

Masters Dissertation in Classical Antiquity: Q8D091

Title: Thucydides and U.S. Foreign Policy

Debates after the Cold War

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2010
Word Count 14,075

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Introduction

Whilst researching online articles for an earlier essay looking at Thucydides' portrayal of the Sicilian Expedition, I was surprised by the number I stumbled across which discussed instead Thucydides' role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Despite being irrelevant to my aims at the time, I was fascinated by the contemporary relevancy of a historian whose work, I am in complete agreement, is 'by far the best historical work that has come down to us from antiquity' (Ste. Croix 1972: 1). This thesis is the result of my research into how Thucydides had become embroiled in such controversies.

Thucydides stated that his 'work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last forever' (1.22). Despite enduring interest from ancient historians, I underappreciated his success in other fields, particularly in international relations, where he has been 'credited with introducing balance of power and the distinction between underlying and immediate causes of war' and his Melian Dialogue 'remains the starting point of discussions about the relative role of ethics and interests in foreign affairs' (Lebow 2003: 26). His *History of the Peloponnesian War* is still compulsory reading on the international relations courses of American universities and he is considered the founding father of the realist theories which have dominated foreign policy debates since WWII.

Aware of the notorious difficulty of Thucydides' Greek and that many renowned ancient historians disagreed on their interpretations; I was interested in seeing the conclusions reached by international relations theorists. Thucydides is one of the few ancient writers, and perhaps the only ancient historian, still read today for his universal insights into human

nature, rather than to learn more about the time he was writing about or to appreciate his literary qualities. Rather than focus entirely on academic dialogues, I also look at works designed for a wider audience, where Thucydides has again been interpreted to support different, often opposing, viewpoints. I intend to bring insights and interpretations from ancient historical methodology to bear on these debates and, perhaps optimistically, to provide new insights into current foreign policy issues.

A further aim is to look for areas where the crossover between international relations theory and ancient history can lead to a fruitful interchange. If ‘antiquity and modernity... are always implicated in each other, always in dialogue’ (Martindale 2006: 5), then modern readings will not only tell us about the context of the interpreter, but may also help us to better understand Thucydides. The approach of international relations theorists in using and adapting the ideas of Thucydides shows how classicists can still be relevant today, and that a study of ancient history can still teach us something about our own society. ‘Most versions of reception theory stress the mediated, situated, contingent... character of readings’ (Martindale 2006: 3), and it is this aspect which is perhaps most interesting in respect to Thucydides. By looking back to what Thucydides said, and comparing it with the readings given by interpreters, I hope to establish whether, and in what ways, he has been misrepresented for current political aims.

I begin with an account of the different approaches taken to Thucydides before and during the Cold War. The ‘realist’ school of international relations adopted Thucydides as its earliest and perhaps still most influential exponent, but doubts have increasingly been raised about the extent that Thucydides actually adhered to these realist beliefs. Chapter Two examines how the end of the Cold War challenged realism and its adoption of Thucydides. His discussion of the power relations between Sparta and Athens may have seemed apt during a

period in which a similarly bi-polar world order was said to exist, but in a radically altered international landscape this relevance could be expected to decline. I examine the increasing influence of liberal international relations theories during the 1990s, and how Thucydides was reinterpreted to support these viewpoints. Chapter Three examines Thucydides' position in neoconservative foreign policy thinking, which drew upon interpretations of Thucydides from both the realist and liberal schools. Finally, Chapter Four focuses on the 'War on Terror', and how Thucydides was utilised by neoconservatives post 9/11 to support the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

1. Background

Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* has been described as 'the only acknowledged classic text in international relations' (Boucher 1998: 67) and always seems to have been especially studied for its universal values and judgements as much as for the particularities of the historical period it describes. Thucydides expressly hoped that 'these words are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future' (1.22). If anything, the use of Thucydides by practitioners beyond the field of historians of ancient Greece has increased with the passage of time, rather than diminished as we might expect, and Thucydides has been viewed as 'modern in a recognizable sense' (Doyle 1997: 10).

The largest theoretical debts to Thucydides were amassed in the twentieth century by the proponents of the international relations theory of realism, whose 'worldview was shaped by the ancient Greek historian' (Doyle 1997: 18). After WWI, there was a 'universal revulsion against war' (Carr 1939: 98), which led to a greater interest in understanding the international system. The first chair of International Politics was founded at Aberystwyth University in 1919 with the stated goal of investigating 'the best means of promoting peace between nations' (quoted in Low 2007: 9). In the early years the field of international relations was dominated by a liberal agenda (subsequently termed idealism), which asserted that there was 'a basic harmony of interest among all people' (Vasquez 1998: 33) and therefore attempted to place moral considerations at the heart of interstate politics. The League of Nations was also created amid such optimism for the future and disgust at the 'great game' of 'behind doors

diplomacy', balance of power politics and great power alliances which were blamed for World War I.

The failure of the League in the 1930s gave force to an alternative theory of international relations known as 'realism'. The outbreak of WWII 'confirmed, for the realists at least, the inadequacies of the inter-war idealists' approach to studying international politics' (Dunne and Schmidt 2001: 162). This reaction was spearheaded by E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau. Despite the general acceptance nowadays that Thucydides 'was the inspiration for the realist school of international relations' (Tritle 2006: 127), he is not directly referenced in the key texts of either of these founders of modern realism. Carr asserted that 'the thesis that "justice is the right of the stronger"' was, indeed, familiar in the Hellenic world' (1939: 81), which surely refers to Thucydides; but otherwise the link between Thucydidean realism and the realism of Carr comes indirectly via Hobbes (Carr 1939: 83 and 194). Morgenthau did not explicitly reference Thucydides either, although Tritle (2006) says that Morgenthau did include a quote from Thucydides about the importance of national interests in early editions. Morgenthau again uses some of the Thucydidean formulations of Hobbes regarding morality and the state (1951: 34), and some of his key arguments, such as bipolarity (1951: 45-52), have later been directly associated with Thucydides. Johnson-Bagby makes the point that immediately after World War II the key lessons drawn from Thucydides were those of tragedy (Athens, like America, had achieved so much by character, but her character was eventually corrupted), but with the Cold War the realist interpretation, focusing on balances of power and bipolarity of power, took precedence (2000: 22)

The key concerns of realist international relations theory usually ascribed to Thucydides are that he is the first writer to describe the 'security dilemma' as a cause for war, that he justifies

expediency over morality or ideology in interstate relations and that he argues that 'might is right' (Boucher 1998: 67). In a 'security dilemma' scenario a nation in fear of another nation tries to increase its own security which then increases the fear among other states, who then increase their own security, and so on leading to eventual war (Doyle 1997: 52). Waltz argues that 'because some states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so' (1979: 102). During the Cold War this factor was cited as a reason for the build up of nuclear weapons on both sides (Jervis 1989: 53). Thucydides is often interpreted as explicitly stating that the Peloponnesian War was not caused by the issues stated by the participants, but instead by 'the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta' (1.23). For realists, this is 'a classic example of the impact that the anarchical structure of international politics has on the behaviour of state actors' (Dunne and Schmidt 2001: 162).

Kenneth Waltz, one of the founders of neo-realism, seems to be describing the Spartans' motivations for war with Athens when he claims that 'given two coalitions, for example, the greater success of one in drawing members to itself may tempt the other to risk preventative war, hoping for victory... before disparities widen' (1979: 126). Waltz argues that 'secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them... thus Thucydides records that in the Peloponnesian War the lesser city states of Greece cast the stronger Athens as the tyrant and the weaker Sparta as their liberator' (1979: 127). This view of international politics (also known as structural realism) emphasises that the structure of the international system and a state's place within that system are more important for interstate relations than the internal workings or culture of individual states. This belief may have helped American foreign policymakers to believe that great power coexistence was a possibility, even if their ideologies were opposed, during the Cold War (Dunne and Schmidt 2001: 162).

As well as being used to support the tenets of structural realism, Thucydides is often considered an exponent of 'classical realism', according to which the anarchy of the international system is not caused by the system itself but is a product of the individual characteristics and human aims of each state. Thucydides, through the speech in the Mytilene debate given by Diodotus, is viewed as an exponent of the view that human nature is 'self interested and unconstrained by any higher moral laws', a view which leads to the belief that 'everything and everyone is a means to an end, and has to be justified in terms of its, or his, usefulness' (Boucher 1998: 29). Applied to international relations theory this means that 'fear and distrust of other states provide the motive for increasing ones power by prosecuting wars to subdue those who when the scales change will seek to subdue you' (Boucher 1998: 30). The Melian dialogue has been used to argue that Thucydides believed that 'Athens, with the power and ability to acquire an empire, was compelled to do so by the laws of nature, which dictate that the powerful rule the weak; that one must rule wherever one can; that self interest overrides considerations of justice; and that others will rule over you if you do not rule over them' (Boucher 1998: 34). Besides fear, Thucydides also recognised that the search for glory could instigate wars (1.75). For these reasons, states will always seek to increase their power at the expense of other states. This cutthroat competition will lead to states using *Realpolitik* to achieve their ends, and 'balance of power theory purports to explain the result that such methods produce' (Waltz 1979: 117).

