INSURGENCY AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
The Case of George McGovern

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As a distinct foreign-policy group, neoconservatives emerged in a period of social unrest and political cynicism—a time when insurgent presidential candidates can have profound effects on the outlook and conduct of foreign policy. The George McGovern insurgency is an important historical event that was accompanied by social unrest, distrust in government, and the splintering of the Democratic Party into disparate foreign-policy groups, including the neoconservatives. McGovern, and in particular his 1972 nomination as the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate, is key to understanding the neoconservatives’ disaffection with their own party. This research investigates the catalyzing and unifying effect that McGovern’s 1972 run for the presidency had on those intellectuals who became neoconservatives. Taking McGovern’s role into account is vital for understanding the genesis of neoconservative ideology as well as comprehending the movement’s present day legacy.

Keywords: foreign policy, United States, America, political parties, George McGovern, roots of neoconservative ideology, presidential candidates, social unrest, Democratic Party.

En su calidad de grupo distintivo de política exterior, los neoconservadores emergieron en un periodo de inestabilidad y cinismo político—un tiempo en el que los candidatos presidenciales independientes logran tener efectos profundos en la perspectiva y conducta de la política exterior. La independencia de George McGovern es un evento histórico importante que fue acompañado por la inquietud, la falta de confianza en el gobierno, y la fractura del Partido Demócrata en una variedad de grupos de política exterior entre ellos el de los neoconservadores. McGovern, y
en particular su nominación en 1972 como candidato presidencial del Partido Demócrata, es clave para entender la decepción de los neoconservadores dentro de dicho partido. Esta investigación explora el efecto catalizador y unificador que la participación de McGovern in 1972 para la presidencia tuvo sobre aquellos intelectuales que se convirtieron en neoconservadores. Tomar el papel de McGovern en consideración es vital para entender la génesis de la ideología neoconservadora así como para comprender en el presente el legado de dicho movimiento.

**Palabras clave:** política exterior, Estados Unidos, partidos políticos, George McGovern, ideología conservadora, candidatos presidenciales, Partido Demócrata.

激进运动和美国外交政策：以乔治麦戈文为例
作为独特的外交政策团体, 新保守主义者出现在社会动荡和政治犬儒主义并存的时期。在此期间, 激进的总统候选人能对外交政策的前景和实施产生深远影响。乔治麦戈文激进运动( George McGovern insurgency) 是十分重要的历史事件, 它伴随着社会动荡、人民对政府的不信任, 以及民主党被分裂为几个互不相同的外交政策团体 (包括新保守主义者)。理解新保守主义者对民主党不满的关键在于麦戈文, 尤其在于1972年他作为民主党总统候选人的经历。本研究调查了麦戈文1972年竞选总统一事对最终成为新保守主义者的知识分子所产生的催化效应和团结效应。必须将麦戈文所扮演的角色考虑在内, 才能理解新保守主义意识形态的起源, 理解该运动对当今社会的影响。

**关键词：**外交政策, 美国, 政党, 乔治麦戈文, 新保守主义意识形态, 总统候选人, 社会动荡, 民主党

The 2016 American presidential election was defined by its rejection of establishment candidates and the electorate’s embrace of insurgents, who openly waged war on their own parties’ foreign-policy views. Although the Democratic Party’s insurgent, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, did not win the primary, his popularity emerged from disagreeing with foreign-policy elites in his own party. Certainly, Donald Trump secured the Republican nomination by disagreeing with Republican foreign-policy insiders over such topics as whether free trade is beneficial for the American economy and whether the United States should adopt a more isolationist stance. During the campaign, such differences divided the party and led some Republican elites to argue that Trump engineered a hostile takeover of their party, which in turn necessitated a breakup of the Grand Old Party (GOP) to mount a third-party challenge against him.
Obviously, the challenger did not materialize with the party rallying around the winning candidate. But even if the Republican Party avoids splintering in the short term, the Trumpites’ revolt will indubitably affect the GOP and its perspective on foreign policy for years to come because, in periods of political cynicism and antiestablishment fervor, insurgent candidates can have profound effects on the conduct of foreign policy. Already in 1942, V. O. Key (1952) described insurgencies as the means by which those disenchanted with the party establishment champion reform. Insurgents emerge because the party’s center of gravity is so far removed from the issue preferences of the party’s agitators, who want to change the party’s positions. At the same time, party professionals may worry about the issue integrity of a party they no longer feel is their own and may leave their party as a result.

It is not the first time that an insurgent candidate was accused of taking over a political party during a presidential campaign or that foreign policy was a key divisive issue. Forty years ago, George McGovern, whose primary reason for running for president was his opposition to the Vietnam War, clashed with the foreign-policy beliefs of “professional” Democrats (Havick 1978). In 1972, as in 2016, voters expressed a deep-rooted revulsion against big government and a distrust of the establishment. In October 1972, the American editor of *The Economist* wrote, “Mr. McGovern’s greatest advantage in the primary campaign was to be running for the Presidency without the backing of Democratic party officials” (Balfour 1972).

But broad electoral support in the primaries did not prove sustainable for McGovern as rejection of his candidacy began to fragment the Democratic Party into several groups that differed significantly in their foreign-policy views. Democrats who were infused with 1960s idealism wanted to reverse the postwar internationalist inclination of the United States and supported McGovern. Democrats who opposed McGovern wanted to reaffirm the dominant form of liberalism and activist anticommunism that had been an important component of the Democratic Party since the Harry S. Truman era. In time, those Democrats who opposed McGovernism—a term coined by neoconservative stalwart Jeane Kirkpatrick—together formed the neoconservative movement. Neoconservatism emerged to contest McGovernite foreign-policy views during the transformative events that led to McGovern capturing the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972. For neoconservatives, McGovernism is a subversive foreign-policy ideology at odds with their own values and beliefs; therefore, opposition to McGovernite thinking was always more
than merely opposing one man and his bid for the presidency. Rejecting McGovernism meant rebuffing the McGovern wing of the Democratic Party, which included the New Left and the New Politics groups.

