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History 165C Final: Climb Aboard the Revolutionary Vessel of Neo-Conservative Paranoia

*Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.<sup>1</sup>*

Even this statement does not effectively capture the revolutionary change in American foreign policy George W. Bush has promulgated since September 11, 2001. For one, our enemy has changed. As Bush explains, we're no longer pitted against the Soviet Union, a risk-averse, WMD-deterred superpower. In fact, our enemy is not even a state. It is a nameless, faceless, group of terrorist organizations more agile and adept at deception and avoiding detection than the highest trained Special Forces or the most skilled CIA operative. Thus, we see the two major parts of the Bush Doctrine in American foreign policy: pre-emptive strikes and sovereign implication in harboring such terrorist organizations. Unfortunately, both of these require near-perfect intelligence, which any retired CIA member would refute the US ever has. Thus, Bush has embarked on a policy of involving the US in military engagements having circumstantial evidence of the above at best, with little respect for international law or opinion, and all because he refuses to "remain idle while dangers gather."<sup>2</sup> Sounds like a futile proposition, and one founded in paranoia of what might be.

This type of paranoia, regrettably, has been the root of many interminably protracted wars in the past. Truman suffered such delusions when he claimed our justification in assisting all free people to work out their destiny and resist attempted

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<sup>1</sup> "The National Security Strategy of the United States," September 2002, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure.<sup>3</sup> Of course, in the case of Greece and Turkey in 1947, fear more than moral purpose led Truman to give them financial and military support—fear of Communism, which Kennan lewdly described as “like [a] malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue.”<sup>4</sup> This fear led us into the forty-odd year long Cold War. Luckily, the Cold War was fought against a cautious state and the battles consisted of research and development in nuclear weapons, constructing their systems of delivery and defense from them, and military buildup in general. In contrast, the war on terrorism is not a war that can be won by developing weapons or by funding the military. Our fight is against organizations that can disperse and regroup at will, so no amount of state-targeting and conventional war will bring success.

Instead, we need to combat the root causes of terrorism, which is an aspect of Bush’s foreign policy that is saliently missing. He acknowledges “the emergence of a small number of rogue states that...hate the United States and everything for which it stands.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, how does one deal with such states? We must be prepared to stop them before they threaten us, and use our alliances and military power to defeat them, Bush responds. He allows that we should be “diminishing the underlying conditions that spawn terrorism” and “kindle the hopes and aspirations of freedom of those in societies ruled by the sponsors of global terrorism”<sup>6</sup>. Instead, why not inflame said discontent by revolutionarily grouping the “bad” guys into their own “Axis of Evil”? There is nothing

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<sup>3</sup> Harry S. Truman, Truman Doctrine Address, March 12, 1947. *Public Papers of the Presidents, Harry S. Truman*, 1947. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963, 178-9

<sup>4</sup> George F. Kennan to Secretary of State, February 22, 1946, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, VI. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970, 708

<sup>5</sup> National Security Strategy, 14

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 6

like fanning the flames of a fire; it is hard to imagine such a snafu has been committed since Kennan first called the communists parasites.

Additionally, part of Bush's policy is to "work with others to defuse regional conflicts". Certainly, he wants to pour soothing water on the religious tinderbox that is the Palestinian-Israeli crisis. It is an oft-cited cause for Arab discontent and Islamic radicalism. However, nowhere is this reason mentioned in his explanation of the crisis, and one is left to wonder how serious Bush can be about the war on terrorism, if he can so weakly battle the problems of a Palestinian state. If Bush was truly afraid of remaining idle "while dangers gather", he would move faster and decisively to pressure Ariel Sharon into a conciliatory frame of mind.

In fact, it seems that thus far in the war on terrorism, Bush has been content to fight the battles that win him the most political support at home even when faced with stonewalled opposition overseas. With strong pro-Israel sentiment in-house and an utter distaste for Saddam Hussein hands down, it was easier to go after Saddam. However, by exercising that pre-emptive strike, Bush has set a worldwide precedent and, by leaving Iraq thus far empty-handed of evidence, irrevocably damaged our reputation. He has failed thus far as well in "kindling the hopes and aspirations of freedom of those in societies ruled by the sponsors of global terrorism" quite simply because he has done only that. In both Afghanistan, where warlords roam the countryside with fatter wallets and more ammunition than the central government, and now Iraq, the US military establishment has left behind ruined states—the perfect breeding grounds for terrorists that Bush has claimed to be trying to correct. He chose to send his military home to cheering constituencies and finance massive tax cuts than to actually shoulder the burden

and bring Afghanistan and Iraq into stability. This cannot but lead to negative consequences in the short run.

The war on terrorism is a new war, and its ramifications both in domestic and foreign policies are revolutionary and dramatically amplified. On the domestic front, the side effects of the Patriot Act are not yet known, and will be felt for years into the future. Afghanistan is not yet stable; Iraq is farther yet. And now Bush, Wolfowitz, and the other Neo-Cons are setting their sites on Iran. But will these revolutionary policies make Americans safer? Will changes to our domestic way of life ensure our safety? And how far do we go before the result of the benefit-cost analysis is negative? Certainly, even the Neo-Cons must admit you cannot win the war on terrorism by attacking the symptoms of what is a deeper social psychosis. No matter how many times your bag is searched, scanned, or stamped a terrorist can still hi-jack a plane. No matter how many police watch a bridge, any old Joe Schmoe can still pack his car full of explosives and auto-ignite. The unfortunate reality we face now is that people no longer have pious, logical, or financial barriers to stop them from committing such acts. How can you fight a war against such an enemy? Mitigate the risks at the cost of your way of life? Certainly paranoid strikes at convenient targets will do little to dislodge the existing anti-Western psychosis; in fact, most of the world thinks such actions will inflame it. Therefore, this college student submits that Bush's policy is not only revolutionary, but as much a mistake as Truman's paranoid decision to drive a wall between the States and the Union. That is, if you believe William's thesis that the Cold War was preventable...