

America at the Crossroads. Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy

by Francis Fukuyama, Yale University Press, 2006, 226. pp.

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Also under review: *The Good Fight: Why Liberals – and Only Liberals – Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again*, Peter Beinart, HarperCollins, 2006, 304 pp; *Anti-Totalitarianism: The Left-wing Case for a Neoconservative Foreign Policy*, Oliver Kamm, Social Affairs Unit, 2005, 128 pp; and *With All Our Might: A Progressive Strategy for Defeating Jihadism and Defending Liberty*, Will Marshall, (ed.), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006, 256 pp.

Momentous events tend to shift political allegiances. They bring into sharp relief underlying affinities otherwise masked by more mundane preoccupations and they highlight the potential for reviving latent traditions and generating new movements.

The reader can hear the grinding of tectonic plates in each of the books under review. Francis Fukuyama delineates a 'realistic Wilsonianism' which, while it reads like an elaboration of Tony Blair's celebrated Chicago speech, an eloquent rationale for liberal interventionism, seeks to reconcile liberal idealism with the constraints of realism. Proposing, in Peter Beinart's words, 'a narrative of the present based upon a memory of the past,' both Beinart and Will Marshall's collaborators present cogent and convincing manifestoes for reviving the muscular Cold War liberalism of the Truman Democrats. They are careful to keep their distance from any neoconservative legacy to the extent of neglecting the contribution of such Democratic stalwarts as Senators Henry 'Scoop' Jackson and Daniel Moynihan, both one-time neoconservative collaborators. Ironically, it takes a British commentator, Oliver Kamm, to highlight, indeed celebrate, the common ground between neo-conservatism and muscular liberalism, a task befitting a founder member of the Henry Jackson Society, a non-partisan group that convenes transatlantic center-left, center-right and independent figures committed to Jackson's legacy of 'democratic geopolitics.' [1]

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Francis Fukuyama's public defection from neoconservative ranks has been widely publicised, even celebrated. Some commentators have greeted his book as not only an intellectual critique of neo-conservatism but its political obituary. He insists that 'neoconservative' has become little more than 'a term of abuse': 'Whatever its complex roots, neo-conservatism has now become inevitably linked to concepts like preemption, regime change, unilateralism, and benevolent hegemony as put into practice by the Bush administration (...) Rather than attempting the feckless task of reclaiming the meaning of the term, it seems to me better to abandon the label and articulate an altogether distinct foreign policy position.'

In some respects, Fukuyama seems concerned to rescue neo-conservatism from the neoconservatives, or at least to reassert some of its founding tenets. Recalling the movement's roots in the critique of Great Society statism and welfarism first articulated by the journal *Public Interest*, he recalls that the 'single overarching theme to the domestic social policy critiques [by *Public Interest*]... is the limits of social engineering,' insights brushed aside by a 'wild over-optimism' about US ability to reconstruct and reshape a defeated Iraq.

Adopting a quasi-Gramscian position, highlighting the constraints imposed by stunted social evolution – not least an underdeveloped civil society – Fukuyama criticises the likes of William Kristol and Robert Kagan, whose stance was 'by contrast, Leninist; they believed that history can be pushed along with the right application of power and will. Leninism was a tragedy in its Bolshevik version, and it has returned as farce when practiced by the United States.' There may be some truth in the charge, although the politics of volition promoted by other self-styled neoconservatives seems to owe less to Lenin than to the fin-de-siecle vitalise of Henri Bergson, Charles Sorel and the Italian Futurists. [2]

On the Iraq war, Fukuyama argues that 'abstract ideas' were 'interpreted in certain characteristic ways that might better be described as mindsets or worldviews rather than principled positions.' In consequence, '[t]he prudential choices that flowed from these mindsets were biased in certain consistent directions that made them, when they proved to be wrong, something more than individual errors of judgment.'