Besides these universalist theories based upon his work, Thucydides' history of war between two evenly matched great powers seemed to provide a direct parallel with the Cold War world which most other, multi polar, epochs of history did not. Observers and actors in 'contemporary affairs from George C. Marshall onward compared the standoff between the

United States and the Soviet Union to that between Athens and Sparta' (Crane 1998: 2). The apparent 'unromantic' style and methods also appealed to modern writers aiming at objectivity rather than moral improvement. Beyond the realms of academic realism, where the ideology of states is viewed as less important than international power structures, the ideologically divided nature of the Athenian-Spartan contest was also attractive to those who took the ideological differences between the USSR and the USA seriously. Louise J. Halle, an academic then working for the US Department of State, wrote in 1952, that the USA, like Athens before, was 'called upon to assume the leadership of the free world' and that the meaning of Thucydides 'has been heightened by the events of our day, how the history that he wrote has become altogether more vivid and poignant' (quoted in Tritle 2006: 129).

Professional historians have made similar observations. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix's (1919-2000) defence of Athenian Imperialism can be seen in the light of his Marxism (Ste. Croix 1981: 29) and possible sympathy for the Soviet Union. He argued that the Athenian democracy had 'affinities with the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in Marxist theory' (1954: 22), and through the prism of the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe during the late 1940s and early 1950s his comment that people in states occupied by Athens might 'even be glad to have an Athenian garrison on hand while they were learning to work their new constitution' (Ste. Croix 1954: 39) is particularly interesting. Fliess took the converse approach to the international relations theorists and applied modern conceptions of realist foreign policy theory to write a history of the Athenian/Spartan relationship drawing explicit comparison with the Cold War, and arguing that in the ancient struggle 'the absence of ideological complication makes the power issue appear in far greater clarity' (Fliess 1966: xx).

So we have two strands in the reception of Thucydides in modern international relations thinking: the purely theoretical approaches of academics, looking for general principles to be applied in diverse situations (balance of power theory, the security dilemma as a cause for war, expediency over morality etc) and the search in Thucydides for direct parallels with the present (for example seeing the USA as Athens), which will resonate more or less powerfully depending on the similarities between the present and late fifth century Greece. Both uses have led to criticisms and problems. Besides arguing against realist theories in themselves, a number of critics have argued that Thucydides was simply not the realist he is portrayed as; and some ancient historical scholarship historians supports these alternative interpretations.

Among ancient historians Thucydides' history has long been perceived as something more than a straightforward retelling of events. Cornford's *Mythistoricus* argued that Thucydides was trying to write history but was heavily influenced by ancient myth, which gave him a tragic mindset (1907: ix). This would suggest that some of the Athenian arguments could be seen as examples of *hubris* rather than Thucydides' own views about how international relations should be conducted. Cornford's particular conclusions have not generally been accepted (Kirby 1983: 183), but the approach itself has. Romilly (1963) viewed Thucydides work as a discourse on the nature of imperialism, but heavily influenced by epic. By analysing the language used and reading between the lines a picture of the nature of Athenian Imperialism could be developed. Her analysis of the character of Athenian imperialism emphasised psychological and cultural factors, such as the Athenians' need for action and power, rather than the structural aspects of the international system emphasised by Waltz. What this approach emphasises is that the sections, such as the Melian Dialogue, cannot be taken out of context and should be seen in the light of what precedes or follows them. For example, the Athenian 'might is right' stance at Melos is followed by the failure of the

Sicilian Expedition. So it can be inferred that Thucydides, in writing the tragedy of Athens, has positioned them like this in order to show ‘the Melians' belief in *tyche* is in a way vindicated by the Athenian’s misfortunes’ (Edmunds 1975: 186). Nonetheless, Ste. Croix points out that ‘the fact that they [the Melians] are being foolishly over-optimistic is made very clear’ (1972: 14). For Ste. Croix, Thucydides does not argue that ‘the stronger ought to rule but... that they actually do’ (1972: 15). Whilst accepting that Thucydides was a realist, it has also been observed that ‘the complexity of Thucydidean realism is difficult for us to gauge, because our assumptions are so different from those of the fifth century elite’ (Crane 1998: 4).

International relations theorists from non-realist schools of thought have also criticised realist theories because they provide ‘an intellectual justification for a range of policies at odds with core democratic and humanitarian values’ (Lebow 2003: 16). Unsurprisingly, some critics have sought to draw Thucydides away from the realists. Lebow (1984: 10) argued that if it was so important for Athens to annex Melos in 416 BC, why did she not do so in 431 BC? His answer was that, rather than being a manual for how states should behave toward one another, the Melian dialogue is in reality an example of the type of desperate measures states will go to when they are afraid. The annexation was a sign of Athenian weakness. In 416 BC ‘they felt the need to convince others of their power and resolve in order to deter both adversarial challenges and allied defections’, so the lesson of the Melian Dialogue is that ‘aggressive foreign policy can be as much the result of a state’s perceived weaknesses as it can be an expression of its perceived strengths’ (Lebow 1984: 11).

Some analysts have also argued that the Cold War world was not as bipolar as often thought. For example, large parts of the world were in the ‘third world’ camp of states aligned with

neither of the superpowers. This calls into question the usefulness of Thucydides' account as a guide to the Cold War. In contrast, Finley, in reviewing Fliess' work on ancient bipolar relations, argued that fifth century international relations were not themselves bipolar and that other powers such as Persia played important roles. Fliess' belief that there was an absence of 'ideological complication' in the Athenian/Spartan rivalry could also be challenged, and seems to ignore the debate started by Ste. Croix about the nature of Athenian imperialism and the extent to which the *demos* in other states fought willingly for, and under, Athens rather than be subjected to oligarchies.

Simplistic uses of the Cold War/Peloponnesian War analogy have also sometimes been the cause of political problems. Henry Kissinger got into trouble during the 1976 Presidential campaign for remarks (which he denied making) comparing Athens to the USA and Sparta to the USSR; especially the suggestion that the USA, like Athens, would ultimately lose due to the less disciplined nature of her citizens in comparison with her opponents' (for a summary of this episode, see Hodkinson, forthcoming). Whether or not Kissinger actually made these remarks, the use made of this gaffe by political opponents, the accompanying press criticism and the fact that the prediction was ultimately so far off the mark, illustrate both the dangers of such parallels and their potentially misleading role as a predictive guide to future events.

Regardless of the justice of these criticisms, the Cold War world, viewed by some as so similar to the world described by Thucydides, changed radically in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. The superficial analogies between the USSR and Sparta become redundant with the later demise of the USSR but, more importantly for Thucydides' influence on realism, 'by the end of 1990 the world was no longer bipolar in a politically meaningful sense' (Keohane and Nye 1993: 104). So Thucydides' role as guide to

a bipolar world was no longer needed. In addition, some of the key tenets of realist theory linked to Thucydides were challenged with some critics suggesting that realism, which had predominated in US foreign policy making since World War II, was no longer necessary.

In 1992 Francis Fukuyama published *The End of History and the Last Man*, outlining how the new solo superpower age would look. For Fukuyama, the triumph of the USA in the Cold War, and the subsequent growth in the number of democratic states worldwide, had proved the superiority of liberal democracy over totalitarianism, paving the way for the spread of liberal, peace-loving democracies throughout the world. Although realism had ‘played a large and beneficial role in shaping the way Americans thought about foreign policy after World War II’, its use after the Cold War would simply be a case of ‘treating a disease which no longer exists’ (Fukuyama 1992: 253). Nor was Fukuyama alone: as another contemporary realist insisted that ‘the kind of foreign policy and national security problems that were central to the politics of the Cold War are bound to become less salient in the years ahead’ (Hogan 1992: 243). In such a benign and idealistic world, ‘with a good deal of realism now inappropriate’ (Jervis 1992: 267), it would be expected that Thucydides’ lessons would become irrelevant. As it turned out, such optimistic forecasts were fairly short lived. By the end of the 1990s new threats to American hegemony were being detected by foreign policy analysts in the form of rising powers, particularly China but also the other ‘BRIC’ nations of Brazil, Russia and India, which has lead to talk about the re-emergence of a multi-polar world. In addition, there has been an increased emphasis on non-state actors in international affairs, such as the power of multinational corporations and terrorist groups acting across and within state boundaries.

I will now examine whether these radically altered circumstances have caused new questions to be asked of Thucydides and whether even a work as layered and open to different interpretations as his history can maintain its relevance in such an altered environment. Since 1989 arguments over whether or not Thucydides was a realist at all have continued but the rise of neoconservatism in the USA has also brought a new band of Thucydidean adherents, taking very different lessons from his work, onto the policy-making stage. In the following chapters I will review these changes and assess some of the interpretations made of Thucydides.

2. Challenges to Realism

Fukuyama may have been optimistic about the triumph of liberal democracy, but he was not alone in seeing the end of the Cold War as the beginning of a new era. Former Secretary of Defense in the Nixon and Ford administrations, James R Schlesinger, suggested that with ‘the end of the Soviet empire ... a kind of euphoria swept over much of the industrial world’ and it was widely expected that ‘the post-Cold War era would be reasonably peaceful’ (Schlesinger 1995: vii). George H. W. Bush, in an address to the U.N. in 1990, announced that ‘we’ve seen a century sundered by barbed threats and barbed wire give way to a new era of peace’ (1990: 151).