In 1972, the leaders of the Democratic Party thought that McGovern’s “far-out views on Vietnam” meant that his chances of winning the nomination were “next to zero” (“Despite the Odds” 1972, 1405). Perhaps the professionals in the party were not paying attention to an electorate that questioned the integrity of establishment officials, with fully 58 percent of Americans stating that they thought the U.S. government operated in a manner more beneficial to special interests than to the general public (Miller and Miller 1975). Nor were Democratic bosses paying attention to the agitators in their own party who wanted a radical transformation of foreign policy. History has shown that when party professionals ignore such prevailing attitudes, they do so at the expense of their party’s unity on key issues.

This article reexamines the catalytic and unifying effect that the McGovern insurgency had on neoconservative thinking and the group’s subsequent formation as a separate political movement. It evaluates sources from the 1970s and 1980s, in particular, taking into account what McGovern wrote about his foreign-policy views and what neoconservatives themselves recorded about the reasons why they left the Democratic Party. This article also connects historical inquiry to more recent analysis, tracing the ebb and flow of the movement’s impact while, at the same time, highlighting the consistency of its rejection of McGovernism. The goal of this reevaluation and synthesis of sources is to shed new light on the origins of the neoconservative agenda, which is still prevalent in American foreign policy today. Such a reconstruction facilitates in unraveling the heated and often unintellectual discourse about the neoconservative movement. Whether one approves of their ideas or not, it is a fact that, following their formation as a separate group, neoconservatives became a powerful force shaping American foreign policy, especially during the Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush presidencies. Even after the low point that neoconservatives experienced after the debacle of U.S. action in Iraq, the members of this movement continue to influence American foreign policy and continue to be animated by their conception of McGovernism.

**Why Neoconservatives Remain Interesting**

Since the George W. Bush presidency, many scholars investigated neoconservatism as a possible coherent theory in international relations
that can be linked to the formation of the Bush Doctrine (Boyle 2004; Flibbert 2006; Guelke 2005; Mazaar 2003; Owens 2007; Rapport 2008; Ritchie and Rogers 2006; Williams 2005). Other scholars considered the origins, beliefs, and impact of the various subcoalitions of contemporary foreign-policy neoconservatives. In particular, the roots of the movement have been put under the microscope to unravel and better understand the source of their power. For example, Murray Friedman (2005) follows the rise of those neoconservatives who came from primarily an urban, socially conservative Jewish background. Such neoconservatives spent their formative years in either New York’s municipal colleges or the University of Chicago, discussing social problems. Although Friedman points to the collapse of the liberal consensus as the moment at which these Jewish intellectuals came forward to challenge “the spirit of the times,” Friedman does not consider what ideas then brought the disparate members together to form one new movement. He also does not consider the consolidating effect McGovern had in crystallizing the coalition’s ideas, and he undervalues the many neoconservatives that did not forge their ideas in urban Jewish intellectual circles (Friedman 2005, 115). Brandon High (2009, 490) emphasizes the ethnic aspects of the roots of neoconservatism, suggesting that it “can be understood in sociological terms as a contemporary version of a Jewish survival strategy.” Stephen J. Sniegoski (2008) also focuses on the Jewish nature of the movement, while Jim George (2005) focuses on the University of Chicago part of the neoconservative narrative, especially the influence of Chicago classics professor Leo Strauss.

Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke (2004), who made the first detailed analysis of the neoconservative movement and its influence on the Bush administration after 9/11, highlight a generational transition of the neoconservative group from the 1970s, when it was formed, to the early 1990s. However, they fail to appreciate the degree to which the new generation rejuvenated the beliefs and values of the previous generation. In fact, Halper and Clarke view the movement as an aberration that has polemic views that run counter to 50 years of both Democratic and Republican administrations. Moreover, they deal with any watershed events that ultimately formed neoconservative thinking during the 1970s in a cursory manner. Similar to Halper and Clarke, G. John Ikenberry (2004) views neoconservatism as a fleeting force whose foreign-policy goals are defined by the conquest of Iraq. Although Ikenberry does briefly link neoconservative convictions to earlier thinking, like Halper and Clarke, his analysis casts the movement’s influence as a momentary aberration based on an approach that is doomed to fail.
In her exploration of the roots of neoconservative thinking, Alexandra Homolar-Riechmann (2009, 180) argues that the diverse group of people known today as neoconservatives developed their core principles through, “the shared political experiences of [their] intellectual forefathers,” in particular, the forebears’ repudiation of the New Left and its loose moral values. However, she does not explore the role of the New Left’s lightening rod, the person who articulated the New Left’s policies, and his role in catalyzing and unifying the world views of those intellectuals who became neoconservatives. James Mann (2004, 21) does mention that McGovern’s 1972 Democratic campaign and “the forces rising out of the Vietnam antiwar movement” did have long-term effects on politics, but he does not clearly link them to the rise of neoconservatives. Instead, Mann (2004) argues that anticommunism was the cause that brought neoconservatives together. Timothy Lynch (2008, 183) points out that most of what has been written about their “genesis” frequently does not go further than prominent neoconservative Irving Kristol’s “folksy definition: A neoconservative is a ‘liberal who has been mugged by reality.’” Lynch’s (2008, 183) own research merely argues that it was “[d]isaffection with the Democratic party in the 1960s and 1970s [that] forced Kristol and his fellow travelers to seek ‘a home in the Republican party.’” However, what that disaffection might be is not explored.

**McGovernism**

George McGovern, and in particular his 1972 nomination as the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate, is key to understanding the neoconservatives’ disaffection with their own party. But, before exploring the evidence that McGovern’s 1972 nomination is a critical moment for neoconservative coalition building, one must first comprehend what it is about McGovern’s thinking that they found so repugnant. At the foundational level, McGovern (1989) formed his ideas about foreign policy while serving as a bomber pilot in World War II and as a history graduate student at Northwestern University in the late 1940s. Infused with the conviction that the horrific sacrifices his generation made in the war should not happen again, he opposed the Cold War liberal consensus that was fostered by the Truman government in 1947. McGovern thought that Truman was not only misinterpreting revolutionary nationalism in Asia as a global communist plot, but that Truman was putting America on the wrong side of history by establishing alliances with repressive dictators such as Chiang Kai-shek (McGovern 1968, 1977).
In 1948, McGovern supported Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party. Wallace formed the party after Truman dismissed him as the secretary of commerce for publicly disagreeing with his “Get Tough” policy toward the Soviet Union. The Progressive Party platform advocated cordial relations with the Soviets as well as the destruction of all American nuclear weapons, the only ones that existed at the time. McGovern (1968, 1977) also expressed disdain for those politicians who came to power via Red-baiting, such as Senator Joe McCarthy, Congressman Richard Nixon, and South Dakota’s Senator Karl Mundt.

