

A Critique of Neo-Conservative Foreign Policy

By Murray Rundus

The Neo-Conservative establishment is on its last breath. While the remnants of a fading order can still put up trivial obstacles to the Nationalist and Populist right, their ideology has ultimately fallen out of favor. The new Trump administration represents a shift within the right wing away from free trade and foreign aid, while also moving toward a peace deal in Ukraine. Although it remains to be seen whether this administration can achieve lasting peace in the Middle East or with China, it has adopted an unorthodox stance that demands that more foreign nations take care of themselves while the United States focuses on its own consolidation. These changes signify a major defeat for what was once the mainstream Republican front. The best representative of this fading group is Senator Mitch McConnell, who, when not [resisting the confirmations](#) of Tulsi Gabbard and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., found time to pen an article for the [January/February issue](#) of *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, detailing his vision for U.S. foreign policy. The policies McConnell presents are based on principles that go unquestioned and unexamined, allowing foreign interests to fill the gap where proper principles and understandings should reside.

McConnellism

Senator McConnell's ideas will be familiar to anyone who has followed U.S. foreign policy or even casually listened to news pundits discuss current events. His foundational idea is that the "revisionist powers" of Iran, Russia, and China are aligned in their interests to "undermine the U.S.-led order that has underpinned Western peace and prosperity for nearly a century." His proposed solution is for the United States to recognize the "systemic competition underway" and counter it with "hard power"—increased defense spending, unwavering support for Ukraine, Taiwan, and Israel, and a return to being the "Arsenal of Democracy" by removing tariffs and embracing free trade once more.

There is a conservative impulse to support one's country through strength, and the right wing is often associated with militaristic might. There is a notion in the national consciousness that a political Hegelian synthesis must be reached between the compassionate left and the orderly, jingoistic right. But this raises a critical question: Is Senator McConnell proposing a strong military-industrial complex for America's sake or something else? When McConnell speaks of defense, he does not speak of defending the nation itself but rather the "U.S.-led order." This reveals a supranational entity that the Senator insists on protecting.

A natural inclination for some Neo-Conservatives is to assert that this supranational entity is the economic order defended by the U.S. security complex. After all, the American government should seek to improve American life and ensure economic security for its citizens. However, McConnell rejects this notion, ridiculing the idea that foreign policy with China should be seen as “a race to produce more widgets” or an “opportunity to sell more American soybeans, semiconductors, solar panels, and electric vehicles.” Instead, he frames foreign policy as “a contest over the future of the international order.”

This “international order” often goes unquestioned, and we are expected to assume its inherent goodness, as if choosing between propping up heaven or hell. But if it is not merely an economic status quo, what is it? The concept of a *Novus Ordo Seclorum* is not new, the phrase is on the back of the U.S. Dollar and traces to the beginnings of Liberalism and the American Revolution. Unlike an order based on Christendom or the preservation of a people group, the Liberal Order is founded on Liberty. The philosophical basis for Classical Liberalism is highly dubious, relying on complex interpretations of pre-social man’s “state of nature” or Locke’s idea of the “consent of the governed,” which suggests that man tacitly consents to be governed merely by existing within a territory.¹ Modern man, however, has little patience for such pseudo-intellectualism, and today the Liberal Order is defended primarily because of the assumed intrinsic goodness of democratic government or a utilitarian desire to defend man’s right to pursue whatever pleases him. In the West, this has come to mean defending the LGBT agenda, assisted suicide, abortion, or whatever social contagion plagues the West at any given moment. This article does not aim to thoroughly examine the moral implications of these issues but merely to point out that this is the justification for the “international order” McConnell insists the U.S. security apparatus must defend. “Western” or “Democratic” values have come to mean the defense of modern man’s right to do as he pleases. If this is what the international order represents, are we comfortable asserting that it ought to be defended?



Image: AP-Mitch McConnell served as Senate Majority Leader from 2015 to 2021

Why Do Conservatives Support the Liberal Order?

Most Neo-Conservatives, like Senator McConnell, will not admit that this is the essence of the international order, even if it is de facto the case. It is difficult to convince a conservative Southern electoral base that America's purpose is to guarantee the freedom to undergo sex-change surgeries. Instead of confronting contemporary realities, they prefer to pretend they are still living in the 20th century, clinging to a deeply ingrained "us vs. them" mentality. No Neo-Conservative article would be complete without invoking the grave consequences had the U.S. not intervened in World War II, as McConnell does in the final section of his piece. Much of U.S. foreign policy in the 20th century was indeed shaped by the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II and the USSR in the Cold War. What the West represented mattered less as long as it opposed Nazism or Communism. But after the fall of the USSR, there was no longer a competing order for the United States to oppose. In recent years, [China](#) has moved away from ideological Marxist-Leninism, embracing a reactionary return to its cultural roots while maintaining the Communist Party as a veneer of imperial legitimacy. Russia has followed a similar path, returning to Russian Orthodoxy and ["traditional Russian values,"](#) whatever those may entail. This is not to defend either nation but to argue that it should not be taken for granted that we are ideologically opposed to

them unless proven otherwise. Personally, I find it insufficient to oppose these nations solely because they do not support the LGBT agenda or other Liberal values. Yet, due to an inability to move beyond a Cold War mentality, Russia and China are simply assumed to be our enemies.

Interest Groups Filling the Gap

Opposition to Iran is a separate issue, as one could theoretically oppose the Iranian regime on ideological or religious grounds. However, Republicans like McConnell cannot genuinely resist Iran on this basis because they must concede that the United States is not a people with a distinct religious identity but rather an idea rooted in Liberal values. Iran, a regional power posing no real threat to the U.S. mainland or its core interests, is opposed primarily due to foreign interests, particularly those of Israel. Senator McConnell himself has received nearly [\\$2 million from the Israel lobby](#). This should come as no surprise, for in the absence of a historic international order founded on following the divinely established order of things, there remains a principle that everyone must serve *somebody*. If supporting allies and opposing their enemies were truly in the nation's interest, that would be one thing. But it is entirely another to support foreign nations and oppose others merely because our political class is influenced by campaign funding from these allies. This reflects a lack of sovereignty for the American people. Yet, to even speak of the sovereignty of the American people, we must first acknowledge that such a thing as the American people exists.

An Alternative

The key to countering McConnell lies in accepting American identity for what it is and questioning the values that supposedly underpin the American order. There is no such thing as a nation united by a shared love for individuals to do as they please. Rather, an American is a person descended from a common stock, connected to a common land, and bound by shared cultural and ethical values. It is neither ethical nor sensible to fund wars against arbitrary enemies in the name of allowing others to embrace a lack of values. Senator McConnell often speaks of Western "prosperity," but what is prosperity? It is not found in societal malaise, declining birthrates, and multi-culturalism. Prosperity is found in a common identity, purpose, and collective excellence. If America is to act on the world stage, let it be done to ensure the prosperity of the American people, not to sustain an artificial order of iniquity.

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1. See Two Treatise of Government, II, 119 [↪](#)