The apparent shift towards a more peaceful and democratic world has undermined realist theory in two significant ways. On one level, in a world of democratic cooperative states, realism was no longer relevant. In fact, beyond irrelevance, realism was perceived as a threat to the new world order. Lebow (1994: 277) argued that realist ‘theories and some of the policy recommendations based on them may now stand in the way of the better world we all seek’. Realists, such as Kissinger, were still arguing in the early 1990s that the west should seek to balance ‘Russian power by aiding Ukraine... in a classic balance of power logic’ (Doyle 1997: 25), and such views now looked out of step with the times. Secondly, realist practitioners ‘since Morgenthau have all had in common, as one of their principal objectives, the anticipation of the future’, but the end of the Cold War caught all by surprise (Gaddis 1992: 11). Realists, ‘perhaps under Thucydides’ spell’ had ‘tended to concentrate on dynamic challengers and moribund *hegemons*’ (Wohlforth 1994: 99) whereas the USSR had been a moribund challenger to a dynamic *hegemon*.

Events in the final years of the Cold War had ‘contradicted the structuralism upon which contemporary realist theory is often based’ (Johnson-Bagby 2000: 25). The Soviet Union intentionally reduced its own power whereas ‘*hegemons* are expected to make every possible effort to retain their principal sphere of influence’ (Lebow 1994: 263). This view of great power behaviour had been traced back to Thucydides’ portrayal of the Athenians, who felt it too dangerous to give up their empire (Thucydides 1.75), so contemporary events were seen as directly contradicting a realist reading of Thucydides. In consequence of these perceived failures, it has been argued that ‘the doctrine of realism was mortally wounded by the end of the Cold War’ (Miller 2004: 4). A conference organised by R.N. Lebow and B. Strauss in 1988 (which ultimately led to the 1991 work they edited, *Hegemonic Rivalry: From Thucydides to the Nuclear Age*) brought together political scientists and ancient historians. One of their goals was ‘to say something novel and useful about the relevance of Thucydides to the study of international relations’. A number of contributors doubted that Thucydides was a realist, whilst others doubted that either the Greek or Cold War eras were actually bipolar (Lebow and Strauss 1991). Ober, positing Athens’ aggressive behaviour as a result of her long walls and comparing them to the Reagan ‘Star Wars’ program, suggested that defences can ‘distort the flow of power’ with unpredictable consequences (Ober 1991: 262). These tendencies to reposition Thucydides outside of realism increased during the 1990s.

The new optimism, combined with newly apparent weaknesses of realism, led liberal theorists to hope that they could now ‘transcend the *Realpolitik* that has dominated discussion of international affairs for the past five decades and invite a reconstructed paradigm, perhaps one inspired by the idealist ideas associated with the Wilsonian vision’ (Kegley 1993: 1). As for the left of American politics, ‘its Wilsonian juices flowed with renewed force and it was eager to right injustices around the world’ (Schlesinger 1995 ix). In international relations

theory, liberals often have widely different views, but share a core belief about ‘the possibility of a state of peace’ throughout the world (Doyle 1997: 19). Rather than being naively idealist, as realists would assert, liberal international theorists argue that human progress makes peaceful cooperation between states much more likely to succeed. There are three reasons often given for peace being more easily attainable in the future than the past; commercial pacifism, liberal institutionalism and democratic peace theory. None of these ideas is new, but all three ideas rose in popularity during the early 1990s.

Commercial Pacifism is the liberal belief that increased economic interdependence between states makes war between them more costly and ultimately obsolete. Adam Smith, the founder of free market economics, credited commerce with providing ‘the liberty and security of individuals... who had before lived in a continual state of war’ (Smith 1784/1976: 412), John Stuart Mill wrote in 1848 that commerce was ‘rapidly rendering war obsolete’ (Mill 1848/1965: 594) and Norman Angell, writing during the first great period of globalisation in 1910, argued that economic interdependence made a state of peace too valuable for states to give up, so that war would therefore become obsolete (Angell 1910/1994: 177).

WWI suggested that these predictions were premature, but some argue that the world has reached a point today in which with ‘access to markets and vital resources, the benefits of international cooperation outweigh the benefits of international conflict’ (Miller 2004: 126). Increasing economic interdependence by lowering trade barriers was a key plank of U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s. The Clinton administration completed the NAFTA Treaty, supported the creation of the World Trade Organisation and passed the African Growth and Opportunity Act (*Foreign Policy* leader 2000: 19). A logical next step from this belief in the

efficacy of trade in discouraging conflict is the use or threat of economic sanctions, rather than military force, to achieve international goals. The Clinton administration used sanctions more regularly than previous administrations, including 'controversial "secondary sanctions," which punish foreign companies doing business with the targeted state (*Foreign Policy* leader article 2000: 19).

Institutional liberals believe that international ties and legal treaties can make states behave more peacefully in contrast to the realist argument that anarchy characterises the international system because there is no ultimate authority which can enforce agreements (Lebow 1994: 276). George H. W. Bush had 'a vision of a new partnership of nations... based on consultation, cooperation and collective action, especially through international and regional organisations' (Bush 1990: 152) and believed that the end of the Cold War meant that the United Nations would now be able to fulfil 'its promise as the World's parliament of peace' (Bush 1990: 153). It is argued that because of such institutions 'international relations among the developed democracies has taken on many of the characteristics of relationships in domestic societies' (Lebow 1994: 277). The E.U. has also been held up as an exemplar of states handing over sovereignty and cooperating against the dictates of structural realist theory (Miller 2004 148), although Waltz argues that the E.U. is an exception because its security is provided by an outside power; so long as European states were great powers there was no incentive for cooperation, as each would prefer to see the others weaker (Waltz 1979: 70).

'Democratic peace' liberals believe that democracies are much less likely to go to war against each other, and therefore as democracy becomes the predominant form of government war will become rarer. Liberals have cited Thucydides as evidence in support of this theory

(Moravcsik 1997: 527). This theory had less relevance during the Cold War for the simple reason that the opponents of the U.S. were not democratic. George H. W. Bush announced in 1991 that ‘as democracy flourishes, so does the opportunity for a third historical breakthrough: international cooperation’ (quoted in Doyle 1997: 205). Bill Clinton declared during the 1992 presidential election that ‘democracies rarely go to war with each other’ (quoted in Russett and Antholis 1992: 1). This view was not restricted to politicians: ‘in the modern international system it is now apparent that democratically governed states rarely go to war with each other’ (Russett and Antholis 1992: 1) and thus with the end of the Cold War this could mean ‘a fundamental transformation of world politics away from principles (anarchy, the security dilemma) that have dominated realist theory and practice to the exclusion of liberal or idealist ones.’ Again, the security dilemma, traced by realists back to Thucydides, appeared no longer relevant in a world of democracies because ‘democracy seems to transcend the security dilemma’ (Miller 2004:34). Confidence that ‘the United States is the only Superpower’ (Bill Clinton 1993, quoted in Clarke and Clad 1995: 29), the success of the first Gulf War and a renewed faith in liberal foreign policy led to increased uses of US power for humanitarian missions in the early 1990s. Combining a belief in commercial pacifism and democratic peace theory, ‘the notion of expanding the community of free-market democracies emerged as the central tenet of the Clinton administration’s foreign policy’ (*Foreign Policy* leader 2000: 18).

Some academics went back to Thucydides to assess the impact of democracies in another international system with ‘a large number of democratic regimes’ (Russett and Antholis 1992: 1). Despite the proviso that ancient Greek states had fewer of the ‘institutional and structural complexities of democracies in modern nation states’ (Russett and Antholis 1992: 5), which some have given as the reason that modern democracies are less likely to make war

on each other, they concluded that the ‘evidence shows democratic states reluctant to fight each other, precisely because of their ties of constitution and ideology.’ Nonetheless, ‘despite the ties - often fragile - of democratic constitution and ideology that might have kept them at peace. .. they sometimes broke down’ (Russett and Antholis 1992: 14). With this conclusion Russett and Antholis attacked the realist adoption of Thucydides as a historian portraying rational, unitary state actors and instead argue that Thucydides gives an ‘analysis of the role and weaknesses of democratic politics in formulating security policy, and of the linkages between the *demos* in one state and the *demos* of others. These influences... are more familiar in contemporary liberal-institutionalist and idealist paradigms that compete with realism’ (1992: 17).

This view of the restraining influence of democracy has its critics. Bachteler argued that the evidence put forward by Russett and Antholis is flawed and that the ‘theoretical explanation of the observation that democracies rarely go to war with each other is still a matter of dispute’ (1997: 315). Instead, Bachteler uses Thucydides to show that ‘the advantage of democratizing another city was less rooted in the utility of common democratic culture than in the improved control over the allies’ because once democracy was instituted ‘the democrats had to fear the revenge of the oligarchs for the cruel treatment during democratization’ (1997: 318). Secondly, Bachteler shows that the war with democratic Syracuse was not a case of the Athenian *demos* misreading the democratic nature of the Syracusan regime (1997: 320). In 1994 another attempt was made to bring ancient historians and international relations theorists together. The Strauss/Lebow conference’s emphasis on hegemonic relations was sidelined and democratic peace theory, which was not mentioned in the earlier book, is discussed. Kauppi suggests that there is no evidence for it in Thucydides, who shows instead that democracy was ‘a driving force behind imperialism’ (1994: 143).

