

What difference does difference make? Reflections on neo-conservatism as a liberal cosmopolitan project

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The aim of this article is to reflect critically on the relationship between liberal democracy, peace and prosperity, both generally and in the light of current international events. The article is particularly concerned with an examination of neo-conservative ideas in the Bush administration, and relating these to ideas of liberal internationalism and cosmopolitanism and democratic peace, which suggest that liberal democratic states are less likely to go to war with each other than authoritarian states, and that therefore the 'international community' should promote the expansion of liberal democracy. Proponents tend to extend this argument by suggesting that liberal democratic political institutions should be supplemented by the promotion of 'free market' principles, which will ensure economic growth and prosperity. Although such arguments do not necessarily lead to the neo-conservative project that has influenced the Bush administration, the article points to some areas of overlap. Moreover, the main concern is less with demonstrating that US foreign policy under Bush has been more unilateralist than its predecessors, which it clearly has been, and more with examining policy on the terms defined by its advocates. The article therefore takes seriously the claim that neo-conservatism represents a 'universalist' project, and therefore the critique has implications beyond a narrow rejection of the Bush administration. Indeed, in identifying some areas of convergence between neo-conservatism and neo-liberal cosmopolitanism, some broader problems related to (liberal) cosmopolitanism are addressed. More specifically, the argument is made that US foreign policy under Bush does not represent such a substantial break from previous administrations as is sometimes implied. The first argument then is that US foreign policy under Bush is in many respects compatible with (neo-liberal) globalisation. But the second argument is that even on these terms, the project is fundamentally flawed—an argument that has wider implications for understanding 'actually existing globalisation', and even some versions of cosmopolitanism. In particular, it is suggested that the simplistic promotion of liberal democracy and the free market, abstract from their emergence in history, ignores the inequalities that characterise the contemporary international order (and the historical legacies that led to this order) and therefore questions simplistic notions of democratic peace and liberal interventionism. Indeed, given that these interventions involve the projection of malign hegemonic power, they fail to correspond to wider cosmopolitan principles.

The argument proceeds in the following way. First, notions of democratic

peace are outlined and linked to the contemporary political project of neo-conservatism, which claims some (selective) allegiance to cosmopolitan principles. This discussion is used more explicitly to question current political projects based on liberal interventionism, including the selective cosmopolitanism of the Blair government in Britain and (more controversially) the neo-conservative *Project for the New American Century*. The second section takes issue with the democratic peace thesis and the Blair–Bush projects, suggesting that they are examples of ‘linear cosmopolitanism’, which fail to take account of ‘difference’ in the world order. Linear cosmopolitanism is questioned through reflection on the emergence of state sovereignty, liberal democracy, the international order, and current patterns of state formation and conflict in (parts of) the developing world. The third section points to the more implicit linearity that can be found in some (Marxist, post-colonial) accounts, which reject cosmopolitanism outright. Finally, in the conclusion some tentative comments are made to suggest some ways out of this potential impasse.

Neo-conservatism as a liberal, cosmopolitan project

One of the more widely influential academic concepts in international relations is that of the so-called democratic peace. Its advocates argue that war is less likely to take place between liberal democratic states, as such states are more likely to promote collective international interests, and to respond to their electorates in accountable and transparent ways which further undermine the likelihood of war.¹ This theory often draws on Kantian notions of perpetual peace, based on the idea of a world republic of peaceful nation-states which champion a spirit of commerce and a ‘universal community’. A long tradition of liberal internationalist thought from the eighteenth century has argued that perpetual peace could be promoted through systems of a world federation of republican government (Kant), an educated class of citizens (Bentham), interdependence through free trade (Smith) and the promotion of international law (Kant).² The case for liberal peace was (unsuccessfully) re-made in the inter-war period, particularly by Woodrow Wilson, and has been revived in the context of the post-Cold War world, where the argument has been made that state competition has been reduced and therefore the prospects for co-operation increased. Furthermore, the potential for co-operation has also increased as a result of the growing interdependence between and beyond nation-states, often characterised as the era of globalisation.³

One of the major problems faced by theories of liberal peace is how one deals with the question of non-liberal states in the international order. Essentially, non-liberal states are regarded as being unreasonable, and so potentially sites for intervention. But this argument potentially undermines the view that liberal states are more tolerant than other states, which of course leads to topical questions related to humanitarian intervention. In an early formulation of his argument Doyle notes this dilemma but effectively evades the question of what to do about it; Russett places his hopes on the continued expansion of liberal democracy across the world; while Owen argues that liberalism is best because it is ‘tolerant relative to its alternatives’.⁴ This last argument does not entirely deal with the issue, and some ethical questions related to it will be returned to later in the article. But for the moment, it is clear that the argument can and has

been made that because liberal democracy represents the best form of government, and the best hope for peaceful co-existence between states, then there is a case for liberal democracies to intervene in the affairs of non-liberal states. Indeed, in some accounts the domestic structure of liberal democracies, and the implications this has for (peaceful) international relations, is itself sufficient for such states to have established the moral high ground. In developing his thesis, Doyle himself reflects on the strategies available to the liberal 'zone of peace', arguing that realist balance of power politics may be necessary to protect this zone, and also suggests that intervention may take place.⁵ Although he hopes that liberal democracy will spread through example (what he calls 'inspiration'), he does accept that there may also be cases for 'instigation' (peace building and economic restructuring) or, when the majority face systematic human rights abuses, intervention.

While such arguments do not necessarily lead to neo-conservatism, a version of this argument has clearly influenced the foreign policy of the US and British states, at least since the attacks on the US in September 2001, and probably earlier. Indeed, a version of this argument lies at the heart of one strand of US foreign policy, based on the notion of manifest destiny, and the idea that what is good for the US state is good for the international community. The rest of this section outlines the rationale for such thinking. Contrary to some 'liberal internationalist' and even cosmopolitan approaches, which suggest that the unilateralism of the Bush administration represents a substantial break from the prospects for a democratic peace, it will be argued that US 'neo-conservatism' represents in some respects a substantial *continuity* with traditional strands of US foreign policy. This point is not made to suggest that Bush II has simply meant 'business as usual', still less that there is no difference between Bush and Clinton,⁶ but it is made to warn against simplistic notions of substantial breaks from previous US administrations.⁷ Indeed, it will be argued that the alliance between the 'cosmopolitan' Blair and the 'realist' Bush can only be understood in this way. In the rest of this section, the relationship between the 'cosmopolitan' Blair and 'realist' neo-conservatism is examined.