But neo-conservatism's credentials as a coherent movement have often been exaggerated. A number of its adherents have proclaimed that it is less a set of positions and more an inclination, or, in Irving Kristol's words, 'a persuasion.' [3]

Indeed, one of the problems of Fukuyama's treatment is the suspicion that his critique applies to but one element of the neoconservative spectrum, those that fetishise unilateralism, elevate military-led regime change above political solutions and hold to a politics of volition which Fukuyama considers Leninist. Just as Marx was contemptuous of self-styled Marxists, many neoconservatives must wince when they see the appellation applied to Jacksonian nationalists, amongst others, with little appreciation of neo-conservatism's intellectual history or political nuances. [4] Fukuyama is, of course, familiar with the diversity of the neoconservative persuasion, but suggests that a paradigm shift from the earlier generation occurred with William Kristol and Robert Kagan's 1996 article, *Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy*, demanding a more aggressive democratic interventionism. [5]

Fukuyama's 'realistic Wilsonianism' – ironically, for a book that criticises American exceptionalism, this is not a phrase that travels well – seeks to reconcile competing schools of US foreign policy: neoconservative, realist, liberal internationalist, and nationalist or Jacksonian. The result is a form of 'hard-headed' liberal internationalism that emphasises instruments of 'soft power,' including diplomacy, alliance-building, democracy promotion, trade and economic aid as prerequisites for restoring American legitimacy in the world. It is Wilsonian in its commitment to liberal internationalism, accepting the voluntary curbing of American power, or at least its 'regularization through institutional constraints,' but also recognising key realist insights – states matter, not least in securing domestic order (a prerequisite for any sustainable democracy promotion), and so does multilateral cooperation and engagement. Like Beinart, Fukuyama concurs with Tony Blair's insistence that, in a globalised world, '[I]nterdependence – the fact of a crisis somewhere becoming a crisis everywhere – makes a mockery of traditional views of national interest.' 'You can't have a coherent view of national interest today without a coherent view of the international community,' he argues. 'Nations, even ones as large and powerful as the U.S.A., are affected profoundly by world events; and not affected in time or at the margins, but at breakneck speed and fundamentally.' Even the most multilateral-minded of liberal internationalists stress the need for reforming the United Nations. But while Anne Marie Slaughter, writing in the Marshall collection, wants to 'reinvent' the UN, Fukuyama sees little prospect of rescuing such a dysfunctional institution, preferring to stress the 'multiple multilateralisms' to be found in softer forms of international regulation and collaboration.

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Fukuyama echoes many of the charges made in Will Marshall's collection. Marshall and Jeremy Rosner argue that 'Bush Republicans have been tough, but they have not been smart,' and that a national security formula of military intervention, ad hoc 'coalitions of the willing,' and pre-emptive war has failed to enhance US security or to undermine the jihadists. There is also considerable convergence between Fukuyama and with the prescriptions offered by Peter Beinart. The latter draws on the legacy of the muscular liberalism elaborated in Truman's 1949 inaugural speech. Truman espoused a foreign policy based on a readiness to use military force to contain the Soviet threat as well as the energetic and well-resourced promotion of economic development abroad, particularly in Europe's recovering democracies. Military intervention in any form will be a tough sell in today's Democratic Party but, as Beinart notes, 'America could not have built schools for Afghan girls had it not bombed the Taliban first.'

