The Iranian Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK) proclaims itself 'democratic' but everyone obeys Mr and Mrs Rajavi. Well, the Muslim Brotherhood also has a completely top-down structure, just like the Communists. Rank and file members don't get to elect anyone above them – an inner committee of 15 elects a Supreme Guide (and that name tells you a lot in itself!) Mahdi Akef, the current Supreme Guide, is neither a democrat of any kind nor a man of peace. It is true that the Muslim Brotherhood has renounced violence within Egypt, but whether this was a genuine change of heart we have no way of knowing. Their renunciation of violence occurred in the 1970s in a deal with Anwar Sadat to get their leaders out of jail. And they vehemently endorse violence, including suicide bombings, in other places, including by Islamist groups in Iraq and Israel.

In one interview, according to the Egyptian newspapers, Mahdi Akef was asked, if there were democracy in Egypt, would he be prepared to be ruled by a Christian. He said he'd rather be ruled by a Muslim from any other country than by a Christian Egyptian. When the interviewer pressed the question, Akef replied 'Fuck Egypt!'

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So, I talk to leaders of the Brotherhood and I plan to continue to do so. But to accept their bone fides as democrats on their own say-so is to toss away one's critical judgement.

**Johnson:** Do we need a grassroots democracy-promotion organisation able to act independently of the parties? The late Penn Kemble was the driving force behind the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, also serving as deputy director of the United States Information Agency under Bill Clinton. When he died in 2005, your tribute noted that he rejected the label 'neoconservative' because 'he doubted that Republicans and conservatives could constitute a reliable base for the kind of internationalist and idealist foreign policy he espoused.' [19] And in 2006 – when the imprisonment of Egyptian democracy activist Ayman Nour was met with only a 'half-hearted' response from Washington – you complained in *The Washington Post* that 'the Bush administration has begun to pull its punches on Middle East democracy.' You went on: 'It's not only in Egypt that the administration is giving this impression. In Iraq, it has acted to shut down dozens of projects designed to nurture the seedlings of democracy: civil society, political parties, women's and human rights organisations, and the like.' [20] We have no equivalent, for instance, to the Congress of Cultural Freedom that battled Stalinism. We certainly have nothing to compare to *MoveOn.org* and the netroots which can dictate political terms to the Democratic Party.

**Muravchik:** That's a really good question and I have not thought about it a lot. The terrible problem we have on the American side is that the anchor for a left-of-centre position that was militantly pro-democratic and militantly in favour of standing up in defence of the democracies was the AFL-CIO. It was the AFL-CIO to a great extent that made 'Scoop' Jackson possible. It provided a powerful base within the Democratic Party that was unyielding in its defence of democratic values on the international scene while being to the left of centre. But that very noble tradition in the US labour movement, which had its analogues in the British labour movement, is now completely gone. There is not a shred of it left. The labour movement in the US is in the hands of old Communists, ex-Communists, and New Leftists. So the hopes of building the kind of force you want inside the Democratic Party are all but nil. The last person in that tradition was Senator Joe Lieberman, but the netroots in effect kicked him out of the party!

On the other hand because of President Bush the Republican Party has been embracing policies that are big departures from its own tradition and history (much



to the chagrin of the elder President Bush and his entourage). To my surprise, Republicans have backed the policy rather strongly, but I don't know how deep that goes. Is it new thinking or are they just embracing their President? When he has left office the Republicans may revert to more 'realist' policies that are more akin to the elder Bush.

It would be extremely useful to have a non-party international organisation for people who believe in the dual cause of defending the existing democracies and encouraging democracies elsewhere. And there is one natural leader for this – Tony Blair. That is something important and wonderful he could do, and it would be much more likely to have an impact than the job he has just taken on. He is better than anyone here at articulating the case.

### Part 3: Neoconservatism's Critics

**Johnson:** It's nigh on impossible to have a grown up conversation about neoconservatism in Europe. Let's talk about three typical kinds of 'criticism' of the neoconservatives: that you are warmongers, lying Straussians, and a Jewish cabal.