In his speech to the US Congress on 18 July 2003, Blair made the following statement:

Ours are not western values. They are the universal values of the human spirit ... What you can bequeath to this anxious world is the light of liberty ... Why America? ... (B)ecause destiny puts you in this place in history, in this moment in time, and the task is yours to do. And our job, my nation ... our job is to be there with you. You are not going to be alone. We'll be with you in this fight for liberty.⁸

President Bush similarly has made similar statements, such as '(t)he United States ... (has) unparalleled responsibilities, obligation and opportunity'. Condoleezza Rice has asserted that the United States has unrivaled power and 'is on the right side of history'.⁹ For those who believe that there is an inseparable link between US national interest and universal, global interest, the complaint made by former British Cabinet minister Robin Cook that the war in Iraq was about the expansion of US hegemony is irrelevant. What links Blair and Bush is the notion that US hegemony and the global good are inseparable. Blair therefore saw his support for the US-led war against Iraq as fully consistent with his

underlying political philosophy, and on the eve of war talked of it as being part of a 'third way war'.¹⁰ In other words it is a war that has the long-term goal of promoting democratic peace. Blair's case for war rested on the threat posed by Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, but after the war, when no such weapons were found, the case for war was re-made on humanitarian grounds which, in some respects, accord with the cosmopolitan principle that the human rights of oppressed Iraqis 'trumped' the sovereignty of the Iraqi state. Moreover, in Blair's eyes at least, this was deemed to be good not only for the Iraqi people, but for the wider 'international community' as it rid the world of a major rogue state, and thus potentially expanded the zone of peace. And ultimately, if this war meant the expansion of US hegemony, then that was no problem as US hegemony was good for the world, as it promoted a liberal international order. Ironically, in this respect Blair's thinking was very much part of an Atlanticist tradition of 'old Labour' foreign policy.

Robert Cooper, a former adviser to Tony Blair, has interpreted the democratic peace in a particularly novel way.¹¹ He has argued that the world can be divided into three kinds of states. Post-modern states are basically advanced liberal democracies, committed to peace and compromise and beyond the power politics of the old state system. Modern states, such as China, are relatively stable but are still committed to competitive expansion. Finally, pre-modern states are failed states and sources of instability. It is the duty of the post-modern states to intervene in the pre-modern states in order to preserve order, even if this means the promotion of double standards and colonial power. Cooper is interestingly hesitant over the nature of the US state (and indeed has been critical of US conduct in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein), and it is not clear if he would categorise it as modern or post-modern. But it could be argued that—given the right direction, say, by someone like Tony Blair—the US would fit the role of the post-modern hegemonic state.

The case made for this link can be closely related to the neo-conservatism of the Project for the New American Century. Contemporary US neo-conservatism has its roots in the Cold War years and much of its focus has been on US domestic policy. Nevertheless, in the Clinton years neo-conservatives developed a distinctive foreign policy that was to be applied to the post-Cold War era. In some respects the focus on US unilateral power represents a break from previous US administrations, although there are deep roots in the Reagan era. But there is also some considerable continuity too, particularly concerning the notions that freedom, the free market and liberal democratic states are universal goods, and the US can play an indispensable role in their promotion. The definition of freedom is contested, but in this case it means certain individual freedoms such as freedom of speech and movement, and above all the right to own private property and compete in a free market. Thus, both Bush and Blair remain committed to the expansion of neo-liberal globalisation, based on the free movement of goods, services and money (but not labour). Quite typically for example, Chapter 6 of the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States was entitled 'Ignite a New Era of Economic Growth through Free Markets and Free Trade'. In this context of globalising market expansion, liberal democracy is regarded as the best government, partly because it allows for such market expansion, but also because it is associated with government which is neither authoritarian nor dictatorial, nor warlike. It is for this reason that many critics

of Bush (and to an extent Blair) supported the war against Saddam Hussein, a point returned to below. According to Bush and Blair then, US hegemony expands human rights and democracy. Moreover, in the process of such expansion, the threat of war, terrorism and instability is undermined as liberal democratic states are more likely to negotiate and compromise, rather than go to war with each other. In opposing people that are hostile to democracy and freedom, US hegemony therefore serves to promote a democratic peace. It is therefore the duty of freedom-loving peoples to support the US-led war against terror and rogue states.

In practice, many advocates of liberal internationalism and varieties of cosmopolitanism have been highly critical of the conduct of the Bush administration, and Blair's support for US unilateralism.¹² Indeed, it is of course true that many of the actions taken in the name of liberal internationalism and democratic peace have not been compatible with the requirements laid down by proponents, particularly those relating to co-operation and international law (see conclusion below). Moreover, unilateralism entails not only less co-operation with other states, but also an increased reliance on the projection of US state power. But it is mistaken to only focus on this aspect of neo-conservatism and/or the Bush administration. Cooper's threefold division of the world finds an echo in the neo-conservative division of the world into core liberal democratic and peripheral, unfree states, and a strategy designed to increase the incorporation of the latter into the former.¹³ Neo-conservative commentator Thomas Barnett similarly divides the world into a 'functioning core' and a 'non-integrating gap', and interestingly bases the divide in terms of the degree of states' incorporation into 'globalisation'.¹⁴ State Department Director of Policy Planning Richard Haass argues that these divisions mean that the core, functioning states have an obligation to intervene into non-functioning states that have limited rights of sovereignty, a duty that has increased since the attacks on 11 September 2001.¹⁵ Mazarr, a senior official at the Department of Defence and admirer of Bush's 'idealism', goes as far as suggesting that it represents an idealism worthy of the liberal internationalism of Woodrow Wilson.¹⁶