Again though, it was ‘argued that realist analysis cannot explain the proliferation of new actors, processes and norms of international behaviour’ following the Cold War (Johnson 1994: 195).

Citing Thucydides as evidence for the theory of democratic peace was not the only way in which critics of realism sought to show that Thucydides’ ‘lessons’ were at odds with realist theory. Johnson-Bagby argued that ‘a close reading of Thucydides will show that he does not agree with some of the most important emphases and conclusions of classical realists’ (1994: 132). Nor can Thucydides ‘completely be identified with neo-realism’ because in contrast to the neo-realist view of the importance of the structure of the international system rather than differences between states, he ‘thinks that an understanding of the political and cultural differences among city-states before and during the Peloponnesian War is crucial for understanding their behaviour (1994: 133).

Ahrens Dorf argued that, although Thucydides agreed with realists about ‘the self-interested character of states and the anarchic structure of international politics’, he ‘doubts that realism can form the basis of a successful foreign policy because he believes that, although the moral passions and hopes that realism opposes are unreasonable, they are also indelible features of political life’ (1997: 233). Any ‘attempt to conduct a strictly and unabashedly self-interested foreign policy inevitably risks provoking an extreme and self-destructive moralistic or religious reaction’ (Ahrens Dorf 1997: 233) because while ‘the case for realism is theoretically compelling, political realism tends to be psychologically naive’ (1997: 262). The speech of Diodotus, during the Mytilene debate (Thucydides 3.42-48) has been used to show that Thucydides provided arguments to show how ‘justice and expediency coincide’ (Johnson-Bagby 2000: 38). However, Ste. Croix interpreted this speech like the realists, arguing that

Thucydides intends it to show that ‘public and political argument should always be conducted on purely rational lines’ (Ste. Croix 1972: 13).

Lebow also noted that Thucydides could be viewed as a realist, only with significant provisos. In Lebow’s case, the emphasis in Thucydides was on the internal political structure of states which determined their responses to hardship. ‘When language was subverted and conventions ignored or destroyed... the rational construction of interest was impossible, war aims were limitless, and the rules of warfare were disregarded’ (Lebow 2001: 558-559). For Garst too, Thucydides saw ‘the internal structures of states, particularly their political institutions’ as ‘equally, if not more, important in determining states’ behaviour’ (2000: 80). As an example, he suggests that the structure of the Spartan government weakened their position in the war because ‘the opposition of the *demos* to oligarchic rule’ limited ‘Sparta’s ability to rally weaker cities against Athens’ (2000: 84). This view is very similar to the liberal view that ‘domestic values and institutions shape foreign policy’ (Doyle 1997: 19).

Some went further, to show that Thucydides was not a realist on any level. Monoson and Loriaux argued, from Thucydides’ portrayal of Pericles, that Thucydides was really criticising Pericles for his amoral, realist foreign policy (1998: 285) and Johnson-Bagby made a similar point that Thucydides has a focus on moral behaviour throughout (2000: 41). Again, suggests that ‘Periclean Athens may be a microcosm of the modern project: a powerful city-state that satisfied the appetites of its citizens by war and commerce. Athens, like America today, was a political unit running on passions’. Pappas goes on to criticise the USA for its amoral, power oriented, and Athens-like, foreign policies from World War II to 2000 (2000: 236).

Other critics accepted that Thucydides was a realist but criticised him as such. In an article predicting the resurgence of a liberal idealist foreign policy, the best that could be said for Thucydides is that, had he lived in more peaceful times, his theory might not have been so concerned with balances of power and war (Kegley 1993: 134). Others asserted that ‘perhaps we should weaken the hold exercised by Thucydides' portrayal of the hegemonic struggle between Athens and Sparta’ (Wohlforth 1994: 128).

In some ways Thucydides' reputation as a realist was boosted by the end of the Cold War. During the 1980s he had been sidelined by scientific neo-realism/structural realism (Johnson-Bagby 2000: 24), and the studies pointing to his emphasis on internal influences on state relations widened the chasm further. But in the post-Cold War fallout neo-realism was the most widely discredited version of realism. There are still some who deny that Thucydides was a realist at all, suggesting that he shows that ‘it stands to reason that the behaviour of states depends less upon some immutable realist logic than upon contingencies such as the skills and characters of particular leaders...moderate, peaceful leaders can shape a moderate, peaceful politics, just as nasty realist leaders can shape a nasty realist politics’ (Welch 2003: 315). But the tendency has been to ascribe to Thucydides a more nuanced realism than the Waltzian type. Heilke argued, from Thucydides' treatment of Brasidas, that ‘axiomatic knowledge of material or systemic factors in international relations may be a good "first cut" (even though it is logically subsequent to narrative), but it is insufficient for practical purposes’ (2004: 136). Again, ‘if he can still be regarded as a political realist, his realism is neither *Realpolitik*, in which international morality is denied, nor neo-realism, in which moral questions are largely ignored. His realism is neither immoral nor amoral... moderation and a sense of justice should keep states from becoming too opportunistic in defining and pursuing their interests’ (Korab-Karpowicz 2006: 239).

Monten has suggested that Thucydides shows how the structural approach can be combined with ‘attention to variation in unit-level attributes’ (2006: 23) and that Thucydides therefore ‘captures an important intersection between the constructivist and realist research programs’ (2006: 23). The conclusion of Doyle, that Thucydides is a realist but neither a classical realist nor a neorealist (1997: 50), seems to be drawing wider acceptance. Instead, he argued that Thucydides was a ‘complex realist’. For Doyle, Thucydides’ complexity lay in his examination of international relations through the ‘roles of leadership, state regimes, and international structures’ but stressing that they ‘cannot be explained by any one factor alone’ (1997: 53).

The Clinton administration, taking office in 1993, made humanitarianism a key plank in its foreign policy agenda. In 1993, the US sent troops into Somalia in an attempt to build a democracy and to ‘refashion it its entirety a Somali administration, police force, courts and civil administration’; however, the ultimate failure of this mission in 1994 underlined the difficulties inherent in such policies (Clark and Clad 1995: 6). By 1995, American public opinion was turning against costly humanitarian entanglements (Hoffman 1995: 160). Besides Somalia, the failure to prevent ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, increased terrorism and the breaking of the ‘democratic wave’ in China all contributed to increased pessimism about the new era and the limits of interventionism. Arguing for a more restrained foreign policy, critics asked if ‘an over eagerness to think in terms of forceful solutions to problems led the nation into expensive and time consuming distractions’ (Clarke and Clad 1995: 67).

Despite believing that ‘realism promises only the perpetuation of the same old game’ and that ‘liberalism remains the only comprehensive and hopeful vision of world affairs’ (1995: 177), by 1995 even liberals were asking if liberal-internationalism was ‘dying’ (Hoffman 1995: 159). Though there were successes too, such as the intervention in Haiti, the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 limited the Clinton administration’s foreign policy freedom for the remainder of his time in office (Haass 1997: 114).

In 2000 the Republican Party regained the presidency and there was a reaction against the foreign policy priorities of the Clinton years. However, this reaction did not automatically entail a return to realism, despite prominent realists and ‘moderates’, such as Brent Scowcroft, Colin Powell, Richard Armitage and Condoleeza Rice, joining the George W. Bush administration. The administration became better known for the influence of a group of foreign policy practitioners combining a liberal belief in democratic interventionism with a realist focus on the ‘national interest’. The Neoconservatives had arrived.

3. Thucydides and the Neocons

This chapter examines the development of the Neoconservative movement in American politics up to the election of George W. Bush in 2000; and its developing relationship with Thucydides. I investigate the aspects of Thucydides' *History* which have influenced the neoconservatives and how they have been interpreted. The emphasis will be on the 'godfather of neoconservatism', Irving Kristol (1920-2009), the political philosopher Leo Strauss (1899-1973) and the neoconservative ancient historian Donald Kagan (1932-).

Neoconservatism originated on the left of American politics after WWII when there was a consensus between both liberals and conservatives that Soviet Communism had to be contained. However, during the Vietnam War, the neocons, then still on the left of American politics, were 'repulsed by America's anti-war movement' (Dorien 2004: 7) and 'stood out for their continued adherence to... an activist, anti-communist foreign policy' during the 1970s (Ehrman 1995: 47). Becoming disillusioned with the Democrats many began a gradual shift to the right, supporting Ronald Reagan and his 'evil empire' anti-soviet rhetoric during the 1980s. With the Cold War over, the original neocons were left without a foreign policy crusade and they 'merged into the mainstream American Republican right' (Dorien 2004: 15). It was a younger generation of neocons, in contrast to 'the liberal internationalism of the Clinton administration and the neo-isolationist nationalism of the Republican Congress' (Dorien 2004: 2), who 'asserted the superiority of the American idea, and projected American power into the world with buoyant self confidence' (Dorien 2004: 15).