Many people – and not only the crazies – think neocons are warmongers. It's not difficult to see why. You wrote in 2006 that neoconservatives hold 'a broader definition of US security, believing aggression and mayhem anywhere could eventually reach America's doorstep.' [21] Furthermore, you say a key tenet of neoconservatism is that 'world peace is indivisible.' [22] Add in the fact that neocons are more open to the idea of force projection than other foreign policy schools, and even reasonable people can put all this together – the expansive definition of security, the universalist outlook, and the preference for force projection and pre-emption – and, well, they get frightened! They think you are offering a recipe for wars everywhere. And, after Iraq, they think that means quagmires everywhere. What would you say to people who hold these kinds of fears?

**Muravchik:** I think it's fair for people to be critical of neocons about Iraq. Iraq is a mess and we bear a share of responsibility for that. At the very least there was some glibness about Iraq – mostly on the part of Donald Rumsfeld, but some neocons were party to that. We should be chastened by Iraq.

But if we step back and take a longer view of American power, we see that the willingness of the US to project power has helped prevent wars, while the reluctance

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of the US to project power has often caused wars. Most clearly, the Second World War was in large part a result of the reluctance of the US to project power. So was the Korean War – we encouraged the North to invade when we allowed it to be thought that we would not fight for South Korea. We encouraged the first Iraq war when the US Ambassador gave the false impression to Saddam Hussein that we would not react to a takeover of Kuwait. And, in an indirect way, our failure to project US power caused the second Iraq war – if we had toppled Saddam in 1991 we would not have had this second war. Of course, the biggest example of the projection of American power keeping the peace was the policy of containment during the cold war – the overall strategy of putting military bases around the world, fighting some wars along the way, and duelling on the political and military and intelligence planes with the Soviets. People then were also very afraid of American military power and feared that American belligerency was risking war. In fact American power kept the peace, prevented the cold war turning hot, and eventually won the cold war.

**Johnson:** Another criticism runs thus: neoconservatives are disciples of a dastardly political philosopher called Leo Strauss whose main teaching was that political elites must always lie to the masses to achieve their ends. The Iraq war is then presented as a grand Straussian lie foisted on us by the neocons. A very silly BBC documentary, ‘The Power of Nightmares,’ ran with this notion. This is the common sense of most European broadsheets about the neocons – a political elite deliberately spinning lies to the masses to achieve their nefarious ends.

**Muravchik:** (laughs) It’s so absurd it leaves me speechless! The main point of Strauss’s thinking is that the world went to hell with Machiavelli. [23] The ancient political philosophers asked the question ‘what is the good?’ The modern political philosophers, starting with Machiavelli, asked the question ‘what is?’ To Strauss this was a horrible mistake. He thought the proper role of political philosophy is to enquire into the good, not to do – as he used to say, sneeringly – ‘value-free social science.’

You know, Strauss was not really interested in politics. When I started hearing all this stuff about Strauss I went to an old friend, Walter Berns, who is 88 years old, works at the AEI and really is a Straussian. ‘Walter,’ I asked, ‘was Strauss interested in politics?’ He said, ‘Well, we were both at the University of Chicago together during the Presidential election year [it was 1952 or 1956]. Strauss came to me and said, “Now we are residents of the state of Illinois I think it behoves us to vote

for Illinois's native son, Adlai Stevenson. But I have never voted, so can you tell me how to register?" So, this was Strauss's involvement in contemporary American politics – voting for the liberal Adlai Stevenson! [if he could figure out how to go about voting.]

This business of Strauss being for the elite telling lies is just a garbled reading of Strauss, who had a theory that when we read political philosophy we must realise we are reading people who lived under dictatorial or intolerant governments and who, therefore, were not free to write exactly what they believed. He thought we must try to tease out meanings that aren't there on the surface. But he was not advocating that we write like that! That's an absurd misunderstanding of Strauss.