It is true that for neo-conservatives, US hegemony and its manifest destiny are simply articles of faith, requiring little reasoned justification, because 'American values are universal', and the US leads a 'benevolent empire'.¹⁷ In other words, the neo-conservative project is a more overtly unilateralist project than the multilateralism championed by contemporary cosmopolitan theorists. Indeed, Kaldor and her collaborators regard the Bush administration as an example of regressive globalisation, as they seek to maximise the benefits of the few regardless of its effects on others.¹⁸ Certainly the neo-conservative project does ultimately argue that the US state must come first, but it also sees no incompatibility between US hegemony and the universal good, even if it makes little attempt to justify this link. Perhaps the most prominent neo-conservative thinker/official, Paul Wolfowitz has argued that 'nothing could be less realistic than the version of the "realist" view of foreign policy that dismisses human rights as an important tool of American foreign policy ... (W)hat is most impressive is how often promoting democracy has actually advanced American interests'.¹⁹ Moreover, this close linkage between US and global interest has a long history in US foreign policy, and it hardly represents a substantial break from an era of unqualified multilateralism. For instance, the post-war settlement in the capitalist world

represented a mixture of multilateral governance and US leadership, much to the disappointment of Keynes who failed to get his way at Bretton Woods, and the collapse of (aspects of) this settlement in the 1970s has given the US enormous international leverage (with the broad consent of other leading powers), not least through the dominant role of the dollar as an international currency.²⁰ Bill Clinton echoed a long line of US presidents when he talked of the need for 'America' to 'continue to lead the world we did so much to make', adding that 'our mission is timeless', while Bush senior talked of the US' 'unique responsibility'. Bush junior has simply intensified the rhetoric, arguing that '(f)reedom is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birthright of every person ... Today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom's triumph over all foes. The US welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission'.²¹ This self-belief is not so far removed from that of the British Empire in the nineteenth century, and is closely linked to the notion of US 'manifest destiny', and the idea that US intervention is designed, in the words of President Wilson in 1916, to 'make the world safe for democracy'.²² Indeed, such notions go to the heart of state formation and expansion in the US itself, which was justified on the grounds that it meant extending the area of freedom, and therefore equating US national interest and the universal interest of humanity.²³ Since the attacks on 11 September 2001, the US has pursued a more aggressive policy based on pre-emptive attacks and nation-building, but such policies can certainly be traced back to debates over pre-emptive nuclear strikes against the Soviet Union in the early 1950s, and a whole host of interventions in the South during the Cold War. More specifically in terms of policy in Iraq, it was during Clinton's second term that the sanctions regime was more stringently implemented, air-strikes were intensified and (albeit led by Congress) regime change became official policy.

A cosmopolitanism that is nostalgic for the pre-Bush era is thus woefully misguided.²⁴ As a related aside, it must be said that Kaldor *et al.*'s argument that globalisation is progressive as against the nation-state, and multilateralism progressive as against unilateralism, betrays a remarkable naivety concerning the role of the US state under Clinton, which was certainly prepared at times to act in unilateralist ways. Moreover, the idea that the expansion of 'global markets'—a policy supported by Bush and Clinton, if selectively *in both cases*—represents an unambiguous global good is highly problematic (see below), not least because it ignores the ways in which state power (directly and through 'multilateral' institutions) has been utilised to promote such expansion. While it may be true that a critical cosmopolitan perspective will incorporate a critique of the Bush administration, so too will it be sensitive to power within multilateral institutions and the interests promoted by the expansion of liberal 'free trade'. A cosmopolitanism that espouses a 'reforming globalisation' or 'global civil society', in opposition to states *per se*, is thus hardly sufficient.

To return to the central argument however, what unites neo-conservatism and Blair's supposed cosmopolitanism is the argument that intervention is necessary against illiberal zones of war in order to preserve the democratic peace. This is all the more imperative in the context of the evils of terrorism and rogue states. In keeping with an interpretation of liberal or democratic peace, the question of who plays the role of policing the world is answered by the fact that both the US and Britain are liberal democracies, and that they therefore

have a right to intervene in the affairs of sovereign states. In the messy real world of international politics, there are of course other factors too, such as the terrorist threat, electoral considerations, and so on, but the basic ethical case is made on these grounds, and it is for this reason that 'Britain' and the 'US' are said to stand shoulder to shoulder on these issues.

Neo-conservatism as a failed project

This section critiques the claims made by advocates of the democratic peace, and uses this critique in order to criticise neo-conservative and some cosmopolitan arguments. Firstly, some broad criticisms of the theory of the democratic peace are made, followed by an examination of how liberal democracy, the 'free market' and peace should be regarded as 'historical outcomes', rather than ahistorical models that can be simplistically imposed by liberal nation-states. In particular notions of state sovereignty, violence and liberal democracy will be historicised. It will then be shown how this applies to the question of the free market, and how the current international order militates against, rather than guarantees, economic growth and political order. The argument will more broadly suggest that 'state failure' needs to be historicised, and that it is a far from abnormal phenomenon. This discussion will then be drawn upon to re-examine the current political projects of the Bush and Blair administrations.

At the heart of the democratic peace thesis is a basic contradiction between its cosmopolitan credentials on the one hand, and its state-centrism on the other. Cosmopolitanism's core arguments rest on the idea that state sovereignty is not absolute, and that the rights of individuals can be more important than the sovereignty of states. Kant himself addressed these problems, albeit in a far from convincing way.²⁵ At the same time, peace between states is said to be best guaranteed by liberal democratic states. This opens up all kinds of tensions between nation-states and the global good, some of which are alluded to above, and some of which will be looked at further below. But the tension focused on first is the implicit linearity combined with state-centrism that dominates the democratic peace thesis. Essentially, some (war-prone) states 'lack' what (peaceful) states have, namely, a liberal democratic state and prosperous, free market economy. Therefore, the former must catch up with the latter. Like 1950s modernisation theory, the argument essentially assumes a linear model of development in which backward states simply catch up with the advanced ones. But if we are to take one of the claims of contemporary cosmopolitanism seriously, namely, that globalisation means the transcendence of purely state-determined communities of fate, then we must recognise at the very least that the institutional character of states is not determined simply by internal factors. In fairness, the democratic peace thesis does recognise that international factors do impact on states within the 'zones of war'—hence, Doyle's reference to inspiration, integration and intervention. But the problem with this argument is—again like modernisation theory—that insofar as there is interaction between peaceful and war-prone states, this is purely benign. Instead of discretely separating zones in this way, we need to focus on the international system as a whole, which 'compels recognition of the mutually constitutive relations between so-called zones of war and zones of peace'.²⁶ This does not mean that the zone of war is simply a function of, or can be read off from, the zone of

peace, but it does mean that we need to recognise interaction in these zones far more seriously than the democratic peace thesis allows. In so doing, we also have the potential for a better understanding of neo-conservatism. This point applies to an understanding of state interaction in international politics, the question of state sovereignty and liberal democracy, and the inequalities of the international economy, each of which are now examined.