Some of the influential neocons of the second Bush administration developed their thinking during the first. Dick Cheney was an isolated cabinet member in the first Bush

administration, but built a team of neocons at the Defense Department including Paul Wolfowitz and I. Lewis Libby (Dorien 2004: 31). Wolfowitz, then Under Secretary of Defense, authored a policy statement in 1992 arguing that America's prime foreign policy objective should be the prevention of other states from challenging America's position as the world's sole superpower (Dorien 2004: 27), which contained many of the ideas later espoused by the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). During this period, when it was shown after the first Gulf War that the Iraqi nuclear weapons program was further advanced than intelligence predicted, the neocons developed their distrust of the CIA (Dorien 2004: 33).

The 1992 election of Bill Clinton gave the neocons a period in opposition in which to develop their thinking. William Kristol and Robert Kagan, both former members of the Reagan administration, founded the *Weekly Standard* in 1995 as a neocon mouthpiece, and Kristol took credit for articulating 'chunks of what later became the Bush Doctrine' (Kristol, quoted in Dorien 2004: 179). In 1996, they founded the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) (Dorien 2004: 126). Future members of the Bush administration, including Donald Rumsfeld, as well as Wolfowitz, Libby and Cheney, and other prominent neocon thinkers, including Francis Fukuyama, Donald Kagan and Norman Podhoretz, were founder members. PNAC shared the same goal as Wolfowitz' 1992 policy statement: to prolong the period of America's 'unipolar moment'. This could be achieved by significantly increasing military expenditure, strengthening democratic ties, promoting freedom abroad and accepting America's 'unique role' in the world (PNAC 'Statement of Principles' 1997). The removal of Saddam Hussein was also a key goal (Dorien 2004: 129).

For the neocons, realism was not a suitable basis for the foreign policy of America because ‘without a broad, sustaining foreign policy vision, the American people will be inclined to withdraw from the world’ (Dorien 2004: 128). Whereas realism ‘was about coping with problems’, neoconservatism was ‘about solving problems’ (Dorien 2004:171). In 1998 PNAC wrote a public letter to President Clinton asking him to work actively for ‘the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime from power’ (PNAC: 1998). Of the 18 PNAC members who signed this letter, 11 eventually joined the administration of George W. Bush (Dorien 2004: 143).

Thucydides apparently played a significant role in neoconservative thinking because his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, according to Irving Kristol, is ‘the favourite neoconservative text on foreign affairs’ (Kristol 2003). Kristol sums up the neoconservative foreign policy as that ‘patriotism is a natural and healthy sentiment’, multilateralism is bad because ultimately ‘it can lead to world tyranny’ and America must work to increase democracy abroad, which is always in the United States’ national interest because its ‘identity is ideological’ (Kristol 2003). To these we can add the commitment to ‘increase defense spending significantly’ (PNAC 1997) so that these goals can be achieved.

Ascribing a prominent role for Thucydides in neocon thinking tells us little in itself. As we have seen, Thucydides’ text is open to conflicting interpretations and it is therefore difficult to assess exactly where the text supports these neocon positions. Despite Kristol’s emphasis on the importance of Thucydides, there is little mention of him in Kristol’s earlier works. Kristol stated in 1972 that ‘there is no great radical text on the conduct of foreign policy – and no great conservative text either’. He went on to mention a number of influential (but apparently not ‘great’) writers on foreign policy, but not Thucydides, who was actually cited

as an example showing that ‘the entire tradition of western thought has very little to say about foreign policy’ (Kristol 1972: 72). A 1983 work including a chapter on foreign policy makes no mention at all of Thucydides (Kristol 1983). But by 2003 Thucydides was the neocons’ most important writer on foreign policy ‘thanks to professors Leo Strauss of Chicago and Donald Kagan of Yale’ (Kristol 2003).

Leo Strauss has often been ‘identified as “the brains” behind George W. Bush and the Iraq War’ (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006: i). He taught political philosophy at the University of Chicago and was ‘well known and controversial within his discipline’ but ‘never achieved public fame’ in his lifetime (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006: 1). Strauss is often closely associated with Plato, but more generally his ‘signature idea was his call for a return to the ancients’ (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006: 30). Writing little directly on American politics, his key concern was that during the twentieth century the western world had placed ‘a greater emphasis on relativism and a corresponding loss of a moral compass’ (Deutsch 1999: 52). According to Strauss, the modern world was in crisis because of the widespread denial of any ‘trans-historical truth with respect to moral phenomena’ (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006: 35).

Like the neocon movement, many Straussians were originally on the left but were repulsed by the counter cultural revolution of the 1960s and the Democrats’ swing to the radical left (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006: 229). Neoconservatism was not ‘dominated by Straussians; but when it emerged many Straussians sympathised with it’ (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006: 230). Wolfowitz had been persuaded to study politics at university by Allan Bloom, a prominent Straussian academic (Dorien 2004: 44). Other prominent neoconservatives, such as Robert Kagan and William Kristol had also studied under Straussians, although Kagan has downplayed their influence (Kagan 2006).

In Strauss' most important work, *Natural Right and History*, he only mentions Thucydides twice, and the first mention is only in the context of showing that Weber misunderstood the ancients (Strauss 1965: 58). The second mention is even more difficult for anybody trying to link Thucydides through Strauss to Iraq. Strauss argues that Thucydides, at 3.45.6, thought that the objectives of the ancient city were 'peaceful activity in accordance with the dignity of man, and not war and conquest' (Strauss 1965: 134). The section on Thucydides in *The City and the Man* (Strauss 1964: 139-243) includes a number of interesting interpretations.

Strauss's Thucydides, in contrast to the realists' Thucydides, is not pointing the way towards ideology-free *Realpolitik* and geopolitical balances of power. He instead 'sympathizes and makes us sympathize with political greatness as displayed in fighting for freedom and in the founding, ruling and expanding of empires' (Strauss 1964: 139). This sounds much more like a neocon Thucydides. Rather than see any antipathy between the philosophical ideas of sophistic Thucydides and the Socratic Plato, Strauss suggests that their teachings 'supplement one another' (1964: 140). Whereas neo-realists, such as Gilpin, view Thucydides as a scientific historian, Strauss argues that the 'differences between Thucydides and the scientific historians are immense' (1964: 141) and suggests, like some liberal interpreters, that realists have missed the 'presence in his thought of that which transcends "power politics"' (Strauss 1964: 145).

So Strauss's interpretation of Thucydides is at odds with the realist view, but it is not necessarily completely at home with the neocon view. Strauss 'drew upon both Plato and Thucydides in his recognition that imperialist, expansionist foreign policy tends to undermine the moral and political order at home' (Robertson 2006: 172). Despite his argument that Thucydides sympathises with Athens, he still viewed the regime as 'defective' (Strauss 1964:

141). He argues that Thucydides, by not mentioning *sophrosyne* (moderation) in respect of Athens or Pericles, was criticising the lack of moderation in the Athenian regime (1964: 152). This criticism, that the Athenian regime was too radical and immoderate, is at odds with the neocon preference for an adventurous and ideologically driven foreign policy. Strauss attaches importance to Thucydides' remark that the more conservative regime of 411 BC, in which the power of the *demos* was to some extent curtailed, was the best in Thucydides' lifetime (1964: 153). He analyses the Melian episode and the subsequent failure of the Sicilian Expedition, but points out that Thucydides makes clear that the failure of the Sicilian Expedition was not 'due to its injustice or daring' but because of a breakdown in domestic politics due to flaws in the regime (1964: 192). So, rather than specific Straussian interpretations of ancient thinkers, it was the general idea that such ancient thinkers had relevance and that 'Straussian theory provided a language of moral absolutism not deriving from any particular religious tradition' that neocons liked (Dorien 2004: 132).

The pre-1990s absence of neocon discussion of Thucydides and their later adoption of him as their favoured text makes sense if they were more influenced here by Kagan than Strauss. Strauss had died in 1973, and his work on Thucydides was a decade earlier, whereas Kagan, though a well known ancient historian since the 1960s, really began to express himself on contemporary policy as a neoconservative during the 1990s. As a founder member of PNAC and through a number of books dealing with modern American foreign policy, he aligned himself with the neoconservative movement and his historical works began to reflect his ideas on 1990s America. Kagan's 1996 *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace* draws lessons for contemporary America from four historical episodes, including the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. Kagan expressly points out that the book is a response to misguided post Cold War optimism (Kagan 1996: 1) in which western states are 'faltering in

their willingness to pay the price in money and the risk of lives' which were needed to deter aggressors (1996: 570). Kagan argues that Thucydides was not a realist and that in contrast to realist theory, Thucydides 'provided a clearer, more profound, more elegant and comprehensive explanation of why people ... fight wars' (Kagan 1996: 7). He argues that the post-Cold War world where war between 'the major powers is hard to conceive because one of them has overwhelming military superiority... will not last' (1996: 568). He sees a similar situation prior to the Peloponnesian War, which marked 'the end of a period of confidence and hope, and the beginning of a darker time' (1996: 16). Kagan saw the wave of democratisation after the fall of communism as a response to American power, which could be reversed by a period of American weakness; 'when Athens was powerful and successful, its democratic constitution had a magnetic effect on other states, but its defeat was the turning point' which sent Greece 'in the direction of oligarchy' (1996: 16).