But look, the real point is simpler. Neoconservatism *has nothing to do with Strauss*. The very term 'neoconservatism' was coined by Michael Harrington as part of an intramural fight *on the left*. Every one of us was either a liberal or a socialist of some kind who had come to be at odds with the majority of liberals over the issue of anti-Communism. Among those people there was not a single one who was Straussian to my knowledge. I do meet people who would call themselves Straussians or who studied with Strauss but not one of them was among the founding figures of neoconservatism.

**Johnson:** In today's Sunday Telegraph (July 15, 2007) the historian Alistair Horne, author of *Algeria, A Savage War of Peace* describes meeting President Bush: 'Bush, an honourable man, might have made a good President without Iraq. His fault was to heed too often the voices of the Zionist lobby in Washington. Never before has the Israeli tail wagged the American dog quite so vigorously.' John le Carré claimed his novel *Absolute Friends* demonstrated 'what would happen if we allow present trends to continue to the point where corporate media are absolutely at the beck and call in the US of a neo-conservative group which is commanding the political high ground, calling the shots and appointing the state of Israel as the purpose of all Middle Eastern and practically all global policy.' (What would the great George Smiley have made of this Bill Hayden-style rant, I wonder?) [24] Anyway, the charge is that the neoconservatives are shills for Israel sending Gentile boys to fight and die for the Likud.

**Muravchik:** This is just raw anti-Semitism, and absurd. Israel – though keen for the US to win once it had attacked Iraq – was not happy that the US attacked Iraq in the first place. Israelis felt the greater danger was from Iran. I remember listening

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to Benjamin Netanyahu at the AEI just after the war in Afghanistan talking with a marked lack of enthusiasm about an invasion of Iraq. Believe me, the invasion was the opposite of an Israeli idea!

There are a lot of neoconservatives who are Jews. That's true for two reasons, I think. One, neoconservatives come from the left, and a lot of leftists are Jews. The Communist and socialist movements were all dominated by Jews, so a lot of the people who are renegades from those movements will be Jews. I think that explains most of it. But there may be an additional factor. The combination of idealism and toughness in the neoconservative position is something that is congenial to a certain Jewish mentality. Support for idealism flows from the Jewish tradition of good deeds, while the preference for toughness flows from a certain Jewish sense of vulnerability.

**Johnson:** Can I pursue this notion of 'toughness?' Paul Berman argues that neoconservatism is 'a clique with a style and that style is marked by ruthlessness.' He sees in neoconservatism a dangerous 'romance of the ruthless,' for instance in Central America during the Reagan administration, when the expectation was that 'a small number of people could be very effective if they acted ruthlessly enough.' And today, Berman argues, this ruthless style 'has contributed to the gigantic errors that have been committed in Iraq.' He said: 'When you believe that if a small number of people act ruthlessly then a larger force is not necessary, it leads you to say, "let's not send a large number of troops but let's not tie the hands of those we do send." That is, you send too few troops on the one hand and practice torture on the other.' [25] How do you respond?

**Muravchik:** It's poetry, not analysis. I don't know what he's talking about in Central America. The signature neocon policy in Central America was support for the Contras. Were the Contras a small ruthless group? Well, first of all they were not a small group. They were the biggest guerrilla movement there ever was in Latin America. There has been a lot of romance down the years about Latin American guerrillas fighting for the liberation – well, the biggest example was the Nicaraguan Contras. They were victimised by a totalitarian regime and they fought for their land and their freedom. So much for the small group business! As for ruthlessness, they were less ruthless than the people they were fighting against, and they were in the midst of a guerrilla war. And in 1989, as soon as the regime agreed to hold an election they stopped fighting, participated in the election, and won it! So I

just don't know what Berman is talking about. He has a piece of poetry and he is intoxicated with it.

Berman says 'they' sent too few soldiers to Iraq. I guess he means the neocons. But it was Rumsfeld that sent too few soldiers. And that decision had nothing to do with a 'romance of the ruthless' but had lots to do with a romance of technology. The notion of a 'revolution in military affairs' revolves around changes in military technology – it used to take 1000 projectiles to strike the target and now you needed 2 projectiles, and so on. Rumsfeld and the people around him became intoxicated with this sort of thing, with bad consequences. They should be chastised for it, including some neocons. But to speak of a 'neocon romance of the ruthless' is nothing more than poetic mudslinging. And I defy Berman to explain the causal connection between the beliefs of neocons and Abu Ghraib.