States and international politics

The first and perhaps most obvious point that needs to be made is that liberal states have a far from liberal history in terms of the promotion of liberal democracy in the developing world. This stretches back to the colonial era, but also the Cold War period, where support was given to authoritarian, anti-communist regimes, and the US intervened directly and indirectly in a whole host of conflicts and anti-democratic coups. Indeed, some senior members of the Bush administration were intimately involved in this anti-democratic behaviour in the eighties.

But various cosmopolitans, liberals and democratic peace advocates could make the response that 'that was then and this is now'. In other words, these 'regrettable' events were necessary in the context of the geopolitical conflicts that characterised the Cold War, but not in the post-1989 era. The argument here is that the post-1989 era represents a qualitatively new period in world politics, which is more conducive to liberal or cosmopolitan principles. In this new context there is widespread disagreement about the question of US hegemony. Some cosmopolitans see the unilateral exercise of such hegemony as dysfunctional,²⁷ and argue that multilateralism is a necessity. The Bush administration itself argues that unchallenged US hegemony represents an opportunity for the promotion of benign hegemony that is good for the US and the world. Despite some misgivings about unilateralism and US tactics, the Blair administration ultimately shares this world-view, and argues that it is compatible with cosmopolitan principles.

But perhaps all these views tend to exaggerate the novelty of the post-1989 era. First, both before and after 1989 we have seen the global expansion of neo-liberal economic policies which, it is argued below, are not conducive to long-term prosperity. Second, in many cases the 'zone of war' regions are rooted in Cold War conflicts. The rhetoric of Bush and Blair concerning the 'axis of evil' suggests that rogue states or terrorist networks have somehow just emerged. Similarly, it is even sometimes suggested that the attacks on 11 September were simply irrational attacks that simply came from nowhere. Irrational, unjustified and murderous they certainly were, but they were rooted in a long history of conflict in the Middle East and West Asia, which stretched back at least to the Cold War, if not to the colonial era.²⁸ Indeed, the attacks by former allies of the US in Afghanistan, offended above all by the US military presence in Saudi Arabia, can be regarded as an example of 'blowback', by which previous practices in US foreign policy return to haunt later generations.²⁹ These points also have implications for cosmopolitan approaches such as that of Kaldor,³⁰ who characterises post-1989 conflicts as new wars based on ethnic conflict and new nationalisms, backed by corrupt elites and carried out by civilian militia. But—albeit in a more sophisticated way than recourse to notions of 'evil'—this view

ignores the wider historical roots of such conflicts, which often stretch back to the colonial or Cold War eras. Moreover, and despite Kaldor's own critical stance towards the actions of the United States under Bush, her promotion of 'islands of civility' and 'cosmopolitan law enforcement' are, at the very least, easily appropriated by neo-conservatism.

These points are important for one overriding reason, which relates to the question of motives. In the case of US neo-conservatism, the question of bad motives does not arise, either in the current period or in the Cold War era, because it is taken as self-evident that US intervention, based on the expansion of 'freedom', is always good. For those of a more critical cosmopolitan inclination, their case is based on a sharp break between an old era of power politics and a new one of global responsibility. But this argument is almost as unconvincing as the neo-conservative one, for even if we accept that the most powerful states have the best motives for intervention, given that until recently such motives were highly questionable, interventions are unlikely to be perceived in this way in most parts of the world. This is reinforced by the fact that any intervention is by its nature selective and therefore faces the charge of double standards. The liberal interventionist response that double standards are better than indifference to dictatorship³¹ is as state-centric as the democratic peace thesis, as it ignores how one specific intervention has implications for wider geopolitics—as the example of Afghanistan above clearly illustrates. Indeed, Ignatieff is even prepared to accept that US motives are often malign and self-interested, but still argues that US intervention represents the best available option. This argument is clearly an apology for the rule of empire rather than the rule of law.³²

State sovereignty and liberal democracy

Liberal notions of intervention are united in their belief that liberal democratic government is most conducive to guaranteeing human rights at home and peaceful relations with other states abroad. At one level this is undoubtedly true, and very few would deny that liberal democracy—for all its limitations (see below)—is indeed preferable to dictatorship. But the problem with liberal views is that they assume that such a system can be easily implemented, and that conflict and liberal democracy are incompatible. But in fact, something close to the opposite is true, namely, that liberal democracy is the product of conflict. Now in a sense the neo-conservative position does accept this argument, given that it recognises the need for benign force to overcome dictatorship. But the problem here is the assumption that this force can provide 'quick-fix' solutions that will then lead to the extension of liberal democracy. Neo-conservatives make much of the success of nation-building in post-war Japan and West Germany, but crucial to those successes was the existence of domestic social and political forces that led the democratic transition. The record in Afghanistan and Iraq is very different, and the popular forces in the latter country are unlikely to enjoy the support of the United States. Indeed, despite consistent warnings from the CIA, neo-conservatism's project in Iraq was essentially based on a naïve belief that Ahmad Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress was a serious social force that could lead the country to liberal democracy. This project lies in ruins, and Chalabi no longer enjoys the significant support of any arm of the US state.