During the cold war, Reinhold Niebuhr shared American conservatives' fears that America had become too 'soft and effete' to resist a relentlessly ideological and ruthless Soviet foe. Nevertheless, he insisted, 'there is no contradiction between recognizing that our enemies are not intrinsically evil, and recognizing that they must be fought, just as there is no contradiction between recognizing that although we are not intrinsically good, we must still fight them.' Similarly, foreign policy's moral purpose, Truman insisted, would be based on humility, not hubris. 'No matter how great our strength,' he said, 'we must deny ourselves the license to do always as we please.' Furthermore, he realised that forceful internationalism demanded greater attention to resolving domestic tensions. Truman promoted civil rights and universal health insurance in the conviction that a divided America would lack both the social cohesion and the moral authority to defend and promote freedom abroad. [6] 'If we wish to inspire the people of the world whose freedom is in jeopardy,' he argued, 'if we wish to restore hope to those who have already lost their civil liberties ... we must correct the remaining imperfections in our practice of democracy.' This insistence on the domestic and social underpinnings of an assertive foreign policy would be a leitmotiv of muscular liberalism, through JF Kennedy's inaugural address and up to and including 'neoconservative' Democrats like Pat Moynihan and Scoop Jackson.

The immediate post-war period has a disturbing contemporary resonance. Then, as now, an alarmingly large swath of intellectual and elite opinion was dismissive of – if not indulgent towards – those who openly threatened our fundamental

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freedoms. Then, as now, much of the left appeared determined to compromise itself – replicating the right's flirtation with fascist totalitarians in the 1930s – by outright fellow-traveling, insisting on communism's progressive credentials, or through a disabling relativism that adopted a neutralist, plague-on-both-your-houses stance toward the socialist bloc and the bourgeois West.

The 'cultural Cold War' was a battle of ideas between democracy (not least social democracy) and communism, and was fought out within the West. Democrats confronted communists and their apologists or fellow-travelers in the public arena, from trade unions and political parties to university faculties and media. *With All Our Might* is a stimulating and, at times, inspiring call to arms on the part of the Progressive Policy Institute, an island of Third Way sensibility in a Democratic Party that – like the British Labour Party of the 1980s – is so embittered toward its enemies, and so in thrall to an unrepresentative activist cadre, that it sometimes seems committed to a strategy of political marginalisation. In fact, the book's subtitle – *A Progressive Strategy for Defeating Jihadism and Defending Liberty* – is enough of a provocation to large swaths of liberal activists who, polls suggest, believe that fundamentalist Islam presents no threat and it is not America's responsibility to defend or promote freedom in anything but rhetorical terms.

The PPI volume covers an impressive array of issues, from the challenges of reviving Muslim economies and supporting liberal Muslims in Islam's ongoing civil war, to restoring America's transatlantic axis and preventing nuclear terrorism. The contributors are largely free of wishful thinking and consistently challenge current orthodoxies. Will Marshall and Jeremy Rosner suggest that liberals may be unable to restore their credibility on national security until a Democratic president successfully deals with a major crisis, giving credit to William Galston and Elaine Kamarck's must-read paper, *The Politics of Polarization*. [7] Jan Mazurek dismisses the suggestion that communist China can become a genuine partner in transforming the broader Middle East. 'Beijing is striking up cordial relationships with a motley array of tyrants and rogue states with which the United States is at odds,' he observes. He goes on to argue that competition between the United States and China for energy and influence in oil-rich states could become the 21st-century equivalent of the Cold War arms race between the United States and the USSR.

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If Fukuyama's defection has added to realist's expectations of a resurgence and restoration of their dominance in US foreign policy circles, there are other indications that the realist revival could turn out to be what market analysts call a 'dead cat bounce.' The limitations of realism are highlighted by liberal Democrat analysts Larry Diamond and Michael McFaul, writing in *With All Our Might*, who note that it was 'a non-state ideologically motivated movement' rather than a powerful rival state that attacked the US on 9/11. They propose a forceful democracy-promotion program, drawing explicitly on Cold War precedent in suggesting the application to the Middle East of the 1975 Helsinki human rights monitoring accords. 'Freedom,' they insist, 'is the fundamental antidote to all forms of tyranny, terror and oppression,' a statement with unashamedly neoconservative undertones.

