

IRWIN STELZER

## FROM HAWK TO CHICKEN

AFTER THE NEOCONS: AMERICA AT  
THE CROSSROADS

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By Francis Fukuyama  
(Profile Books 226pp £12.99)

'THE RISK THE administration took [in Iraq] was not absurd, especially in light of what was believed about the WMD threat at the time.' 'Walking away from Iraq now without creating a strong and stable government there will leave a festering terrorist sanctuary in the Sunni triangle.' 'We do not want to replace national sovereignty with unaccountable international organizations; the United Nations is not now nor will it ever become an effective, legitimate seat of global governance ... it is doubtful that any set of reforms currently contemplated or politically feasible will solve the organization's problems ... Regimes that treat their own citizens unjustly are likely to do the same to foreigners.' 'American power remains critical to world order; the United States is not just a giant version of Sweden or Switzerland on the world stage.'

Excerpts from an address by George W Bush? From a press conference by Donald Rumsfeld? From the latest neoconservative manifesto by William Kristol and Robert Kagan? No, these are excerpts from Francis Fukuyama's new attack on the neoconservatives whom he accuses of misapplying the principles which, it seems, he still finds attractive.

Fukuyama has four reasons for mounting his dissent. First, he has some scores to settle. He was shocked at a gala Washington dinner to hear Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Charles Krauthammer, a dweller in the broad tent that is neoconservatism, cheered when, in Fukuyama's words, Krauthammer 'treated the war as a virtually unqualified success'. It is important here to note that Krauthammer did not say that, or anything like it. He conceded that our effort in Iraq 'may be a bridge too far ... The undertaking is enormous, ambitious, and arrogant. It may yet fail.' I mention this at the outset because the reader should be aware that Fukuyama has the unfortunate habit of misremembering what his new enemies have said, and even what he himself has written.

Second, he is eager to prove that his earlier thesis, laid out in his widely read work, *The End of History and the Last Man*, remains valid. Fukuyama says that his argument in 1992 was that there is 'a universal ... desire to live in a modern society, with its technology, high standards of living, health care and access to the wider world'. If recent terror attacks by radical Islamics are an assault on Western culture and modernity, he will have

been wrong: history will have refused to end. So to rescue his earlier work he now must demonstrate that those attacks were mounted by a tiny number of disaffected Muslims, and that the Iraq war caused, rather than responded to wider Islamic hostility to America and the West. The destruction of the World Trade Center, by this reasoning, was an aberration: the desire for modernity remains universal.

Third, he is eager to convince everyone that, as he puts it, 'Unlike many other neoconservatives, I was never persuaded of the rationale for the Iraq war.' Yet he admits to signing a letter – sponsored by the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), the centre of neocon foreign-policy thinking – which, as he describes it, urged the Clinton administration 'to take a harder line against Baghdad... An American invasion of Iraq was not then in the cards, however'. The disingenuous phrase 'harder line' hardly does justice to Fukuyama's earlier hawkishness. The famous letter actually called for a new strategy toward Iraq that 'should aim, above all, at the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power... This means a willingness to undertake military action.'

Fukuyama did not abandon his hawkishness after 11 September. Like other neocons, on 20 September 2001 he put his signature to a letter calling for American forces to 'back up our commitment to the Iraqi opposition by all necessary means' because failure to remove Saddam 'will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism'.

Fukuyama now contends that 'In the year immediately preceding the invasion ... I finally decided that the war didn't make sense.' Nothing wrong with that. Indeed, were the neocons to tax their new critic merely with changing his position, he might quite properly respond in the manner of John Maynard Keynes: 'When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?' But it does seem more than a little odd that so prolific a letter-writer and essayist as Fukuyama should have concealed this conversion from hawk to dove from the very people he had urged to use all means to rid the Middle East of Saddam. Only now, when he believes that public opinion has turned against the war because it is a disaster, does he feel compelled to reveal what he really, really thought all along.

Fukuyama's fourth reason for producing this book is to advocate a new direction in US foreign policy, the adoption of what he calls 'Realistic Wilsonianism'. Unfortunately, it is not easy to determine just what that policy is, and how it differs from the one he now repudiates. He quite properly chides the neoconservatives for abandoning the scepticism about social engineering that was at the core of their domestic policies. It is fair criticism to point out that a group that didn't believe Lyndon Johnson could create a Great Society in America, or that George W Bush could successfully

rebuild New Orleans, was foolish to persuade itself that Bush and Rumsfeld could create a decent society in Iraq and rebuild Baghdad.

But here as elsewhere Fukuyama climbs up the hill only to scamper down again. He concludes his attack on social engineering by calling nation-building 'a difficult business'. Well, so is driving to work in the rush hour, but we do it all the time because it is worth doing. And surely it is worth undertaking this 'difficult business' if we believe that we are facing a threat to the very existence of Western values and our way of life.

Fukuyama doesn't think we are, which is why he continues to contend that history has indeed ended. As he sees it, the main threat is from 'isolated attacks ... [by] alienated and uprooted young people' living in non-Muslim lands, a problem that Western European nations will have to solve. As for America, before the Iraq war 'we were probably at war with no more than a few thousand people around the world who would consider martyring themselves and causing nihilistic damage to the United States'. If that is the case, goes his argument, 'if the truly dangerous terrorists constituted a relatively small number of people, then the problem would probably be manageable'. This, from a man who some hundred pages earlier concedes, 'A number of large unknowns remain about the nature of the terrorist threat, such as the number of hard-core jihadists, and the sources of future supply of new recruits...'