Moreover, insofar as it relies on the construction of institutionally separate

'economic' and 'political' spheres, and confines formal politics to the latter, liberal democracy is itself a limited form of democracy. It therefore rests on a 'depoliticising politics', in which citizens are entitled to vote and to own private property, but are expected to limit their demands so that there is no excessive 'intervention' in the sphere of 'freedom', the market economy.³³ The tension between liberalism and democracy is therefore all too apparent and, when faced with the alleged trade-off between 'freedom' and 'democracy', neo-liberals and indeed neo-conservatives opt for the former. This was the essential thinking behind the neo-conservative Reagan doctrine in the eighties, when support was given to 'authoritarians' against 'totalitarians', the latter of whom, even when democratically elected, challenged the dominance of the 'free market'. The neo-conservatives in the Bush administration may therefore be committed to the expansion of 'democracy' to the Middle East and beyond, but it is a limited kind of democracy and one that can easily be dispensed with in favour of the primacy of 'market expansion'. The falsehoods, cover-ups and human rights abuses in the war in Iraq should be seen in this light, and they are far from being aberrations in the history of US—and western—foreign policy. Indeed, historically labour movements have generally played central roles in the expansion of a democratic public sphere, at least in the western world.³⁴ These movements have faced a number of political defeats in the 'advanced' capitalist countries, which has facilitated the increased domination of the 'market' and erosion of liberal democratic procedures. Moreover, in Iraq there has been a limited but significant revival of trade unions since the invasion, but this is hardly likely to be regarded as a positive development, either by US neo-conservatives or 'Islamist' forces in Iraq.

Indeed, the spread of liberal democracy to the developing world since the eighties can be seen in this light. Democratisation has essentially been limited to formal procedures which have largely left intact wider social structures that guarantee high levels of social and political inequality and undermined labour and other movements. Of course resistance continues, but this is *despite* rather than because of dominant state policies such as structural adjustment. Moreover, in this context of structural adjustment, such inequalities have often been intensified and, given the influence of the Washington institutions in heavily indebted developing countries, serious questions arise as to the autonomy that democratic states actually enjoy. This does not necessarily mean that processes of democratisation have simply been a 'sham', and the end of authoritarian and military dictatorships has been a welcome development. But equally the limitations are so great that the designation 'low intensity democracy' is appropriate.³⁵ This can further be seen if we examine the wider international context in which democratisation has taken place.

The international economy

One of the key arguments made by neo-liberal cosmopolitans, as well as neo-conservatives, is that the world economy represents an enormous opportunity for 'later developers'. States can enter the liberal zone of peace if they adopt pro-free market policies that accompany processes of liberal democratisation. Appropriate institutions must be put in place, which respect accountability, transparency and the rule of law.³⁶ These institutional changes are seen as the

most appropriate means of promoting 'market friendly' policies, above all of trade, investment and financial liberalisation. Trade liberalisation will encourage competitive efficiency as it will force 'national economies' to exercise their comparative advantage, and therefore specialise in exporting their most efficient goods and services; investment liberalisation will encourage investment by foreign capital; and financial liberalisation will enable access to world financial savings, which will be particularly useful for countries with low rates of domestic savings. This 'neo-liberal cosmopolitan' world-view unites neo-conservatism, the third ways of Blair and Clinton, and the major international economic institutions, including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation. Insofar as it leads to the expansion of 'globalisation' at the cost of nation-states, it is a view that is not incompatible with more critical accounts of cosmopolitanism.³⁷

But it is not remotely convincing. The most successful 'late developers' have selectively drawn on the world market while simultaneously protecting 'national economies' through tariffs, restrictions on the movement of capital, subsidies and even state planning. This applies not only to the first tier newly-industrialising countries such as South Korea and Taiwan, but also to China and India, the two countries that are supposed to confirm the potential of globalisation.³⁸ It is certainly true that none of these (narrowly defined) success stories have progressed through de-linking from the world economy, but equally neither have they simply embraced it through neo-liberal policies. Like all other successful capitalist developers, these countries have selectively protected themselves from higher productivity established economies, so that domestic producers would not face bankruptcy in the face of cheaper imports from established competitors.³⁹ Moreover, their success in breaking into export markets has often been subsidised by the state precisely because of the competition faced by established, cheaper competitors. Given the global context of neo-liberal dominance, not least at the WTO, it can be argued that this strategy of state-guided capitalist development has been severely undermined, and with it the potential for widespread prosperity and therefore expansion of liberal states. Indeed, given the competitive advantages enjoyed by earlier developers, it is not surprising that the dominant tendency in recent years has been for capital to *concentrate* in specific locations, and bypass others.⁴⁰ Certainly, the amount of foreign investment in the developing world has increased in recent years, but this is concentrated in a few countries, and shares of investment and trade have declined for much of the developing world.⁴¹ Moreover, these tendencies have occurred in a period where states in the developing world have liberalised trade and investment, and so have increasingly opened up to the world economy—that is, they have adopted market friendly policies. Moreover, financial liberalisation has encouraged the movement of money into speculative rather than productive investment, which has diverted much needed capital away from development initiatives. Moreover, speculation has increased the volatility of those economies that have received substantial levels of portfolio investment, including those in Latin America and East Asia that have experienced financial crashes in the 1990s and beyond. Furthermore, the US is the major recipient of these financial flows, which are necessary in the context of massive US trade and budget deficits, thus further undermining the potential for prosperity.⁴²

Linearity, difference and cosmopolitanism

The argument so far is essentially twofold. First, despite a more overt and unilateral projection of US state power, neo-conservatism still has a commitment to 'liberal expansion'. This may be selective and contradictory, but it is not incompatible with the self-image of a benign hegemonic power promoting both US state interests and the universal interest. Second, that on its own terms it is a project that cannot succeed. This is not only because of the specific problems caused by US unilateralism, but also because of the wider problems outlined above, namely, the limits of liberal democracy and inequalities of market expansion. In this section I want to reflect a little more on the question of 'failed states' in the international order, because this is a crucial problem for any project of liberal expansion, and if my arguments above are correct, neither 'military humanitarianism' nor market expansion gets to grips with these issues.