#### Part 4: Neoconservative Futures?

##### The Iraq War

**Johnson:** In 2006, after the Republicans were defeated in the mid-terms, you concluded 'It is the war in Iraq that has made "neocon" a dirty word, either because President George Bush's team woefully mismanaged the war or because the war (which neocons supported) was misconceived.' [26] Was the intervention in Iraq mismanaged or misconceived?

**Muravchik:** It was obviously horribly mismanaged, starting with the decision on troop levels. General Shinseki said he would need 350,000 troops or thereabouts, and according to the books, Rumsfeld said 'nonsense' and insisted on 125,000 troops. If that is true it was criminally negligent on Rumsfeld's part. Then you have the disbanding of the Iraqi army, and so on. It was badly mismanaged, no doubt.

Was it misconceived? Well, at the risk of seeming that I really am part of the 'Zionist lobby' (laughs) we must ask in hindsight, what was the sense of making Iraq the second focus in the war on terror, rather than Iran, which was always a bigger player in terrorism? And that was a question that some people asked at the time. It seems now that that was a big mistake. But that still leaves the question of whether the war in Iraq was a mistake per se. If we had gone with a bigger force could we have achieved a different outcome? I'm just not sure.

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**Johnson:** When we try to understand why those mistakes were made, I think something you wrote in your book on the UN is very useful. You have written that American idealism has sometimes gone off the rails and drifted into ‘building dream castles’ rather than face the world as it is. [27] Do you think that was going on in 2002, and that it explains at least some of the astonishing failure to prepare for the day after the end of major combat operations?

**Muravchik:** There were people who believed that creating democracy in Iraq was going to be much easier than it has proved to be. I wanted to do it – so if it was a dream castle it was mine too – but I didn’t think it would be easy. I thought it would take a much more thorough occupation than we were able to do with the small force we sent. In *Exporting Democracy* I have a chapter on the occupation of Japan and noted that temporarily we took complete ownership of the country and helped put in place democratic institutions. In 2003 that’s what I thought we ought to do in Iraq. I remember participating in a seminar with some Americans and Israelis. The Americans were talking about bringing democracy to Iraq. The Israelis were very cynical, saying, ‘that’s insane, you Americans don’t know the area, and this is a ridiculous idea.’ I recall that one of the two American speakers (not me!) quoted from the inscription of the Statue of Liberty, saying the Iraqis were also ‘huddled masses yearning to breathe free.’ I thought that was off the wall even then. There was some terrible glibness on the part of some neocons about what was involved in this project. But I am not of the view that the project was or is hopeless per se. The folly was in not appreciating what an immensely difficult project it would be.

**Johnson:** The Democratic Party leader in the Senate, Harry Reid, recently said ‘the war is lost.’ Most people in the US and UK probably agree with him. Why is he wrong?

**Muravchik:** We are not defeated. It is within our power to keep fighting, or we can surrender as Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi propose. The terrorists and resistance fighters can prevent us from achieving our goals for a long time but they do not have it within their capacity to defeat us. If we surrender we will not ‘cut our losses,’ we will multiply them. To the global jihadist movement it will be as a massive dose of steroids. That movement grew out of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan – it is fuelled not by grievances but by successes. The Jihadists say over and over again ‘we defeated one superpower when no one thought we could, and now we are going to defeat the other superpower.’ On the back of these promises of success they offer a global jihad for a new caliphate. And there is a tremendous amount

of support for this in the Muslim world – not a majority but not an insignificant minority. If Reid and Pelosi have their way and we surrender, there will be untold thousands of new recruits to the ranks of the suicide bombers attacking the US and Britain and Spain. It's right there in all their documents. They believe, as a minimum, in reconquering for Islam every piece of land that was ever conquered by Muslims. This land is regarded as sanctified by that fact, as 'Waqf' – holy Muslim territory. If we surrender we will face much bigger wars over the coming decades because they won't stop until we subdue them.