McGovern’s contempt for McCarthyite cold warriors and his views on America’s role in the world propelled him to become active in politics and win office, first in the House of Representatives and then the Senate. In those offices, he continually questioned America’s military presence abroad. In particular, McGovern (1968, 200) was against intervention in Vietnam, describing his distress over the war as “the driving force of my public career” (see also Hart 1973, 70; McGovern 1967, 10–11; 1977, 102; McGovern et al. 1967, 28–30). In 1963, McGovern was one of two senators to question John F. Kennedy’s expansion of U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the first to voice that opposition in a speech on the Senate floor. McGovern waged the criticism despite his friendship with Kennedy and his previous work overseeing the Kennedy administration’s successful Food for Peace Program.

Similar to his critique of Truman’s willingness to deal with repressive dictators, McGovern said the Kennedy administration’s arms and money to Southeast Asia were used to suppress the very liberties America claimed to be defending, thereby demonstrating the limitations of military power. Instead, he called for a reorientation of American foreign policy away from what he considered a disproportionate reliance on military force and the false priorities of the military-industrial complex. McGovern also argued for a reduction in military personnel, joining with Senator Mike Mansfield in contending that because Western Europe and Japan had recovered economically, U.S. commitments to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) should be reduced and that the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) should be restructured (McGovern 1969). He further thought that a drawdown of forces would ease tensions with the Soviet Union while a rethink of SEATO would enable better relations with Mainland China. He also repeatedly denounced the wastefulness of the arms race and the immense funds spent to build redundant nuclear weapons (McGovern 1972, 1979; see also Greider 1972). Reducing defense spending or encouraging employment conversion are also the themes of several chapters and speeches in
McGovern’s 1968 book, *A Time of War. A Time of Peace*. In his 1963 speech on the Senate floor, McGovern echoed President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s warning of the opportunity costs of directing vast sums to the military-industrial complex rather than investing in schools and hospitals.

Over time, along with a few other “dove senators,” such as J. William Fulbright and Mike Mansfield, McGovern became an important conduit of 1960s student radicalism against the war in Vietnam (Beisner 1970). By March 1968, Lyndon Johnson’s presidency had collapsed under the conflicting pressures it faced in waging the Vietnam War. For Johnson, the options had been dire: either broker a peace with the Communists, who would then take over South Vietnam, which in turn would surely result in his losing the 1968 election, or escalate the war as his Republican critics advocated, and be dropped by his own party as the nominee. In a March 31 speech to the nation, Johnson (1968) altered the political battlefield by announcing that he would not seek another term as president, leaving the door open for an insurgent candidate who could channel the antiwar activism.

Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) was among the reform candidates that came forward in 1968. But in June, after winning the important California primary, RFK was assassinated. Kennedy’s murder traumatized the presidential campaign as it neared the Democratic National Convention in late August. As McGovern was a close friend to both Robert and John Kennedy, and was a well-known Senate dove, the antiwar forces prevailed on him to take RFK’s place and articulate their hopes of transforming U.S. foreign policy (McGovern 1984). McGovern announced his candidacy in 1968 only 18 days before the convention. Yet, in that short time, he bested the two other main contenders—Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Senator Eugene McCarthy—in a nationally televised debate (see McGovern 1977; Miroff 2007). While Humphrey collected the necessary delegates behind closed doors (with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley’s help), the antiwar movement set off an implosion in the convention that culminated in the clubbing of anti-Vietnam protesters by Chicago’s police in the streets outside the convention.

Despite the chaos of the convention, Humphrey was still on course to win the election, especially if Johnson secured a deal in the Paris peace talks between North and South Vietnam. Richard Nixon, the Republican nominee for president, saw that his polling numbers fell as Johnson edged closer to a peace settlement between Hanoi and Saigon. Nixon, therefore, moved to secretly sabotage the talks in Paris. Melvin Small (2004, 527) relates that at the end of October, Nixon used covert back channels to convey a “Republican position”
to the South Vietnamese President Nguyen van Thieu to “hold fast and not participate in the peace talks” (see also “No Ethics but Pragmatism” 1972, 2256–57). This covert obstruction of the peace process combined with the apocalyptic character of the Chicago convention led the American public on November 5, 1968, to elect Nixon as its next president.

Humphrey’s failure to beat Nixon emphasized divisions in foreign-policy views in the Democratic Party between the New Left and the traditional liberal consensus, whose members felt that the radical Left had sabotaged Humphrey’s bid for the presidency. For their part, New Left Democrats wanted America to leave Vietnam as they were convinced that the American government was the obstacle blocking a peaceful settlement to the war (Kelman 1970). The New Left would reverse the internationalist inclination to one of “liberal isolationism” (Woods 2003, 43, 54–57). As it had in 1968, the New Left found a voice in McGovern, who by 1970, announced his intent to seek the presidency in the 1972 election. The New Left then combined forces with a less radical wing of the Democratic Party, known as the New Politics group, many of whose members became key McGovern campaign staff. New Politics members believed that it was possible to bring about fundamental change through the electoral process (Miroff 2007). With regard to U.S. foreign policy, the New Politics group wanted to reduce U.S. reliance on military power and revert to a policy that emphasized democracy and economic development. The combination of the passion of the New Left with the New Politics’ practical sense on how to organize and win a grassroots election created a powerful insurgency capable of winning primaries (Balfour 1972; Omvedt 1972; Pressman and Sullivan 1974). McGovern also had a better understanding of how to make the 1968 reforms to the convention delegate selection procedure work in his favor, in part, because he was the chair of the commission that had made the reforms. The party moved to reform their delegate selection procedure after the tumult of the 1968 Chicago convention because the antiwar movement was furious that Humphrey won the nomination—although he never entered a primary election and had not publicly stated any policy positions. McGovern’s advantages gave him an edge in the initial twelve-candidate primary contests.

**The Neoconservative Genesis**

Yet, whatever success he had in the primaries, McGovern achieved it against his own party’s wishes. As he inched closer to claiming the candidacy in the spring of 1971, Democratic rivals began to characterize him as a dangerous radical. In particular, McGovern’s foreign policy was
attacked by two distinct groups of professional Democrats—the Cold War liberals and the anti-Stalinist Left (Ehrman 1995)—who maligned him during the remaining primaries as a left-wing extremist that would disarm the United States and open the White House to riotous street mobs.