If we accept that in Europe, the construction of state sovereignty and liberal democracy were violent, conflict-ridden processes,⁴³ and that parts of the periphery are (in some ways) repeating these bloody processes, then there are a number of possible political implications. One is that the so-called failed states of the periphery are simply states that are undergoing inevitable historical transitions, and that the end result may be a progressive one. Western notions of rogue states therefore lack historical awareness, not least of their own bloody history. Moreover, it could be argued that western interventions have simply made matters worse, and that insofar as such interventions are really about 'western imperialist interests', there can be no intervention in the developing world. Intervention can therefore be opposed on grounds of historical inevitability and anti-imperialism. Let us leave aside anti-imperialism for the moment, and focus instead on historical inevitability, because this does beg a number of uncomfortable questions. If we support such a linear account of history, so that some nation-states (in formation) are at a lower stage of history, and such people in those states are simply necessary sacrifices in the onward march of progress, then we have a politics of indifference, in which the suffering of such people is an unfortunate necessity. Now of course most anti-interventionists do not make their case through the necessity of history, but instead refer to the self-interest of major powers or the (under-theorised) expansion of capitalism. But both positions do face the problem of insensitivity to the sufferings of people that live under highly authoritarian states. Which brings us to the cosmopolitan principle, which supports forms of intervention that can protect the rights of individuals, over and above the sovereignty of nation-states. The question then becomes one of what kind of intervention. Most contemporary cosmopolitans have strongly opposed the wars of the Bush administration,⁴⁴ but cosmopolitanism has become a guiding principle of Blair's commitment to humanitarian wars in the age of globalisation. But this cosmopolitanism suffers from effective indifference to the inevitable deaths of innocents in wars which, given their inevitability, cannot be excused by reference to higher motives than the deposed dictators. The inevitable double standards and military might are experienced by many of the world's population, not as the promotion of human rights but as the imperialist exercise of power. This becomes all the more evident when cosmopolitan principles are used by the Bush administration to increase unaccountable US power in the international order. Moreover, cosmopolitanism itself

can suffer from a linear approach (ironically, given its eighteenth-century origins), based on a broad acceptance of the rigid Westphalia–globalisation dichotomy, in which state sovereignty applied to a previous era, but has been undermined in the era of globalisation. As a result, it too easily lends itself to notions of globalisation as progressive and state-centrism as reactionary.⁴⁵ This first step can then move on to Blair's self-defined cosmopolitanism, and ultimately a defence of US hegemony in the name of human rights and against failed (pre-modern) states. In other words, cosmopolitanism can easily lead to justifications for the exercise of power by the dominant states. And when it is further linked to the globalisation of neo-liberalism, it becomes the latest phase of capitalist imperialism.

These issues therefore relate to questions of 'difference'. Post-colonial critiques of liberalism and Marxism, and by implication cosmopolitanism, emphasise the ways in which 'universal' theories tend towards an authoritarian homogenisation of societies, cultures and polities that do not 'fit' the requirements of the theory in question. But the problem with such perspectives is that they can lead to 'indifference', so that acts of violence, persecution and so on are tolerated in the name of 'difference'. Thus, in our discussion, crude relativist arguments could be used to justify slavery or political persecution in the name of 'anti-imperialism'. Arguments along these lines have been made by Saddam Hussein and Robert Mugabe, among others. Much has been made of this 'instrumental relativism' by 'liberal imperialists' who supported the war in Iraq. However, the approach to difference taken here is slightly different, and the focus is less on cultural particularity and more on social specificity. In other words, in the absence of wider social and political change, notions of 'universal standards' are unlikely to have the desired results, precisely because universal standards ignore such specificity in the first place. This focus on social specificity does not mean accepting the rhetoric of a Mugabe, Milosevic or Saddam, but neither does it mean minimising the unequal social and political contexts that militate against the quick-fix solutions offered by liberal imperialists. This is not an argument for blanket relativism, nor indeed for total opposition to all forms of intervention in the developing world. Crude relativist arguments are guilty of absolutising difference, but equally, insofar as they assume that dominant norms are shared by all within specific nation-states, they are guilty of bad sociology. However, this accusation applies equally to liberalism, which tends to assume that human behaviour can be reduced to the rational individual of liberal thought, except when this is 'held back' by rogue states or terrorists. Thus in the case of post-intervention Iraq, the population is divided into 'good' and 'evil' Iraqis (and outsiders), the former said to be clamouring for western-style free markets and liberal democracy, the latter simply promoting nihilism. But while it is the case that much of the opposition to the occupation in Iraq is indeed reactionary, it is also the case that the 'good Iraqis' have increasingly opposed the occupation and even shown some sympathy for some (though not all) insurgent groups within Iraq. The misplaced optimism is rooted in liberal claims to universalism outside of specific historical and social contexts, and thus fails to recognise the limitations of 'humanitarian intervention' and nation-building, and that in many cases certain forms of intervention make things worse. Indeed, US neo-conservatism is more guilty of liberal optimism than other US liberals (though it is certainly shared by Tony Blair) even if the former are more willing to

compromise their liberalism than the latter in terms of promoting the means to the desired ends. If this emphasis on context sounds like a recipe for indifference, then apologists for the war in Iraq would do well to remember the rhetoric of those pro-war politicians who argued that there was simply no time to delay intervention. Such a war was 'sold'—at least to those who wanted to believe—at a time when US annual military spending remains significantly higher than the finance required to eliminate the extremes of global poverty.⁴⁶ But for neo-liberalism in particular, and liberalism more generally, such poverty either lies outside the ambit of (individual) human rights, or is caused by 'market unfriendly' policies, an argument already rejected earlier in the article.

Conclusions: cosmopolitan scepticism against 'cosmopolitan' projects

This article has critically reflected on the dilemmas of liberal internationalism, humanitarian military intervention, the democratic peace and cosmopolitanism, with particular reference to neo-conservatism in the United States. Rather than argue that the 'universal' good espoused by neo-conservatism is merely ideological 'cover' for US state power, or indeed capitalist expansion, the argument has been outlined in such a way as to address neo-conservatism's relationship to these other factors on its own terms. In this conclusion, the broad arguments are summarised, but the article also concludes by more explicitly criticising neo-conservatism, and in the process endorsing a 'sceptical' or 'critical' cosmopolitan approach.