So it comes to this. Fukuyama is upset with the neo-conservatives who see Islamic terrorism as an existential threat, who believe that history marches on, but confesses that he has no idea of the number and strength of the jihadists, except when it suits him to argue that they are, or were, a mere handful of fanatics. He gives no weight to the fact that modern technology makes the sheer number of terrorists intent on destroying us less relevant than their devotion to that cause and their ability to acquire nuclear, chemical and biological weapons from states that shelter and support them. He is, in short, willing to gamble that the first and second attacks on the World Trade Center, the attacks on Americans in Saudi Arabia, and the assault of the *Cole* were the work of only a handful of jihadists. This requires him to ignore the network of financial and logistical support made available to the attackers by Muslims and Muslim nations in the Middle East and



Fukuyama: 'Realistic Wilsonianism'?

elsewhere, and to close his eyes to the relationship between non-state actors such as bin Laden, and the states that provide them with shelter and the means to wage jihad.

He is also disturbed by what he sees as the decline in American standing in the world, a result of the Bush administration's unilateralism, and the assertion of American exceptionalism. That America is less popular in parts of Europe now than it was when our troops were in the process of assisting Great Britain in the liberation of France, Germany and other countries from Hitler's oppression, and when those countries depended on our nuclear umbrella to contain Russian ambitions, there can be no doubt. But that does not mean that Fukuyama is right in contending that 'unlike earlier trans-Atlantic spats, the rift caused by the Iraq war was in the nature of a tectonic shift, a rift that will not easily be healed in the future'. In fact, the healing is already under way. Gerhard Schroeder, the German chancellor who campaigned on an anti-American platform, has been turned out of office by voters who prefer pro-American Angela Merkel, whose visit to the White House went famously well; Jacques Chirac is now among the political walking dead, unable to control the streets of Paris and likely to be replaced by pro-American Nicolas Sarkozy. And the leaders of the coalition that deposed Saddam – Bush in America, Tony Blair in Britain, and John Howard in Australia, along with coalition supporters Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark and Japan's Junichiro Koizumi – have all been returned to office by voters who do not seem to have been as offended by their commitment of troops to Iraq as Fukuyama would have us believe.

None of this is to say that Fukuyama does not have it right when he points to the botched handling of Iraq after Saddam was driven down his spider hole. We and the Iraqi people are paying a huge price in blood and treasure for Rumsfeld's flippant 'stuff happens', Bush's refusal to consider the difficulty of the task of creating a stable, democratic Iraq, and the unwillingness of the administration to commit the resources it was being told by commanders in the field would be needed.

But what does Fukuyama conclude from that? He opposes withdrawal because it would leave a cesspool in which terrorism would breed. But he doesn't say whether he favours correcting past errors by committing still more troops to Iraq, the position taken by most neo-conservatives. The current situation is a mess, withdrawal is impossible and therefore we should now ...? Finger-pointing and wailing are not workable policies.

His 'Realistic Wilsonianism' seems to come down to this. He favours the nurturing of the multiple international organisations that exist to coordinate such things as the use of the Internet and reduction of trade barriers. He would have us seek added legitimacy by increasing the role of the Community of Democracies relative to that of the UN because the latter organisation 'makes no practical demands on its members to be democratic or to respect the human rights of its citizens'. Good idea, paralleling one made three years ago when Krauthammer, whom Fukuyama sees as his principal policy antagonist, proposed establishing a new alliance of democracies as a foundation for a new post-9/11 structure.

'Realistic Wilsonianism' also involves primary reliance on soft power, to use Joe Nye's phrase. But it does not completely eschew hard power, which Fukuyama concedes played a key role in many democratic transitions. He opposes an 'exclusively military response' to terrorism, but then who does not? He does not rule out preventive war 'as a component of an American grand strategy', but assigns it a very limited role – a position no different from that of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, whom he approvingly quotes as saying 'this approach must be used with great caution', and in only a small number of cases. He favours 'demilitarization of American foreign policy' but in the next sentence concedes, 'Preventive war and regime change via military intervention can never be taken off the table completely.'

Fukuyama would, in the end, place greater reliance on international institutions than would his former colleagues of the neoconservative persuasion. He trusts the US less than they do. 'The fatal flaw lying at the heart of a world order based on American benevolent hegemony [is that] the hegemon has to be not just well-intentioned but also prudent and smart in its exercise of power.' He doubts that America possesses those virtues, or at least that it possesses them in greater measure than the variety of international institutions in which he rests so much hope for a stable world order.

Fortunately for the reader, this is a short book, more in the tradition of accessible policy pamphlets than scholarly tomes. Its admirable summary of the roots of the neoconservative movement is probably worth the price of admission. And if your taste runs to a pudding in search of a theme, dip into Fukuyama's lament for neoconservatism as he once knew it, or now remembers it. But don't do so in search of a solid meal. *To order this book at £10.39, see LR Bookshop on page 22*

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