It was once *de rigueur* to begin academic articles with a quote from Marx, Engels, Gramsci and the like, simultaneously demonstrating one's ideological credentials and depth of scholarship. Yet it is sometimes appropriate. Reading Oliver Kamm's stimulating polemic for a left-wing neo-conservatism prompted the recollection that in one or other of the various prefaces to the Communist Manifesto, Engels reminds us that Marx considered Napoleon III and Bismarck to be progressive figures. In securing the nationhood of Italy, Germany and Hungary, Marx suggested, such reactionary figures functioned as the 'testamentary executors' of the 1848 revolutions, acting in spite of themselves as *Träger* (bearers) of historical forces.

For most of the contemporary left, the 'Bush-Blair axis' is the equivalent of the reactionary troika of Napoleon Bonaparte, Bismarck and Cavour. The historical irony, of course, is that the latter were practitioners of classical realism while the former have evinced an exceptionally idealist approach to foreign policy that would normally be expected to appeal to progressive values rather than attract the left's venomous contempt. A scant few on the left have, however, showed some of Marx's political imagination and insight, and made a comparable conceptual leap in recognising that exceptional times beget unlikely alliances.

There is certainly a flavour of such irony in Kamm's identification of neo-conservatism as a catalyst for reviving a moribund tradition of progressive internationalism. In what could be deemed an unfortunate case of bad timing – with neo-conservatism suffering sustained intellectual and political assault in the US and at least one former stalwart declares the term redundant – Kamm makes a

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'modest plea for claiming the term "neo-conservative" as an accurate designation of a progressive political stance,' at least on foreign policy. He has little time for neo-conservatives' 'reactionary social views' in the realm of social policy or their hostility to the cultural relativism and indulgence that underpin the permissive society.

'A Left uninterested in defending the constitutional societies of the West, in its broadest sense, cannot serve progressive ends,' writes Kamm. 'Tony Blair's interventionism is not "right-wing,"' he argues, but a 'reassertion of an earlier left-wing tradition of anti-totalitarianism.' Kamm traces the fortunes of that tradition from the British Labour Party's commitment to collective security against 1930s' fascism, through early Cold War anti-communism, to the eventual rejection of unilateralism in the 1980s. Insisting that 'the neoconservative stance accords with the historic values of the democratic left,' Kamm cites Blair's observation, in his celebrated (at least in the US) speech to Congress in July 2003, that 'it is the great irony of modern politics that this doctrine [of promoting freedom] should be opposed, indeed sneered at, and for classically realist reasons, by people who are typically regarded as being on the left.'

Indeed, Blair has himself refused to cede ownership of traditionally progressive values. 'When the Americans say we want to extend democracy to these countries, or extend democracy and human rights throughout the Middle East in the Greater Middle East Initiative, people say, well, that is part of the neo-conservative agenda,' Blair told the *London Times* (November 5 2004), 'Actually, if you put it in different language, it is a progressive agenda,' he insisted.

Kamm writes eloquently and incisively, outlining how 1930s collective security was undermined and fascism's emergence facilitated by a blend of isolationism, the Not-In-My-Name pacifism of the day, and a denigration of, and corresponding unwillingness to defend, constitutional democracy. Kamm's historical reflections carry contemporary relevance. Of the fate of Woodrow Wilson's 'organized common peace' he writes, 'To many of its liberal adherents, the idea of a community of power to restrain selfish and bellicose impulses became not collective resistance to aggression, but a euphemism for handing the problem to someone else.' The degree to which illusions generated impotence and prevarication became a diplomatic norm should give pause to those who promote – sometimes in Panglossian terms – a blend of multilateralism, soft power and the 'international community' as a feasible and coherent alternative to more forceful foreign policy approaches. [8]