In treating US neo-conservatism as a (selective, flawed) cosmopolitan project, that in some ways is consistent with earlier projects of liberal internationalism, we are in a position not only to criticise the unilateralism of the Bush administration, but also the problems of more liberal approaches to world order, such as the neo-liberal cosmopolitanism of the Blair administration. In particular, attempts to promote universal standards based on 'humanitarian intervention', liberal democracy and expansion of the 'free market' are seriously flawed. Such projects ignore the historical conflicts that have given rise to state sovereignty and liberal democracy, the selectivity, self-interest and continued double standards associated with specific 'western' interventions, and the political, economic and social inequalities of the global order. These factors not only undermine the potential success of promoting universal standards, but equally the fact that these exist means that the very *existence* of such standards, no matter how laudable an aim, is seriously undermined in the context of the real world of international politics. Recognising these inequalities is not an argument against *any* forms of intervention, and still less is it an argument for crude political relativism. But it is an argument that suggests that liberal internationalism and some forms of cosmopolitanism ignore social and political hierarchies at their peril. Indeed, we can go further and suggest that it is precisely those advocates of liberal imperialism that are guilty of crude political relativism. This can be seen if we briefly turn to the reality of US neo-conservatism in the context of state power in the international order. In addressing the United Nations, Bush made the case for military intervention against Iraq on the basis that 'a regime that has lost its legitimacy will also lose its power'. But, '(o)ne might well ask why the Bush administration comprehends the importance of international legitimacy for Iraqi power, but fails to understand its importance with respect

to American power'.⁴⁷ For if democracy is to be valued, then this cannot be selective. It must apply not only to states in relation to their domestic populations, but also to the international system of nation-states.⁴⁸ In this international system, the United States has a poor record of democratic principles, as we have seen. Singer usefully makes the point that '(a)dvocates of democracy should see something wrong with the idea of a nation fewer than 300 million people dominating a planet with more than six billion inhabitants. That's less than 5 per cent of the population ruling over the remainder—more than 95 per cent—without their consent'.⁴⁹

It may of course be utopian to espouse the cause of global democracy, even if, as cosmopolitan democrats point out, a similar argument was used in the past to argue against democracy within nation-states. But surely it involves even more wishful thinking to expect the world's population to passively acquiesce to such a patently undemocratic international system. This is not to romanticise much of the 'anti-imperialist' resistance to current US global domination, much of which is reactionary. But it is absurd to dismiss *all* resistance to the US as the actions of terrorist minorities. Only the most wishful thinking about 'US destiny'—such as that shared by George Bush and Tony Blair—can reduce global politics to simplistic struggles between good and evil. Thus, while US hegemony may be here to stay for the foreseeable future, it is also likely this will continue to give rise to conflict and opposition. The fact that much of this political opposition may not (or shouldn't) be to the taste of progressives does not provide an excuse for uncritically supporting US hegemony.

But at the same time, there is a need for scepticism towards liberal (and liberal cosmopolitan) alternatives. Neo-conservatism is a flawed project, and the Project for the New American Century undoubtedly overestimates the extent to which military power can guarantee US hegemony. But even if the US moves away from such an overtly military and unilateral project, serious problems would persist, and these relate to problems faced by neo-conservatives and liberal cosmopolitans, namely, the difficulty of promoting liberal democracy, peace and prosperity in a deeply divided global order. Contrary to much cosmopolitan rhetoric, which too easily repeats neo-liberal fallacies concerning the dysfunctionality of the nation-state, such divisions are not only caused by 'national' or 'statist' conflicts, but by the inequalities promoted by the global market order. Above all, 'actually existing globalisation' has promoted the marginalisation of parts of the world, even where 'market friendly' policies have been promoted, while financial liberalisation has intensified instability and inequality, not least because US hegemony has relied on the free movement of capital to finance its deficits. These problems were not created by the Bush administration, and indeed such liberalisation was actually intensified above all by the Clinton administration. While certainly preferable to the unilateralism of the Bush administration, commitments to multilateralism and international institutions are insufficient. At their best, cosmopolitan approaches recognise the necessity of social and collective as well as individual rights, but it remains the case that (admittedly radically reformed) nation-states remain crucial agents for promoting such rights. A far more nuanced account of the different functions of nation-states and the ways that these have been eroded is necessary. Indeed, given the (relative) hollowing out of 'welfare states' and related conceptions of public service, and the simultaneous *strengthening* of the military apparatus of one

state, the simplistic liberal cosmopolitan emphasis on the progressive potential of state erosion is misplaced. Moreover, given the military power of this one state, combined with its continued capacity to wield considerable power in other spheres too, US hegemony—at least in its neo-liberal and neo-conservative guises—ultimately undermines the basis for these progressive policies.⁵⁰