As their name suggests, members of the first subgroup wanted to reaffirm the dominant form of liberalism and activist anticommunism that had been an important component of the Democratic Party since Truman. Cold War liberals denounced McGovern’s campaign promises of significantly cutting defense spending, of drawing down American troops in Europe, and of restricting America’s postwar commitments. A prominent figure in the Cold War liberals group was Jeane Kirkpatrick. Starting in the 1970s, Kirkpatrick began writing articles that disparaged the New Left and the New Politics groups along with their counterculture ideas that she believed were negatively impacting the Democratic Party. She thought their ideas were subversive and labeled them “McGovernism,” because in her words, “McGovern was widely perceived as [their] standard-bearer” (Kirkpatrick 1973; see also Kirkpatrick 1975). Since the grand coalition of the New Deal, Kirkpatrick and other Cold War liberals had been loyal supporters of the Democratic Party. But during the 1972 election campaign, they began to feel that a new revolutionary elite and its seditious ideas were hijacking the party.

The second subgroup, the anti-Stalinist Left, refers to a cluster of former socialists who, according to John B. Judis (1995, 125), “were either members of or close to the Trotskyist Left in the late 1930s and early 1940s” (see also King 2004; I. Kristol 1995, 1977). During the 1960s, the members of this group also fiercely rejected the social revolution that was taking place in America, which they viewed as promoting moral relativism and disregard for American liberal democracy. These views led the members of this group to reject the protests against the Vietnam War. Whereas the military tactics used in Vietnam appalled the members of the anti-Stalinist Left, they nevertheless remained opposed to the hostile and systematic critique of American foreign policy coming from the New Left (Friedman 2005; Glazer 1996). They rejected what they perceived as the self-accusing political culture of the New Left—arguing that America was the same great country it had been before the Vietnam War and, thus, it had the same responsibility to defend freedom—including militarily (Steinels 1979). Rather than fostering a culture of appeasement, the anti-Stalinist Left thought that what American society needed was a new sense of civic virtue that could dispel self-doubt and
strengthen the public’s resolve that American ideals were superior and worthy of export.

To the anti-Stalinist Left, McGovern’s campaign positions implied the opposite—that America’s involvement in the world had been corrupting and morally wrong. Thus, while the anti-Stalinist Left shared McGovern’s political moralism, the group arrived at the opposite conclusion: America was immoral when it retreated from its postwar active involvement and its vigorous export of democratic values. As a result, the main foreign-policy goals of this group were global exportation of democratic capitalism and fierce anticommunism, with the promotion of both being viewed as a crusade (Ehrman 1995; Stelzer 2004). For the anti-Stalinist Left, an important component to realize these goals was military power. The group believed that the United States should strive for military superiority and, in turn, use its enhanced position to help bring about a just international order. Thus, McGovern’s ideas on military power were abhorrent to the anti-Stalinist Left.

An important figure for this group is Irving Kristol. In 1967, he wrote an influential essay titled “American Intellectuals and Foreign Policy,” in which he argued that as a great power, America has certain moral responsibilities that may be “a terrible burden” but that it nonetheless must bear, even in places such as Vietnam. Certainly, American foreign policy must first ensure national security, but as a responsible great power, America must encourage other nations to shape their social, political, and economic institutions in line with American values. In a 1973 essay, I. Kristol (1995) argued that the New Left’s primary threat was its rejection of these values. Kristol believed that the New Left’s counterculture movement embraced nihilism—a total rejection of established social norms—and that ultimately this nihilism would lead to societal and political decadence. The anti-Stalinist Left, therefore, thought that liberalism, as practiced by the McGovernites, had lost its original intent concerning human liberty and had gone too far so that liberalism was, in fact, undermining modern society. To counter this social and political decadence, the anti-Stalinist Left sought, in the early 1970s, to rescue American culture through a remobilization of republican virtue (Lynch 2008; Williams 2005). The members of the anti-Stalinist Left had also been strong supporters of the Democratic Party since the 1930s New Deal. But during the 1972 election campaign, they began to view themselves as liberals abandoned by the Democratic Party.

Their rejection of McGovern’s candidacy and the foreign-policy ideas associated with him led these two groups to fuse into one movement, the members of which in time became known as neoconservatives. Both
groups were given support in their early years by Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Henry “Scoop” Jackson, a Democrat Cold War liberal who came to prominence by launching a series of high-profile hearings during the Eisenhower administration that accused Eisenhower of inadequately meeting the Soviet threat. Neoconservatives, in return, supported Senator Jackson’s run for the presidency in the 1972 Democratic primary race as he ran against the candidate that represented all that they opposed—George McGovern.

**Sustained Rejection of McGovernite Thinking**

The splitting of the Democratic Party was so pronounced that by the fall of 1972, the McGovern camp no longer thought that it had a chance to beat Nixon. The Democratic Convention had proved to be a disaster for McGovern, in part, because of efforts by soon to-be-neoconservatives (Miller and Miller 1975; Paletz and Elson 1976). A series of gaffes—in particular, the choice of Senator Thomas Eagleton from Missouri as a running mate (who, it was soon revealed, had undergone shock treatment for depression)—combined with Nixon’s fear campaign and ruthless deception, ultimately resulted in Nixon winning the 1972 presidential election by a landslide (Leubsdorf 1976; “No Ethics but Pragmatism” 1972). The rout of the insurgent candidate led neoconservatives to wage a counterinsurgency, with the goal to take back the party from the McGovernites. The counterinsurgency’s manifesto was published the day after the election in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and titled “Come Home Democrats” (as a retort to McGovern’s “Come Home, America” campaign slogan). It implored party members to reject “the forces temporarily in control of the national Democratic Party in 1972” (“The McGovern Catalyst” 1990, 82).