### The question of 'national faint-heartedness'

**Johnson:** You wrote as early as 2003 that the war in Iraq might be lost because of 'a recurrence of national faint-heartedness.' [28] Is it possible that 21st century capitalist democracies combine (a) unparalleled superiority in economic, technological and military power with (b) a culture (i.e. a mass media, a popular culture, an intellectual class and, above all, a sensibility) that makes it almost impossible to project that power, even for progressive ends? Does that culture fold when it meets a resistance – even a fascist one – capable of fighting and inflicting losses upon us over a sustained period? Are the Jihadis and 'insurgents' right in their belief that if they can kill enough Americans or Brits then the home front will collapse? If they are, is the West now starting fights that it literally cannot finish?

**Muravchik:** No, the Jihadis are not right. Yes, in both the US and the UK there is a real problem – in the US an underlying isolationism, in the UK an underlying pacifism. Both consistently make our enemies underestimate us, and that is dangerous. But in the end, the English-speaking peoples will have enough self-regard, and enough love for our way of life, that we will stand up and fight for it. In the end we pay any price to defend it. But most of the wars of the last century were started because we gave our enemies a very different impression. And I think that may be what we are doing today – I think it likely that all this will end in some kind of bigger war. But I don't have any doubt that we will win it. We won't surrender in the end.

### The Threat from Iran

**Johnson:** Iran is obviously determined to acquire a nuclear bomb. Why should we not seek to accommodate a nuclear Iran as we have other nuclear powers?

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**Muravchik:** First, because it is a revolutionary and messianic regime engaged in terrorist violence around the world in a way that even the communists weren't to the same extent. I don't think there is any reliable way to 'deter' Iran. It is possible that Iran will give the bomb to terrorists, or just drop it on Israel, as even the so-called moderate Rafsanjani has proposed to do. Second, it would be the end of the non-proliferation regime. If Iran breaks out, other states would follow quickly. We will end up with 20 or 30 nuclear armed states. That would be very dangerous. Third, it would energise the Iranian drive for regional hegemony and that would in all likelihood result in some big wars in the region.

Look, when people say we succeeded in deterring the Soviets, well, yes, we did, but let's not forget the cold war was a terrible harrowing period, and victory was due only in part to wise Western policies. In part it was just luck that it ended without horrible fighting. By 'luck' I mean Gorbachev got elected Secretary General in the Politburo in a contested situation in which he might not have won. If we had had the chance to prevent the Soviet Union from becoming a nuclear power, would that have been an option worth seizing? Yes! Because if you run the cold war scenario over several times, sooner or later it ends in World War Three. The peaceful end we achieved in 1989 was not guaranteed. And today we do have the option of stopping Iran gaining the nuclear bomb.

**Johnson:** Many commentators judge that the bad consequences of trying to stop Iran by force – radicalisation in the region, retaliatory strikes – are likely to be so great that we should desist.

**Muravchik:** I don't believe radicalisation flows mostly from defeat. It flows from victories. I understand that people will be angry – though don't forget a lot of people would be relieved. I understand Iran will retaliate and will redouble its terrorist acts against Americans. It may unleash Hezbollah, maybe do some things in the Gulf. And some of these things could be painful and we have to deal with them as best we can. But they won't be as painful as having a nuclear armed Iran.

### The United Nations

**Johnson:** Your last answer would horrify those who we might call cosmopolitans – people who seek the rule of international law, a strengthened United Nations, transnational networks, global civil society, and so on. Cosmopolitanism is offered as an alternative strategic framework for doing foreign policy, and you



have been pretty scathing about it. Your book on the UN, for example, rejects the cosmopolitan's vision of a pax UN not just as 'an illusion' but potentially 'the source of much harm.' [29] What is wrong with a 'pax UN?'