Whereas realists have focused on fear and interest from Thucydides' 'honour, fear and interest' (1.75) factors, Kagan ascribes a much more important role to honour, which he then attempts to show played a key role in the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (1996: 8). It was 'honour' which drove the behaviour of Corinth which caused the war (1996: 38), and Athenian fear of a future war with Sparta which caused them to ally with Corcyra and cause even greater fear in Sparta (1996: 42). For Kagan, a state's power is about more than military capabilities, because there will be a decline in power if 'attitudes towards it change' (1996: 8). The most likely reason for a change in attitude is if the state is 'seen to lack the will to use its military power' (1996: 8). PNAC viewed Clinton policy towards Iraq as half hearted, and Kagan suggests that Athens too should have made a 'clearer and larger commitment' prior to the Peloponnesian War (1996: 74). By supporting Corcyra with only a token force the

Athenians hoped to deter Corinth without suggesting that they wanted to ‘destroy Corinth’, following a policy ‘called in the current jargon “minimal deterrence”’ (1996: 46).

Kagan viewed the Megarian Decree as a similar example of Athens wishing to punish a third party without arousing Sparta (1996: 50), and criticises both policies because they failed to deter the smaller power but still ‘frightened and angered the Spartans’ (1996: 73). Kagan agrees with the realist reading of Spartan fear of Athens as a factor, but sees material interest and honour at stake too, as the Spartans feared that their allies might act without them which would dissolve the league (1996: 57). The overall lessons are that peace is maintained by states like Athens and the USA maintaining ‘preponderant power’ and ‘the will to accept the burdens and responsibilities required (Kagan 1996: 570). For contemporary America the ‘preservation of peace requires active effort, planning, the expenditure of resources, and sacrifice’ (1996: 567). In this way Thucydides, like PNAC, urges America towards greater military investment and a greater willingness to use force.

A 2000 work edited by William Kristol and Robert Kagan includes essays from future Bush staffers Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, as well as Donald Kagan. Kagan again argues that a strong US military is the best guarantor of a peaceful world and also attacks as ‘delusions’ the prevailing ‘faith in international organisations’ (D Kagan 2000: 338). For Robert Kagan and William Kristol, the 1990s were a ‘decade of squandered opportunity’ because the US did not continue the Gulf War until Saddam Hussein was toppled and this set a precedent of defiance without repercussions for Serbia, North Korea and China (R Kagan and Kristol 2000: 7). For them, the idea of ‘America using its power to promote changes of regime in nations ruled by dictators... is eminently realistic’ (2000: 20) and they predict that the unilateral use of American power will cause some resentment but that ‘because American

foreign policy is infused with an unusually high degree of morality' other nations will 'have less to fear from its otherwise daunting power' (2000: 22). Wolfowitz focuses on the threat from China and Perle concentrates on Iraq, describing the 'flawed ideas' of the Clinton administration that invading Iraq might create instability or strengthen Iran (Perle 2000: 101).

By 2000, the neoconservatives had adopted Kagan's interpretation of Thucydides, and used it to argue that for the sake of world peace the United States needed to maintain its *hegemony* by maintaining overwhelming military forces and using them decisively to deter any competitors. Nonetheless, neocon positions were taken before their adoption of Thucydides, so he has been used to lend respectability and to reinforce arguments, rather than as an inspiration for new theories. Thucydides was used in discussions focusing on conventional great power politics, such as threats from states like Russia and China, which were considered the main threats to American *hegemony* in the 21st century. Besides WMD, the more important argument in favour of toppling Saddam Hussein was that it would show other potential challengers that America meant business.

4. Thucydides and the War on Terror

This chapter will look at the neoconservative response to the attacks of 11 September, and how the interpretations of Thucydides were altered to fit the 'War on Terror', as the threats to America shifted from rising traditional powers, warned against by Kagan, to the ideological movement of militant Islam. It will also look at some of the alternative interpretations of Thucydides which have been used to criticise the Bush administration in response to the Iraq War.

George W. Bush's campaign foreign policy advisory group 'was a patchwork of neocons led by Paul Wolfowitz and hawkish realists led by Condoleeza Rice' (Dorien 2004: 2). Despite the large number of neocons they still felt marginalised before 9/11 by the realists (Dorien 2004: 143). Colin Powell earned especial suspicion. He was considered 'nearly traitorous' for his opposition to the first Gulf War and his emphasis on 'multilateralism, military restraint and sensitivity to public opinion' was anathema (Lusane 2006: 89-90). They began to criticise him as an appeaser for his reluctance to invade Iraq in the second Gulf War (Kristol 2002) and as a 'realist' who did not 'respond enthusiastically to Bush's broadest foreign policy goal, democratization of the Arab world' (Barnes 2004). Rice's 'realist inclinations differed from the neocons by presenting a softer line than they did... in a number of areas' (Lusane 2006: 92) and she was initially 'known for her caution' (Barnes 2004). The overall moderation of the Bush administration, from a neocon viewpoint, caused the *Weekly Standard* to attack 'Bush's soft positions on China, Iraq, the Middle East in general, and defense spending' (Dorien 2004: 149).

After 9/11 though, the administration became more hawkish, and Rice especially changed course, altering the balance of the cabinet. The attacks had ‘convinced her... that the United States had pursued stability in the Middle East at the expense of democracy, and achieved neither (Lowry 2007). Neocon commentators were generally satisfied with Bush’s response to 9/11, especially when the ‘war on terror’ was broadened to include Iraq, Iran and North Korea (the ‘axis of evil’) in Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address (Dorien 2004: 109). Iraq was considered a threat because of its supposed WMD. Although there is much evidence since that intelligence reports were ‘sexed up’ (Dorien 2004: 183), many neocons felt that the evidence that Iraq had used chemical weapons in the past, had been trying to make nuclear weapons and that significant stocks of chemical weapons were unaccounted for after the first Gulf War was sufficient justification to invade (Dorien 2004: 110). But the neocons main reason to attack Iraq was ‘regime change’ (Dorien 2004: 110). It was thought that a democratic Iraq could be a catalyst for democratic change throughout the Arab world and that these new democracies would automatically be ideologically closer to the US as a result (Dorien 2004: 181). This objective predated 9/11 and critics have therefore claimed that in arguing that Iraq had WMD, and by insinuating Iraqi links to terrorism, the Bush administration engaged in ‘opportunistic daring’ (Clarke and Halper 2004: 4).

The ancient historian Victor Davis Hanson (1953-) has become prominent in foreign policy debates since 9/11. Though he denies being a neocon he ‘came to support neocon approaches first in the wars against the Taliban and Saddam’ because he agreed with the ‘post-9-11 effort to stop radical Islam and state sponsors of terror’ (Hanson 2008). Even before 9/11 he was a fellow traveller in a number of important issues. In *Who Killed Homer?* (Hanson and Heath 1997), a work looking at the state of classics teaching in America, the arguments already suggest sympathy towards Straussian/neocon warnings against moral relativism and

multiculturalism. The current academic orthodoxy, that ‘all cultures are equal – the west no better or worse than any other’, is attacked (Hanson and Heath 1997: 114). Arguing that the Greeks were superior to other ancient Mediterranean cultures because they were western, they comment that ‘the ancestors of Saddam’s yes-men and Iran’s theocratic guard’ were defeated by the west’s ancestors at Marathon (Hanson and Heath 1997: 119).

After 9/11, Hanson began to write prolifically on foreign policy issues. Two books, *An Autumn of War: What America Learned from September 11 and the War on Terrorism* (2002) and *Between War and Peace: Lessons from Afghanistan to Iraq* (2004) collect together his articles in response to 9/11 and the ‘War on Terror’ originally published from October 2001 to July 2003. These articles take a consistently neoconservative line on Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as support for Israel (2004: 69). Like Strauss, Hanson is at odds with ‘adherents of postmodernist relativism’ and he argues that the war on terror can be viewed in terms of ‘good versus evil’ (2004: 125). He is suspicious of social science theory and cites Homer, Sophocles, Thucydides and Plato as ‘time honoured alternatives to modern behaviourism, Freudianism, Marxism, and social construction’ which teach instead that ‘war is terrible but innate to civilisation’; terrorist states are not ‘economically driven’ but ‘rush to battle out of Thucydidean fear, envy, and self interest that in turn are fuelled by a desire for power, fame and respect’ (Hanson 2002: xv). The superiority of western civilisation is again emphasised: ‘all people born onto this planet seek freedom and security’ and ‘the western paradigm alone provides man a chance to realize these innate aspirations’ (2002: xix).