The manifesto further argued that its electoral trouncing was a wake-up call for the Democratic Party; that the party must again listen to “common-sense liberals,” who “have been barely audible in the blare of the New Politics” (“The McGovern Catalyst” 1990, 81). More than 70 individuals sponsored the manifesto, with their names and titles listed at the end of the document. As regards foreign policy, the signatories of the manifesto emphatically rejected any notion that the United States should withdraw from its international responsibilities, stating that they wanted to save the party from the New Politics that “sneered at the greatness of America” and had “tragically” allowed the Republican Party, which in the past had been known as the “party of privilege,” to present itself as the party most deeply concerned with “responsible
action abroad” (“The McGovern Catalyst” 1990, 82). The group of 70 also announced that they wanted to form a new organization called The Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), to recapture the party’s previous broad-coalition character. Several soon-to-be-well-known neoconservatives were listed as being on the CDM’s organizing committee while Scoop Jackson was a cochair, and members of his staff were principal coordinators.

The Come Home Democrats manifesto was also careful to distinguish McGovernite ideology from the candidate himself. Although the writers thought McGovern had run an incompetent campaign, they believed his defeat emerged from the fact that the American people had rejected the revolutionary clique for whom McGovern was a spokesman. Giving voice to these sentiments, Kirkpatrick (1973) argued that the “McGovern phenomenon” rested upon the fact that his plan to win the presidency did not depend on the traditional socioeconomic coalition that previous Democrat politicians had put together. Instead, McGovern built a coalition around “the poor and the minorities and the young people and the anti-war movement” (Kirkpatrick 1973, 6). These groups, for Kirkpatrick, shared an outsider’s perspective toward the traditional political culture of the Democratic Party, especially concerning America’s involvement in international affairs.

Kirkpatrick (1975, 1976) further explored the notion that McGovern built a coalition around nontraditional groups precisely because the 1968 McGovern Commission on primary reform had deliberately increased the impact of these outsider groups. The result was an estranged “McGovern elite” that was in control of the convention and whose views and values differed significantly, not only with rank-and-file Democrats, but also with the majority of Americans (Kirkpatrick 1976, 4). Ultimately, when it came time to vote, Americans perceived McGovernism as amounting to a stance that sided with the enemy. Such perceptions allowed Nixon to cast himself as the centrist leader of the American masses.

The Limits of Counterinsurgency

Yet, while neoconservatives argued that the Republican Party was able to present itself as the responsible foreign-policy party, they disliked the amoral realpolitik of the Nixon administration. Morals were a driving force for neoconservatives and Nixon’s policy of détente equaled

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1Indeed, data confirm that McGovern was the least popular Democratic presidential candidate of the previous 20 years (see Lawrence 1978; Miller and Miller 1975).
compromised morals. Henry Kissinger (1979, 255) related that Nixon had hoped to bring the country together by incorporating “many of the ideas of the doves of 1968” via his policy of détente. But détente did not mollify Nixon’s critics on the Left, and, to make matters worse, it found him new adversaries among neoconservatives on the Right. In particular, Nixon’s arms-control measures were controversial for neoconservatives. After Nixon resigned in 1974, one of Gerald Ford’s first actions was to ask for an independent assessment of Soviet military capabilities because of pressure from neoconservatives who thought that the CIA underestimated the Soviet Union’s stockpiles and its level of military technology (Friedman 2005). Ford created a “Team B” in 1975 to carry out this assessment, which was chaired by Richard Pipes and included Paul Nitze, Truman’s former head of policy planning in the State Department, and a young Paul Wolfowitz among its researchers. Both Pipes and Wolfowitz were former Senator Scoop Jackson advisers and, in time, both would become prominent neoconservative foreign-policy ideologues in their own right. In 1976, Team B began an assault on the policy of arms control by disputing the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) drafted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA; the “Team A” that “Team B” was scrutinizing). Despite Team B’s arguments, Ford continued Nixon’s policy of détente, including a new round of arms-control negotiations.

Also, in 1976, as a follow-up to Team B’s activities and in response to Jimmy Carter’s winning the election that year, neoconservatives refashioned the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), which had been first created in 1950 in support of National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68). The CPD was deployed to counter Carter’s presidential campaign promises that called for a significant cut in military spending, a halt in building new expensive weapons systems (especially the B-1 bomber), and an abolishment of nuclear weapons. Like McGovern, Carter (1982) was concerned with the massive amounts of money going into the military-industrial complex. Carter was also skeptical about the fears that led the United States to support dictators. As a result, Carter eventually cut U.S. aid to the dictatorial regimes of Ethiopia, Uruguay, and Argentina and reduced loans to states violating human rights. Kirkpatrick’s response to these measures was that Carter was “a brand of McGovernism without McGovern” (Winik 1988–1989, 138).

During his campaign, Carter also announced that he intended to reduce U.S. troops abroad. The CPD opposed these cuts, arguing, instead, for a return to a militarized doctrine of containment, including a renewed emphasis on the Soviet Union’s malevolent global ambitions (Friedman 2005; Sanders 1983). Despite their efforts, Carter was not
persuaded by any CPD claims and continued with the Ford administration’s round of Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) to secure the ratification of SALT II. Still, while Carter could get Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to sign the treaty, he could not get the U.S. Senate to approve it, largely because of the CPD’s efforts (McGovern 1980; Miroff 2007). Members of the CPD worked vigorously against the treaty using several lines of attack, such as that Carter did not understand that the Cold War was a real war and that the Soviet military buildup and expansion into Africa and the Middle East were real threats to American security (Nitze 1976).

One result of their activities was that no neoconservatives were asked to join the Carter administration, although they were foreign-policy experts still residing within the Democratic Party. The distribution of a list of 53 neoconservative candidates only meant that the names on the list were frozen out (Muravchik 2012). To overcome their alienation, neoconservatives tried to wield influence via newspapers, books, and journals. Beginning in the late 1970s, a large number of neoconservative journals were established through the support of several foundations (Bell 1992). By the 1980s, these journals dominated the intellectual arena outside universities, especially in the policy-making circles of Washington, D.C. The ideas that were expressed in the late 1970s included that America was the only power with the moral and military resources to guarantee freedom and security in the world (Moynihan 1978); that under Carter’s watch, the Soviets dramatically built up their military (both technologically and numerically) while America’s armed forces stagnated (Pipes 1977); and that the Soviets’ spectacular extension of influence in the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Southern Africa, and the Caribbean, was matched by America’s decline in all three of these areas (Kirkpatrick 1979). Despite their efforts, neoconservatives remained outside government policy making in the Democratic Party, which, by 1979, they claimed had been thoroughly “McGovernized”—even some of the leaders in the Coalition for a Democratic Majority had “surrendered” in their view to becoming McGovernites (Winik 1988–1989, 139). It would take Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980 to change the fortunes of neoconservatives.