**Muravchik:** Unlike most neocons I am a believer in international law. Eugene V. Rostow – a neocon much more prominent and infinitely more knowledgeable than I – was a big advocate of international law. I believe in it because there is a big problem in managing American power. That power, as you were implying in some of the earlier questions, is inevitably frightening to people who aren't American, because it is unbalanced by any other power. International law offers a broad code of conduct for states. By emphasising our respect for international law, we can reassure others that we do not believe that our power entitles us to act as a law unto ourselves. At the same time, virtually every aggressive action by other states to which we object is also a violation of international law, and therefore the law gives us a basis for framing our objections and for taking action against the miscreant.

But the UN is simply a failed institution. It was created in 1945 to 'spare future generations from the scourge of war.' There has not been another world war but the reason for that owes nothing to the UN – the UN completely failed to create the institutions of peace-enforcement which are spelled out in the Charter. It has everything to do with the use of US power, together with that of its allies, to keep the peace. Therefore, it is my view that the US, with its allies, should continue to keep the peace. The UN is unable to do this.

There was a belief that the UN was hamstrung by the cold war and would come into its own and play the role that was foreseen for it in 1945 once the cold war ended. But right away, in Bosnia and Rwanda, that was proven false. We have had three different experiences: the League of Nations, the UN during the Cold War, and the UN after the Cold War. Every time the result has been the same: utter impotence. It is mad to look to the UN as the bulwark of peace, and doubly mad to look to the UN at the expense of the US, because the US has been very effective at keeping the peace. It has kept the peace of Europe since 1945 and while it has not completely succeeded in keeping the peace in Asia, it has succeeded in putting to rest the central threat of war in Asia, which is the competition between China and Japan.

**Johnson:** So what role should the UN play in international affairs?

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**Muravchik:** People criticise the UN on the ground that ‘it’s nothing but a talk shop.’ But the idea of a talk shop doesn’t sound at all bad to me! If the nations of the world can talk in big groups and small groups that is good. Having an international forum where issues can be raised and representatives can talk, formally and informally, is good. The problem is not the talking. The problem is that the UN is dysfunctional as an action organisation.

**Johnson:** What do you think of the idea of creating a ‘concert of democracies?’ This notion, in different forms, can be heard from John McCain, Madeleine Albright, the Princeton Project, Ivo Dalder and James Lindsey, and it is implied in Tony Blair’s 1999 Chicago speech.

**Muravchik:** I like it, but it is going to be very hard to achieve. I think it would be wiser to seek to create a separate stand-alone organisation than to create a force within the UN – the atmosphere of the UN is poisonous. But as a stand-alone organisation of democracies that has more substance to it than the current ‘community of democracies’ it is an excellent idea. For instance, it’s possible to envisage a Human Rights Committee of a Concert of Democracies becoming an alternative to the discredited UN Human Rights Committee.

**Johnson:** What are you working on now?

**Muravchik:** I’m writing a book of profiles of half a dozen Arab democrats. These people are trying to bring democracy to their countries and I admire them. And they are too little known to us.

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### Notes

- [1] Muravchik 2002a, p. 1.
- [2] Glicksman 1948.
- [3] Muravchik 2002c.
- [4] Muravchik 1999.
- [5] Harrington 1973, p. 421.
- [6] Djilas 1972.
- [7] Muravchik 1999.
- [8] Muravchik 2002a, pp. 319-20.
- [9] Muravchik (Manny) 2002.
- [10] Kristol 1983.
- [11] See Kristol 1995.
- [12] See Podhoretz 1996, 2003; Kirkpatrick 1983.
- [13] McNamara and O’Keeffe 1982.
- [14] Muravchik 2003.
- [15] See Muravchik 2007b.
- [16] Muravchik 1991.
- [17] Muravchik 2007a.
- [18] Leiken and Brooke 2007; Muravchik 2007c.
- [19] Muravchik 2005b.
- [20] Muravchik 2006a.
- [21] Muravchik 2006b.
- [22] Muravchik 2006c.
- [23] See Strauss 1958, in which he writes, ‘We profess ourselves inclined to the old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil.’
- [24] Le Carré quoted in Jeffries 2005.
- [25] Berman 2006.
- [26] Muravchik 2006d.
- [27] Muravchik 2005a, p. 1.
- [28] Muravchik 2003.
- [29] Muravchik 2005a, p. 5.

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