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One of the strengths of Kamm's book is its appreciation of the ideological dimension of the challenges confronting liberal democracy. 'The ideology of Islamist totalitarianism is neither subtle nor despairing,' he observes, but 'an assertion of theocratic triumphalism over the values of the Enlightenment.' As Fukuyama notes, radical Islam presents no existential threat to the West comparable to the prospect of nuclear annihilation, nor does it have the appeal that Marxism demonstrated to large numbers of intellectuals and left activists, at least in the advanced democracies. But it has sufficient potential appeal to the marginalised and disenfranchised of the Islamic world – and, as events in Britain, Holland and Canada have shown, to a minority of zealots in the advanced democracies – to suggest that radical Islamists represent more than a challenge to conventional policing and that 9/11 was not a singular, unrepeatable event. [9]

'There are strong moral and prudential grounds for the Western democracies to pursue an interventionist foreign policy of confronting tyranny and promoting global democracy,' Kamm writes, while recognising that democracy promotion is no panacea. Similarly, former Clinton administration staffer Daniel Benjamin observes in *The Good Fight* that while democratisation and economic liberalisation will not end terrorism, they will 'help marginalize extremists and create political space in which radical dissent will be vented and, most of the time, dissipated.' Bemoaning the fact that the left has been 'infected with a reactionary preference for stability rather than liberty in the international order,' Kamm nevertheless insists it is with progressives that 'historic responsibility' lies to promote democratic internationalism and resist the 'resurgence of a conservative realpolitik in alliance with an isolationist and reactionary left.'

But the prospects of the contemporary left assuming such responsibility seem bleak. In Europe, Tony Blair has been more forceful than most in articulating both a rationale – unapologetic and radical – and a vision for muscular liberalism. But he remains one of the few European politicians – one of the few politicians anywhere – resolutely committed to Iraq's democratisation and to transforming that benighted region's dysfunctional states. 'This is a global struggle,' he told the Labour Party conference. 'Today it is at its fiercest in Iraq [where] it has allied itself there with every reactionary element in the Middle East.' The way to protect the innocent, he argued, 'is not to retreat, to withdraw, to hand these people over to the mercy of religious fanatics or relics of Saddam, but to stand up for their right to decide their Government in the same democratic way the British people do.' Similarly,

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Blair is one of the few political leaders to explicitly recognise the need to confront fundamentalist Islam and its apologists in a contest that extends beyond security considerations to an ideological terrain that necessarily includes the reform and democratisation of the broader Middle East. Such an engagement demands, says Blair, 'a battle of ideas, hearts and minds, both within Islam and outside it,' noting that 'the 20th century showed how powerful political ideologies could be.'

Oliver Kamm recalls British union leader Ernest Bevin's timeless put-down of Labour's ineffectual, pacifist leader George Lansbury, excoriated for 'hawking your conscience around from body to body asking to be told what to do with it.' But a Bevin anecdote of perhaps more immediate relevance comes to mind. When he returned from the Potsdam summit in 1945, as Foreign Secretary in the 1945-51 Labour government, Bevin was quizzed by intrigued colleagues. Did you meet Stalin? Molotov? What were the Soviets like? 'Just like the communists,' he replied. Bevin's dismissive response was far from nonchalant or glib, but reflected a familiarity with the enemy, an intimate knowledge derived from almost 25 years of confronting communists within the Transport and General Workers' Union and the wider Labour movement. The same understanding of the nature – both the appeal and the threat – of totalitarianism was similarly pronounced in the activists and intellectuals associated with *The God That Failed*. Deeply immersed in communist ideology and activities, in both overt and covert forms, the likes of Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone and Richard Wright, amongst others, had a deep appreciation of the challenge confronting liberal democracy. This often-uneasy alliance of anti-communist intellectuals and labour leaders provided both a vehicle and vital ballast for Cold War liberalism.