The Invigorating Reagan Years

Upon coming to office, Reagan made clear that he agreed with the findings vocalized by the CPD and Team B. He also agreed with Kirkpatrick, whom he discovered via her 1979 article that claimed there was
a difference between right-wing and left-wing totalitarian governments. Kirkpatrick argued that right-wing dictatorships could eventually transition to democracy while left-wing ones could not, and as a consequence America should not shy away from supporting noncommunist potential allies. This argument was precisely the opposite of McGovern’s viewpoint, which held that support of dictators and apartheid regimes, as part of a reflexive anticommunist policy, was both imperialistic and immoral. Kirkpatrick’s assertive stance against the Soviet Union and her view that American power was “necessary for the survival of liberal democracy” appealed to Reagan, and he discussed the essay’s themes with her several times (Finger [1983] 1984, 437). When preparing for the presidential debates, Kirkpatrick also briefed Reagan on foreign-policy issues. After his election, not only did Reagan appoint Kirkpatrick to be Ambassador to the United Nations, he also appointed more than 30 members of the CPD to posts in his administration. As a result, neoconservatives were to profoundly influence Reagan’s policy of a massive arms buildup and his rhetoric concerning the Soviet Union. Reagan’s failure to carry out the most contentious components of their agenda did produce anger in the neoconservative ranks but probably allowed Reagan to maintain high public approval ratings (Schneider 1983).

Reagan’s neoconservative-driven foreign policy roused McGovern to seek the presidency for a third time in 1984. McGovern wanted to shake up the early primaries of the Democratic Party because he was disturbed by the fact that none of the six candidates was discussing Reagan’s deepening military involvement in Central America or the enormous nuclear overkill capacity produced by America’s colossal military spending. In a similar argument to his moral objections regarding the support of repressive dictators such as Chiang Kai-shek, McGovern said the anticommunist guerrillas or governments in Nicaragua, Angola, El Salvador, Cambodia, and Afghanistan that were on the receiving end of billions of dollars in U.S. arms, finance, training, and covert intelligence were not only corrupt but did not represent the best interests of their own people (Pastor 1987). McGovern’s attempted shakeup of the 1984 Democratic primaries did not agitate neoconservatives at all, because they were no longer involved with the Democratic primaries, having by then made a complete move to Reagan’s camp in the Republican Party.

To complement their fellow coalition members in government, those neoconservatives still outside the Reagan administration began a new writing campaign. This included a republication of the 1972 Come Home Democrats manifesto, which, in the fall of 1990, was replicated
in full under the title “The McGovern Catalyst: The Neoconservative Response, 1972.” Other books and articles condemned the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives for refusing aid to the Contras in Nicaragua (Krauthammer 1987; Pipes 1984). One important aspect of the Iran-Contra affair and the agenda neoconservatives had for American foreign policy at the end of the Reagan years is their disappointment with the turn of events. Foreshadowing a similar response to the failures associated with the 2003 military intervention in Iraq, neoconservatives in the late 1980s were frustrated that outcomes “failed to cooperate with their theories” (Blumenthal [1987] 1988, 166).

After the heady Reagan years, neoconservatives found themselves in the wilderness. They no longer had the same access to the corridors of power, and their party identification was uncertain. After serving eight years for a Republican president, the Democratic Party was unlikely to take them back, even if some still had not switched their registrations. And the George H. W. Bush administration was not a suitable political home. Bush’s cabinet reflected a pragmatic outlook on foreign affairs, with picks such as Secretary of State James Baker and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft. Geopolitical national interests mattered more to the Bush administration than interests based on morals. Nevertheless, neoconservatives did find Bush’s frequent interventionist internationalism to their liking (Kirkpatrick 2007). Neoconservatives were also much in favor of Operation Desert Storm and Bush’s overcoming of the Vietnam syndrome. However, they did find that Bush had stopped the ground war in Iraq prematurely (Barnes 1993).

Despite their marginalization, neoconservatives attempted to engineer the Bush administration’s military policy guidelines to include the notion that the U.S. military must remain superior. As they had in the 1970s (indeed, precisely what the CPD argued in 1976), neoconservatives wanted towering defense budgets. With that goal in mind, neoconservatives within the Department of Defense inserted in the February 1992 Defense Policy Guidance for the 1994–1999 fiscal years, the imperative that America should actively seek to thwart the emergence of any rival superpower in Europe, Asia, or the former Soviet Union. Zalmay Khalilzad and I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, aids to then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, were helped by Under Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz to write that America should use its power to bring order to the world by preserving American global military supremacy (Packer 2005). Almost certainly hinting at the origins of the 2002 National Security Strategy (and with what is most compellingly associated with the Bush Doctrine of preemptive strike), the 1992 draft considered the use of American
military power to preempt or punish the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons even in conflicts that otherwise do not directly engage U.S. interests (Gellman 1992). Cheney defended the policy guide, and its later more measured version, on Capitol Hill against skeptics who wanted to cut defense spending and realize a peace dividend in the post-Cold War era.

**A New Generation Emerges**

By the end of the 1990s, their wandering in the wilderness ended. A new generation of neoconservatives reiterated their anti-McGovernite core beliefs in an essay written just before the Clinton-Dole presidential election (Kagan and Kristol 1996; see also Kagan 2008; Kagan and Kristol 2000). This new cohort had not lived through the watershed years of the 1970s when neoconservatism was forged in opposition to McGovernism. Nevertheless, its members took up the banner of their fathers—in the case of the authors of the essay, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, literally. They restated their anti-McGovernism by, for example, emphasizing the critical importance of military power in promoting American interests and values (Halper and Clarke 2004; Kagan 2008; Kagan and Kristol 2000; Wolfson 2004). Just as neoconservatives had rejected détente and arms limitations in the past, second-generation neoconservatives argued that American military strength should be in a position of power beyond challenge. While the Soviet Union may no longer pose a threat, a position of military prominence would deter future rivals and extend U.S. global reach. This second generation further echoed the need to mobilize republican virtues at home.