Notes

1. See M. Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs: Part One', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1983, pp. 205–35; B. Russett, *Controlling the Sword*, Cambridge, MA, 1993; H. Starr, 'Democracy and Integration: Why Democracies Don't Fight Each Other', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1997, pp. 153–62.
2. See T. McGrew, 'Liberal Internationalism: Between Realism and Cosmopolitanism', in D. Held and T. McGrew (eds), *Governing Globalization*, Cambridge, 2002.
3. See D. Held and T. McGrew (eds), *Governing Globalization*, Cambridge, 2002.
4. M. Doyle, 'Liberalism and World Politics', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4, 1986, p. 1163; Russett, pp. 132–7; J. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, Ithaca, 1997, p. 29.
5. M. Doyle, 'A Liberal View: Preserving and Expanding the Liberal Pacific Union', in J. Hall and T. Paul (eds), *International Order and the Future of World Politics*, Cambridge, 1999.
6. See P. Anderson, 'Casuistries of Peace and War', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 25, No. 5, 2003, and A. Cockburn and J. St. Clair, *America's Imperial Crusades*, London, 2004, for implicit examples of ultra-left dismissals of any political action short of revolution, or in its absence, an effective commitment to an outmoded third worldism.
7. A point which has important implications for understanding the politics of 'globalisation', and specifically the argument that Bush II represents a reversal of the move towards a multilateral, cosmopolitan world order. This argument ignores the tensions in the world order in the 1990s, particularly relating to the world economy, the liberalisation of which promoted widespread financial instability. It was above all the Clinton administration that supported such policies. See P. Gowan, *The Global Gamble*, London, 1999.
8. Quoted in D. Coates and J. Krieger, *Blair's War*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 9.
9. National Security Council, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2002, <www.whitehouse.gov/us>; C. Rice, 'Campaign 2000—Promoting the National Interest', 2000, <www.foreignpolicy2000.org>.
10. T. Blair, 'The Left Should Not Weep if Saddam is Toppled', *Observer*, 10 February 2003. Since then he has stated that in Iraq there was no third way, but this referred specifically to the question of war or peace.
11. R. Cooper, 'Why We Still Need Empires', *The Observer*, 7 April 2002.
12. M. Kaldor, 'American Power: From "Compellence" to Cosmopolitanism?', *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1, 2002, pp. 1–22; D. Held, *Global Covenant*, Cambridge, 2004.
13. M. Mazarr, 'George W. Bush, Idealist', *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 3, 2003, p. 507.
14. T. Barnett, 'The Pentagon's New Map', *Esquire*, 1 March 2003.
15. Mazaar, p. 508.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 509.
17. Rice; R. Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, London, 2003.
18. M. Kaldor, H. Anheier and M. Glasius, 'Global Civil Society in an Age of Regressive Globalisation', in *Global Civil Society Yearbook*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 3–33.
19. P. Wolfowitz, 'Remembering the Future', *The National Interest*, Vol. 59, 2000, <www.nationalinterest.org>.
20. R. Kiely, *The Clash of Globalisations: Neo-liberalism, the Third Way and Anti-globalisation*, Leiden, 2005.
21. B. Clinton, 'Inaugural Address', *The Times*, 21 January 1993; G. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: 102nd Congress, 1st Session, 1991*, Vol. XLVII, 1992, p. 6E.
22. S. Howe, 'American Empire: The History and Future of an Idea', 2003,

- <www.openDemocracy.net>; A. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, Chicago, 1963. The quotation is cited in R. Heffer, *A Documentary History of the United States*, New York, 1976, p. 249.
23. E. Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, New York, 1998.
 24. This point applies at times even to the best cosmopolitan approaches. See, for instance, Held's preface to his 2004, which combines a scathing attack on Bush's response to September 11th with an implicit nostalgia for pre-Bush multilateralism.
 25. J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, Cambridge, MA, 1998.
 26. T. Barkawi and M. Laffey 'The Imperial Peace: Democracy, Force and Globalization', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1999, p. 404.
 27. Kaldor, 'American Power'.
 28. F. Halliday, *Two Hours that Shook the World*, London, 2002.
 29. C. Johnson, *Blowback*, London, 2002.
 30. Kaldor, 'American Power'; M. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, Cambridge, 2003.
 31. See, for instance, M. Ignatieff, 'The Burden', *New York Times Magazine*, 5 January 2003.
 32. A. Bartholomew and J. Breakspear, 'Human Rights as Swords of Empire', in *The Socialist Register 2004*, London, 2003, pp. 125–45.
 33. E. M. Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism*, Cambridge, 1995.
 34. D. Rueschmeyer, E. Stephens and J. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Cambridge, 1992.
 35. T. Evans, 'If Democracy, Then Human Rights?', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2001, pp. 623–42; B. Gills, J. Rocamora and R. Wilson, *Low Intensity Democracy*, London, 1993.
 36. World Bank, *World Development Report*, Oxford, 1997.
 37. M. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*; N. Harris, *The Return of Cosmopolitan Capital*, London, 2003.
 38. On South Korea, see A. Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant*, New York, 1989; on Taiwan, R. Wade, *Governing the Market*, Princeton, 1990; on tariffs, see D. Rodrik, *The Global Governance of Trade as if Development Really Mattered*, New York, 2001; on China, see P. Nolan, *China at the Crossroads*, Cambridge, 2003. The case for 'globalisation' that is effectively shattered by all these works is made in P. LeGrain, *Open World: The Truth about Globalisation*, London, 2002.
 39. R. Kiely, *Industrialization and Development: A Comparative Analysis*, London, 1998; H. J. Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder*, London, 2002.
 40. See Kiely, *The Clash*, Chapter 5.
 41. UNCTAD, *World Investment Report*, Geneva, 2002.
 42. R. Kiely, 'The Changing Face of Anti-Globalisation Politics: Two (and a Half) Tales of Globalisation and Anti-globalisation', *Globalizations*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2005, forthcoming.
 43. M. Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, Cambridge, 2004; B. Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, London, 2003; C. Tilly, *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000*, Cambridge, 2004.
 44. D. Archibugi, 'Demos and Cosmopolis', *New Left Review*, Vol. 13, 2002, pp. 24–38; D. Held, *Global Covenant*.
 45. See especially Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*.
 46. T. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, Cambridge, 2002, p. 2.
 47. The Bush quote and the critique can both be found in C. Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 155.
 48. A failure to recognise this distinction between nation-states and the international system of nation-states lies at the heart of liberal cases for humanitarian military intervention. See, for instance, the journalism of Johann Hari.
 49. P. Singer, *The President of Good and Evil*, London, 2004, p. 191.
 50. These final comments are made neither to romanticise the progressive nature of the state on the one hand, nor to overemphasise US hegemony on the other. The state remains hierarchical and is closely linked to the expansion of capitalism, including in its neo-liberal form. The post-war 'social democratic' and 'developmental' states were in many ways very undemocratic and authoritarian. I remain unconvinced, however, that their erosion and the rise of contemporary globalisation represents a progressive development. These issues are discussed in detail in Kiely, *The Clash*, Chapters 3, 7

and 8. On US hegemony, I am not claiming that military power automatically secures economic, political or cultural power, and there are serious tensions in the US-led international order. I am here simply suggesting that US hegemony—neo-liberal or neo-conservative—is in many ways dysfunctional and is certainly not conducive to sustained capitalist development in what used to be called the periphery.

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