Echoing Thucydides (1.22), Hanson argues that ‘human nature is unchanging’, continuing, ‘its essence being raw, savage and self-serving beneath a veneer of civilisation’ (2002: xv). Again, ‘Thucydides often reveals a tragic view of the human condition’ in which ‘culture and

civilisation are a thin veneer that protects us from the innate savagery of our natural selves' (2004: xvi). It seems that here, despite some common ground over influence of domestic structures in international relations, we see a key difference between neocon and liberal views of human nature. Liberals have a basically optimistic view in which humans are perfectible and war can be abolished through progress; for the neocons, taking Thucydidean pessimism step further, the democratic crusade is about forcing institutions on people who will never fundamentally change and whose natures need to be restrained by force. Hanson accepts this 'tragedy of the human condition in order to ensure that we do not allow evil people to act out what they desire' (2002: xvi).

Taking the use of Thucydides for the war on terror to new heights (some might say a new low), one of Hanson's articles is an 'interview' with 'General Thucydides', in which Thucydides replies through selected quotes. Despite the inherent difficulty in finding quotes from Thucydides to fit questions on Afghanistan and 21st century America, the answers initially appear relevant. However, when checking the source of the quotes problems emerge. The Warner translation has Pericles ask the Athenians to 'give your full support to these resolutions that we are making all together, and to abide by them even if in some respect or other we find ourselves in difficulty' (1.140), but in Hanson this becomes 'one must support the national resolve even in the case of reverse' (2002: 146). This could simply be to make the translation snappier, but it also implies a subtle change of meaning from 'support these specific resolutions' to 'always support the government'. Hanson also ignores the problem of which speeches, if any, represent Thucydides' own views, and he uses quotes which tend to undermine points he makes elsewhere. For example, despite Hanson's emphasis on America as a nation of imaginative and daring innovators like Athens, and Sparta as 'fundamentalists' in his history (see below), one of the quotes describing how America acts (2002: 148) is

actually in Thucydides a description of Spartan characteristics (1.169). In predicting that Afghanistan will be pacified quickly and easily, Hanson's Thucydides describes the Afghans with a quote from Alcibiades' speech (6.17) recommending the Sicilian Expedition (2002: 152), despite the fact that Alcibiades' predictions about the Sicilians turn out to be completely wrong. Hanson has described the Athenians at Melos as pursuing an unjust war, but nonetheless uses a quote from the Athenian side of the dialogue (5.103) to support his views here (2002: 146). Even more starkly, he quotes arguments from both sides of the Mytilene Debate (Diodotus 3.45 and Kleon 3.39) as the views of Thucydides (2002: 145 and 148). Finally, even the staunchest supporter of Donald Rumsfeld might feel that Hanson is getting a little carried away when Hanson describes Rumsfeld (2002: 151) by quoting a large section from Thucydides' praise of Pericles (2.65).

Reverting to his earlier role of historian he published a history of the Peloponnesian War in 2005 targeted at a popular audience. Like Kagan in the 1990s, he explicitly compares ancient Greece with the modern world, writing 'the Peloponnesian War seems not so old in this new millennium' (Hanson 2005: 3). He points out that Thucydides' work has been applied 'both astutely and clumsily' to current events over the past century, with Sparta as both Germany and the USSR, and the Sicilian Expedition as a 'precursor to Gallipoli, Vietnam, or any proposed great democratic or imperial crusade abroad' (2005: 4); but states that it is 'because Thucydides first framed the important issues that... we naturally return to his original and unimpeachable conclusions' (2005: 4). Modern America is like Athens in offering 'the world a radically egalitarian popular culture and, more recently, in a very Athenian mood' seeking to 'remove oligarchs and impose democracy' (2005: 8). Responding perhaps to modern criticism of Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, Hanson states that Athens' 'detractors expected a much higher level of fairness from them than they ever would have from the

Spartans' which 'presages the dilemma faced by generations of subsequent powerful western liberal and imperial republics' (2005: 9). Going a step further, Americans 'like the Athenians, are all-powerful, but insecure, professedly pacifist yet nearly always in some sort of conflict, often more desirous of being liked than being respected, and proud of our arts and letters even as we are more adept at war' (2005: 9).

Even when not making such explicit comparisons, Hanson's language forces the reader to think of the present in descriptions of the past. There is a chapter on 'Terror', in which the increasing use of light armed irregular troops in the Peloponnesian War is compared with contemporary uses of 'the terrorist, guerrilla, and insurgent... armed with rocket-propelled grenades, land mines, and suicide bombs' (Hanson 2005: 93). The notion of the Athenians being ready to 'pay any price' (Hanson 2005: 167) to support Plataea uses the same words as American promises to South Vietnam in the 1960s (Gardner 1995: 457). There are Greek and Macedonian 'autocrats', not tyrants or kings, bringing a 'nationalist antidote' to the problems created by Athenian 'consensual governments' (Hanson 2005: 12). An advantage of the Athenians is that they can act 'unilaterally' whereas the Spartans are only head of a 'coalition of the willing' (2005: 29). This reminds us of his earlier advice to America to 'be prepared to act alone' without the UN, which was both 'impotent' and 'morally bankrupt' (2002: 17).

An interesting comparison can be drawn between this use of modern analogy and language in his work on ancient history and the intrusion of ancient vocabulary when discussing the contemporary world. America stopped Afghanistan from becoming 'a Soviet satrapy' (2002: 15). If America, 'like the Athenians' at Melos, fight an unjust war they 'should lose'. Echoing Thucydides (3.82), Hanson states that war made by America will 'serve as a harsh teacher' (Hanson 2002: 66). What America needs in the war on terror is Thucydidean

wisdom: where the Greeks would have immediately attacked Osama bin Laden after 9/11, in America ‘we must chitchat with him (thus Reverend Jackson), fathom him (our professors and novelists), or accommodate him (the Clinton State Department)’ (Hanson 2002: 67). Nonetheless, as America eventually prepares to invade Afghanistan, Hanson imagines bin Laden fearfully wondering if ‘there are still Greek moralists in the land of Wal-Mart and Britney Spears’ (Hanson 2002: 67).

In arguing for the US invasion of Afghanistan Hanson had argued that there was little to fear because ‘it is almost a truism that the chief military worry for a western army for the last twenty-five hundred years was usually another western army’ (2002: 32) and that ‘the western way of war is deadly as old as the agrarian Greeks’ (2002: 33). The Muslim world is the successor to Persia where America is the successor to Athens: on the one side there is ‘Xerxes on his throne overlooking Salamis and Saddam on his balcony reviewing his troops’ and on the other there are ‘the Greeks arguing and debating... and the Americans haranguing each other on the eve of the Gulf War’ (2002: 194). The Spartans are less western than the Athenians and, perhaps placing them in the position of al-Qaeda to Athens as America, they are described as ‘fundamentalists’ (2005: 14). In an earlier essay he described the ‘millions of guest Asian and Arab helots’ working as un-free labour in Saudi Arabia (2004: 47) and this Sparta/Islam comparison is continued. In contrast to Athens/America but now also in terms like those Hanson uses of Iraq in his political articles, Sparta is a ‘quasi police state’ with ‘no lively intellectual life, no notion of upward mobility, and no immigration’ (2005: 39).

Hanson argues, like Kagan, that Thucydides was technically wrong in his assertion that Spartan fear of Athens was based upon growing Athenian power, but suggests that it was the spread of Athens’ ‘soft power’, in the form of the ‘sheer dynamism of Pericles’ imperial

culture' that the Spartans feared. They could live with Athens' expansionism, but not when combined with its 'radical ideology of support for democracy abroad' (Hanson 2005: 13). This is similar to the point made by Ste. Croix, that 'the dynamic, explosive, volatile factor in the situation was Athenian democracy', which 'struck fear into the hearts of Greek oligarchs' (1972: 290). Attacking the realist uses of Thucydides, Hanson argued that Thucydides was 'too discerning a critic to reduce strife down simply to perceptions about power and its manifestations' (2005: 312), and that 'when Athens engaged in *Realpolitik*... without the necessary revolutionary fervour of democracy, it often failed' (Hanson 2005: 14). In the subtext of Athens as America, the suggestion here is clear – America's enemies will fear her and America will be successful only when she puts democratic idealism, and regime change, at the top of her foreign policy agenda.

Like Ste. Croix, Hanson sees the Athenian empire as relatively popular amongst the subject states, whose poor 'liked the security offered by the Athenian fleet and did not mind the obligations of tribute, which fell mostly upon their own rich' (Hanson 2005: 13). Perhaps foreseeing that the Sicilian Expedition would be used by critics against the war in Iraq, Hanson is careful to provide grounds to weaken such arguments. The folly of the Athenians was that the expedition was not ideologically driven and that, in fact, Syracuse was a fellow western state with all the benefits that 'such imaginative and resourceful societies characteristically possessed' (2005: 204). The Athenians also made the mistake of ignoring Lamachus' advice to attack immediately, so that the Syracusans were not 'shocked and awed' (2005: 207). The Iraq invasion, to a neocon, differed on all three counts.

Despite Hanson's many favourable comparisons of Athens and America, there is still a fundamental difference between them, which is the moral superiority of America. In

attacking talk of an 'American Empire' Hanson draws distinctions between Athens and America: where the Athenians wanted 'land and treasure and grabbed all they could', the Americans haven't 'annexed anyone's soil since the Spanish-American War' (2004: 237), where the 'Athenian *ekklesia*' was 'eager for empire' America goes to war 'reluctantly' (2004: 238), and where the Athenians 'raised the Aegean tribute often' to fund its military expenditure the US 'spends less of its GNP than it did during the last five decades' (2004: 239). His final point, that whereas 'empires create a rhetoric of superiority', in America the media specialises in self criticism (2004: 240) seems to contradict the point in his history that Athens and America were alike in exactly this respect.