But the heart of Kagan and Kristol’s appeal concerned the nature and the goals of America’s commitment abroad. As the previous generation argued, Kagan and Kristol (2000, 4; see also Kagan 2001) contended that it was immoral for the United States to not be active in spreading liberal values and democratic institutions abroad: “the present danger is that the United States, the world’s dominant power on whom the maintenance of international peace and the support of liberal democratic principles depends, will shrink its responsibilities and—in a fit of absent-mindedness, or parsimony, or indifference—allow the international order that it created and sustains to collapse.” In the strategic vacuum of the 1990s, a new generation of neoconservatives restated their goal to advance a foreign-policy agenda based on morals.

However, Bill Clinton’s first term fell short. Neoconservative influence on a president who had worked on McGovern’s 1972 Come Home,
America campaign was always certain to be limited. Still, Clinton was careful in his own run for the presidency not to present any McGovern-like policy (Hyland 1999). Clinton’s “Third Way” campaign rhetoric even earned him praise and the endorsement of some neoconservatives (Miroff 2007, 261). During his campaign, Clinton also entertained the idea of reactivating the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, the last forum in the Democratic Party in which neoconservatives preserved a voice. However, once elected, Clinton did not appoint any neoconservatives to his administration and shifted to a more centrist foreign-policy stance.

Neoconservatives were further dissatisfied with the people Clinton did appoint. This was especially the case with the choice of Warren Christopher as Secretary of State. Kirkpatrick (2007, 194) wrote that Christopher’s actions provided proof of the Clinton administration’s “retreat from global leadership.” A list of more evidence that Clinton wanted America to disengage included concessions to North Korea; cuts in defense spending coupled with an aim to drastically reduce U.S. armed forces abroad; the unconditional expansion of most-favored-nation status to China; a tentative response to Serb aggression in the breakup of Yugoslavia; and Clinton’s inaction in the face of Iraqi provocations, including his neglect to build a missile defense system (Barnes 1993; Wolfowitz 1994). Pressure from neoconservatives did push the Clinton administration to employ missile strikes in retaliation for a 1993 assassination attempt against President George H. W. Bush and again, in 1998, against suspected Iraqi weapons facilities. However, neoconservatives roundly dismissed these measures as not having any effect or actually having the opposite effect of strengthening Saddam Hussein (Wolfowitz 1994). Neoconservative pressure further propelled the passage of the 1998 Iraqi Liberation Act through Congress, which focused on regime change and the promotion of democratic governance (Gardner 2005). One major component of neoconservative pressure on the Clinton White House was a new neoconservative think tank, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), set up by William Kristol. Shortly after its establishment, the PNAC sent an open letter to Clinton that was highly critical of his Iraq policy and that advocated a preemptive U.S. military intervention against Iraq (Letter to the honorable William J. Clinton 1998).

While neoconservatives were only mildly effective during Clinton’s two terms, they were to find resurgence in the subsequent administration. This is despite the fact that George W. Bush was not viewed as an
authentic match for neoconservative principles. In fact, neoconservatives supported John McCain’s candidacy in the 2000 primaries. Even so, neoconservatives were prevalent within the Bush administration, with half of the signatories of the 1998 letter to Clinton accepting jobs. Friedman (2005) points out that many CPD members, who had been recruited by Reagan in 1980, were again enlisted to join Bush’s administration where they became key staff members. After 9/11, they, as well as neoconservatives outside of government, were able to have a great deal of impact on foreign policy, especially with regard to the military invasion of Iraq (Haar 2010).

McGovern (2004, 2008) was one of a few outspoken antiwar critics confronting the neoconservative agenda in the early to mid-2000s. And by late 2006, with Iraq falling into civil war, it appeared that neoconservatism was once again being shoved aside by a Bush president. The pragmatists, who had been consistent in their disapproval of neoconservatism before the invasion, were called back. Further reflecting their difficult circumstances, prominent neoconservatives began jumping ship (Fukuyama 2006, 2008). Even Kirkpatrick (2007), who had been appointed by the Bush White House in 2003 to head the American delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, was critical. Other leading neoconservatives in the administration either resigned or were pastured out to such places as the World Bank, where Wolfowitz was sent. In fact, after Bush’s reelection and the shuffle of cabinet posts, the emphasis changed to diplomacy and rebuilding ties with allies, especially those in Europe. Unilateralism was suppressed, and Bush talked about climate change and the International Criminal Court.

But neoconservatives are nothing if not resilient. Once again, reports of their death were greatly exaggerated (Ikenberry 2004; I. Kristol 1995; Kurth 2006; McClay 2010; Tanenhaus 2009; Winik 1988–1989). In fact, evidence of another comeback already appeared in the 2008 presidential campaign in which Republican candidate Rudy Giuliani named Norman Podhoretz, Commentary magazine’s editor-in-chief for 35 years, to be his senior adviser on foreign policy. Barack Obama’s electoral victory in 2008 further reawakened neoconservatives. Obama campaigned on a policy of multilateralism and the prodigious use of soft power, policies that neoconservatives argued were based on U.S. self-criticism and self-doubt on a par with similar sentiments espoused by the McGovernites. Neoconservatives thought that Obama’s world view would lead to moral confusion, a return to moral relativism, and ultimately American disengagement from the world. During the 2008 campaign, neoconservatives explicitly compared Obama’s political base with that of McGovern’s in...
1972 by arguing that antiwar youths and the Far Left of the Democratic Party supported both politicians. They also asserted that Obama, like McGovern, was a wartime candidate who used widespread opposition to the war to seize power (Gelernter 2008). Throughout the 2008 campaign, neoconservatives predicted that if Obama got to the White House, Washington politicians would collaborate in bringing about a defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan akin to America’s defeat in Vietnam.

After Obama’s election, neoconservatives kept up a steady attack on his national security policy and his defense budget projections (Boot 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Greenwald 2010; Herman 2010; Joyner 2009; Price 2009). Using similar arguments as those who attacked McGovern in the 1970s, neoconservatives claimed that Obama was unpatriotic while his apologetic defeatist approach was immoral. William Kristol (2011) even used his father’s famous analogy when he wrote that, “[i]t’s getting pretty difficult to avoid noticing the grand mugging by reality that we are experiencing, both abroad and at home.” John Bolton (2009), a hawkish intellectual who shares some neoconservative thinking, wrote that Obama’s discomfort with projecting American power was akin to McGovern, writing that Obama followed “the advice of his intellectual predecessor George McGovern.”