Post-war America's muscular liberalism was not only intellectually robust but politically resilient enough to transcend the challenges of the outbreak of Cold War, the Berlin blockade, the Korean War, McCarthyism, 1956, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, only to dissipate under the traumatic impact of Vietnam and the attendant counter culture. Fed by the intellectual insights of Niebuhr, muscular liberalism was resistant to its detractors from right and left, in part because it was socially-rooted, reflecting the values of Middle America, and benefiting from the energetic commitment of a labor movement – a surprising omission in Beinart's otherwise thorough book – which helped ensure Cold War liberalism was not the fragile creature of intellectual fashion. In attacking the anti-anti-communism of JK Galbraith, for instance, leading social democrat Sidney Hook could undermine

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Galbraith's attempt to appropriate the liberal label, highlighting the fact that 'the foreign policy Galbraith and his confreres are attacking is the foreign policy more strongly advocated by the liberal, organised labor movement in the US than by any group of plutocratic monopolists...' [10]

Organised labor's post-war role in educating and mobilising domestic support for an energetic and principled foreign policy seems all the more relevant at a time when marginal individuals like Cindy Sheehan are so regularly projected as representative of key constituencies. But the contemporary labor movement has not only been overtaken by 'new social movements,' it also seems to have lost its political bearings. The annual conference of the British TUC, once an anti-communist bastion in global labor politics, passed a resolution celebrating the Bolivarian Revolution of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's authoritarian caudillo, and condemning America's aggressive imperialist... well, you get the picture. The TUC's deputy general secretary recently welcomed the conference of the mis-named Cuba Solidarity Campaign to Congress House, the TUC's HQ, addressing the assembled philo-Stalinists with an enthusiasm that must have had Bevin squirming in his grave.

The dilemma facing muscular liberals who identify with the left is that their positions are not shared by the vast majority of their comrades. This is the missing ingredient in Kamm, Beinart and Marshall, and perhaps also in Fukuyama. Who will constitute the political vehicle and provide the cadres? Who will be the Träger for their distinctive politics? When recently asked to identify the contemporary equivalent of post-war liberalism's mass social base, Beinart answered, 'the post-Dean internet left.' A depressing prospect. The PPI can at least point to prominent political champions, including such presidential hopefuls as Senator Evan Bayh, former Virginia Governor Mark Warner and Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack, chairman of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council. But the balance of power within the party, the need to placate rank-and-file activists in advance of the primaries and the fact that few leading Democrats have been prepared to speak out against the witch-hunt against Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman, probably the most prominent exponent of muscular liberalism on the Hill today, does not augur well.

But groups like the Truman National Security Project are nurturing a new generation of promising activists. [11] Perhaps most promisingly, the Euston Manifesto (reprinted in this issue of *Democratiya*) has also assumed a momentum and significance that must exceed the expectations of its initial signatories. Its

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success confirms that significant numbers of progressive democrats are sufficiently alienated by the rampant anti-Americanism, relativism, anti-Semitism, and other pathologies of the international left to not only articulate a distinctive politics but consider new allegiances that transcend traditional affinities.

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Notes

- [1] <http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/>
- [2] Leeden 2002.
- [3] Kristol 2003.
- [4] See Gerson 1995, Gerson 1996, and Friedman 2005.
- [5] *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996.
- [6] Truman's 1948 State of the Union address read like a liberal manifesto – a hike in the minimum wage, progressive tax reform, national health insurance and, as Beinart notes, 'most dramatically of all' civil rights proposals that signaled his willingness to confront the Southern Democrat power bloc. Within a month, Truman returned with specific legislative proposals to integrate the military, end the poll tax, eliminate segregation in interstate commerce, and make lynching a federal crime.
- [7] www.third-way.com/products/tw_pop.pdf
- [8] See, for example, Leonard 2005.
- [9] Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh recently told a Washington DC audience that 9/11 was a 'one-off,' and compared it to a scratch basketball game where a few guys get together and

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happen to 'hit it off.' This seemed a marked departure from his admission (since retracted) to *The Nation*, in December 2001, that 9/11 had impacted his politics: 'It's a tough world. You have to rely on unsavory people. It's real easy to say "forget about it" until you start thinking about your own kid being a hostage. Then you want Oliver North working on it.'

[10] Hook 1983.

[11] <http://www.trumanproject.org/>