Robert Kagan has also written on foreign policy in the 2000s. He makes no mention of Thucydides in *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (2003) but draws upon a number of neoconservative Thucydidean themes. In the nineteenth century, whilst the US was weak and Europe was strong, European states, like imperial Athenians, believed in exercising their power to achieve their ends whilst the US, like Melos, 'denigrated power politics' and appealed 'to international law as the best means of regulating the behaviour of nations' (Kagan 2003: 10). Now their positions have been reversed there is a 'powerful European interest in building a world where military strength and hard power matter less than economic and soft power' and this wishful thinking is partly behind European criticism of the Iraq War (2003: 37). Unfortunately for Europe, all of her 'great economic power seems not to translate into diplomatic influence... where crises have a military component' (2003: 66). So, despite European success in building a 'postmodern paradise', Europe in its present form can only exist so long as 'the United States continues to use its power in the dangerous Hobbesian world that still flourishes outside Europe' (2003: 75).

In his 2008 work, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, Robert Kagan again shows the influence of his father's Thucydidean emphasis on 'honour' as a cause of conflict.

America may be drawn into a war with China over Taiwan because of China's 'national pride and honour' and states have 'historically considered honor and pride worth fighting for, often at the sacrifice of economic interests' (Kagan 2008: 35). The constructivist approach to regimes in Thucydides is also suggested by Kagan, in arguing that 'democracies have pursued policies that make the world safe for democracy' but also that 'autocrats pursue foreign policies aimed at making the world safe, if not for all autocracies, then at least for their own' (Kagan 2008: 61).

Despite realists within the administration, like Powell and Rice, coming to terms with the neocon agenda, or being forced out of the administration (Scowcroft), many outside were still critical. Over 30 realist academics, including prominent names such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, took out a *New York Times* advertisement arguing that an invasion of Iraq would be misguided. Accepting that 'Saddam is a tyrant and that Iraq has defied a number of U.N. resolutions' they went on to argue that an invasion would not be in the 'national interests' because the costs of war would be high, the evidence that Saddam was a danger to the U.S. was not 'credible' and a war would 'spread instability in the Middle East' (*New York Times* 26 September 2002). Unsurprisingly, the adoption of Thucydides by neocons caused realists to reclaim him for themselves. In response to the neoconservative adoption of Thucydides, Betts points out that Athens, 'however superior in virtue or motives it may have been, fought for 27 years, endured and inflicted more material devastation and moral degradation than the war's architects could possibly have envisioned at the outset— and still ultimately lost the Peloponnesian War' (Betts 2007: 143). He admits one cannot 'expect

Thucydides to settle any general theoretical question neatly. Nor should anyone be foolish enough to claim to know for sure which side of a particular policy debate Thucydides would take if he were alive today' (2007: 143). But he then says that, were Thucydides given the choice between the 'world-weary, sober humility' of the realists or the 'fresh-faced, romantic hubris' of the neoconservatives, 'the choice would be easy' (2007: 143).

The reason often given for using ancient examples is that the post Cold War world more closely resembles 'the distant than the recent past' (Johnson-Bagby 2000: 21), which is the reason given by Robert Kaplan in *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos* (2002). Kaplan draws upon a number of historical episodes, but sees Thucydides' *History* as perhaps 'the seminal work in international relations theory' (2002:45). Thucydides' insightful analysis and the 'slowness and difficulty of transportation in ancient Greece' make the work 'an apt metaphor for contemporary global politics' (2002: 47). Kaplan approaches foreign policy from a classical realist perspective, emphasising that wise and successful leaders are pessimistic about human nature and think 'tragically' (2002: 18). He did not view democratisation as an answer to global problems and argues that promoting democracy in the Middle East 'may unleash extremist forces that, in the short term, will further destabilise the Middle East' (2002: 6). Like Hanson he believes that 'Thucydides teaches us that civilisation represses barbarism but can never eradicate it' (2002: 50) but unlike the neocons argues that it was the Athenians lack of a 'tragic sense' which led to their arrogant overseas adventures and ultimate downfall (2002: 48-49).

Liberals have also used Thucydides to criticise neocon policy. In an essay on America's pre-emption policy and its invasion of Iraq without U.N. approval, Franck suggests that Athens was ultimately 'destroyed in a futile effort to protect itself against every eventuality by

attacking and securing the submission of all islands from which danger might emanate', arguing that this 'is highly relevant to our times' (2003: 608). Likewise, the 'extent to which a state like Athens, regarded as a perfect model of democracy in so many ways, could lose its way when it sought to use its power to impose democratic regimes on other states' has been put forward as a warning for American foreign policy makers following the invasion of Iraq (Scott 2005: 349). Again, the case of Melos has been used as a prototype of the Iraq War to argue that 'the United States risks abusing its power by adopting the more aggressive posture' of its pre-emptive war policy (Fiala 2006: 35).

Conclusion

It has been difficult in such a short space to cover in sufficient detail all of the uses (and misuses) of Thucydides during this period, and further research could fruitfully be undertaken. Nonetheless, interesting conclusions can be drawn from the way the competing ideologies of realism, liberalism and neoconservatism have interpreted Thucydides. It is clear that the allure of Thucydides has been most strong for conservatives, with the liberal adoption somewhat begrudging. Where liberals have cited Thucydides it has usually been either to disprove a specific realist or neocon interpretation, or only as one more piece of evidence towards an existing liberal theory (e.g. democratic peace theory). This should not be surprising. Conservatives, by definition, tend to place more trust in ‘ancient wisdom’, and the liberal faith in progress means both that ancient writers are less valued and that their insights, even if accurate for the past, can be less relevant today because human nature has progressed. Thucydides also lends himself better to a conservative reading. Putting aside his disputed sympathy for Sparta and distrust of radical democracy, his pessimistic view of human nature is often shared by conservatives but is at odds with progressive liberal thinking. The neoconservative adoption of Thucydides is perhaps evidence of their continued drift away from their progressive roots towards mainstream conservatism.

Despite the controversy between the different strands of US foreign policy thinking, there have in some ways been surprisingly few actual changes of policy. Unilateralism and the tendency to use force abroad ‘were not invented by the Bush administration’ (Kagan 2008: 86) and the foreign policies of George W. Bush were in many ways a continuation of Clinton’s. Clinton had bombed Iraq in 1998 without UN authorisation and even the neocon

Wolfowitz has asserted that, although some of Clinton's foreign interventions were 'wasteful, the broad policy itself was neoconservative' (Dorien 2004: 225).

Despite the dominant position of realism in academia, American administrations have generally spoken, and often acted, in terms of ideals and commitments to freedom and democracy. Eisenhower told Americans in 1952 that they 'faced a choice between good and evil,' Nixon wanted a 'moral rededication' of the west, Carter 'took the country on his version of a moral adventure' and Clinton 'promised a higher standard of morality' (Clarke and Halper 2004: 159). Neocons have been criticised by some fellow Republicans for being Wilsonian idealists (Clarke and Halper 2004: 18), but their rhetoric has been little different from that of their predecessors.

Neoconservatives drew the lesson from Nixon that Americans will not go along with a foreign policy of 'national interest' realism alone: policies also need a moral foundation. The lesson from the Bush administration, repeating the original rejection of Wilsonianism, is that an idealistic foreign policy alone will not garner widespread support either. In the invasion of Iraq, the neoconservative priority was the democratisation of Iraq which would set off a wave of liberalisation throughout the Middle East. The WMD argument was the secondary, realist, reason used in order to justify the invasion in terms of the national interest (though the WMD argument was pushed to the fore for those outside the administration). Once the WMD were shown to be nonexistent the national interest argument collapsed, and Americans' unhappiness over losing lives in an ideological crusade grew.

In terms of Thucydides' perceived relevance to contemporary America, this looks set to continue. America remains, like fifth century Athens, a democratic, dynamic and powerful

imperial state. America's predominant position amongst western nations, and the rise of less democratic developing nations, means that any challenge, in the short term, is likely to come from a less democratic state. This will give new life to the 'free Athens/America versus reactionary Sparta/'other'' dichotomy. The 'lessons' drawn from Thucydides can also be made to fit different situations – for a structural realist, it is the power relationship which matters, so America is just as likely to be the status quo power (Sparta) fighting off a rising Athenian challenger (e.g. China). Finally, as the example of the neocons demonstrates, Thucydides has sometimes been cited as an influence, despite his popularity in that group post-dating the ideas he is said to have inspired. This suggests that he is also used to add a stamp of respectability, rather than as a source of ideas.

Perhaps a key reason for his continued relevance lies within the text itself though.

Thucydides describes many problems but provides few answers. The labelling of Thucydides as a 'complex realist' may be the most accurate way to describe him, and it is this complexity, combined with the unresolved tensions in US foreign policy, which will sustain his relevance.

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