By 2010, neoconservatives felt a comeback was possible, at least the 2010 midterm election results, in which the Democrats were battered at the polls, were interpreted as “a great and perhaps unprecedented political comeback” for neoconservative thinking (McClay 2010). A central part of their revival entailed joining the Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s foreign-policy and advisory panel; for example, at least eight of the members of the PNAC joined Romney’s team (Judis 2012; “Mitt Romney Announces Foreign Policy and National Security Advisory Team” 2011). Romney’s reliance on neoconservatives prompted more pragmatic Republicans such as Colin Powell and Lawrence Wilkerson to worry that the foreign-policy novice Romney would end up following “the same sheet of music” as George W. Bush, whose foreign-policy inexperience was no match for the neoconservatives’ bureaucratic inside expertise (Matthews 2012).

Resurgent Sunni sectarianism, expressed through the brutal terrorist group Islamic State, also created opportunities for neoconservatives to cast themselves as foreign-policy experts. Seeing many of the architects of the 2003 Iraqi invasion commentating on major news outlets prompted a “Back to the Future” feeling for U.S. foreign-policy pundits (The Diane Rehm Show 2014). Perhaps the most ironic twist in the neoconservative narrative is the rise of a new insurgent, Donald Trump, and his
capturing of the Republican nomination and eventual win in the 2016 race. Not only did neoconservatives vehemently disagree with Trump’s isolationist stance, they actively supported the Democratic nominee, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose more muscular approach to foreign-policy views is more in line with their liberal interventionism. Robert Kagan even commented to the *New York Times* that under different circumstances (i.e., if her supporters accepted such a label), her foreign policy might even be called neocon (Horowitz 2014). Ironically, those foreign-policy professionals who are most likely to leave the Republican Party following Trump’s insurgency are the neoconservatives. Where will they find their new home? Might neoconservatives finally come home to the Democratic Party, some four decades after they left it?

**Conclusion**

There are two important messages to communicate from this analysis of McGovern’s insurgence in the 1970s and his impact on foreign-policy views in the Democratic Party. The first relates to the power of insurgencies to splinter political parties into different groups with opposing views on policy. Insurgents are successful during times of distrust in politics and vehemence against the establishment because party professionals are not paying attention to the agitators in their own party who want a radical transformation of policy. McGovern’s success emerged largely because Democratic Party professionals ignored predominant attitudes among their party’s rank-and-file members. Understanding the impact of McGovern’s insurgence is important because his is not the first—nor is he likely to be the last—insurgent whose nomination transforms his or her own party’s foreign-policy views. In fact, the power to transform accompanies insurgents even when they do not actually win the presidency. For example, although Barry Goldwater lost the election in 1964 as the Republican nominee, Goldwater’s ideas greatly affected the intellectual framework of the conservative Republican majority of the 1980s and early 1990s. Leading up to the election in 2016, it is clear that Republican Party professionals again did not understand the relevance of political cynicism and the anti-establishment fervor that had taken hold of their party and, indeed, much of the American electorate.

To complicate matters further, in 2016, the American public not only flirted with the insurgent in the primaries, the agitated party members actually elected him to the White House. The fact that Trump won propels the Republican Party into unchartered waters with regard to the degree of transformation that Trump’s uprising will entail. It also greatly increases
the likelihood of political divisions between the Trumpites and Republican Party professionals. To use a Trumpian adjective, his victory is a tremendous win for insurgents and dissident candidates. Indeed, Trump’s success breaks the myth that anti-establishment candidates are unelectable.

The many inherent conflicts between the views of decades-old Republican foreign policy, much of it refined over the years by neoconservatives, and Trump’s campaign rhetoric have already prompted some neoconservative foreign-policy professionals to voice a similar lament to their forefathers in the 1970s: that they felt the Republican Party had abandoned them (Boot 2016). These fundamental differences have already resulted in problems in policy formation, communication, and execution for the Trump White House and the Republican-controlled Congress. Moreover, these conflicts are likely to continue, with the president remaining a polarizing figure.

But like all insurgents, Trump will change the Washington foreign-policy establishment more than Washington changes Trump. He will rely on his base, which remains solidly behind him, and the support of enough Republicans in Congress to fashion his disruptive approach toward foreign policy and make it more mainstream and more acceptable—a fact that neoconservative foreign-policy professionals will find alarming and likely result in their leaving the Republican Party. A Trumpian-influenced Republican Party is apt to be more protectionist, more nationalist, and more zero-sum transactional than a neoconservative-influenced GOP. Therefore, one important goal of this research is to highlight the need for further exploration on the effects of insurgent presidential candidates on foreign policy. A better understanding of the insurgent’s role in transforming a party’s long-held views on foreign policy is a first step.

The second important message to communicate from an analysis of McGovern’s insurgence in the 1970s relates to neoconservatives themselves. This article sheds new light on the origins of the neoconservative movement and its influential agenda through a reevaluation of earlier sources. This is an important endeavor if one is to assume that foreign-policy neoconservatives are destined to be around for some time to come. Whether as members of the Republican Party or members of another party, it is important to know what shapes their beliefs and policy goals. In fact, neoconservative foreign policy expert Max Boot hoped that those Republicans who identified themselves as #NeverTrump adherents would be the “small remnant upon which the Republican Party” would rebuild, “if it is not to become Trump’s party in perpetuity” (Boot 2016).
George McGovern remains a potent catalytic agent for neoconservatives, and anti-McGovernism remains a uniting ideology. First-generation neoconservative convictions unswervingly maintained an aversion to McGovern’s emphasis on accommodation, while at the same time promoting a strategy of American military supremacy, national honor, elevated patriotism, and moral confidence in America’s engagement with the world. Second-generation neoconservatives reiterated the critical importance of these principles in their formulation of U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s. For both generations, morals equal policy and prescribe U.S. conduct on the world stage.

Their arguments against Obama, Trump, and even in support of Hillary Clinton make it clear that, in spite of the many changes in international relations in the post-Cold War and the post-9/11 eras, one sees constancy in their world view regarding U.S. foreign policy. Even in noting McGovern’s death in October 2012, neoconservatives underscored their dismay and their anger with McGovernites for destroying their Democratic Party—a destruction that they believed caused great harm to the country and the world (Tobin 2012). Neoconservative revulsion of the ideas that McGovern personified in the 1970s persevered in their subsequent generations and continues to distinguish them from other foreign-policy intellectuals who influence U.S. foreign policy.

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