

Glossary of the Right–Wing Sectors in U.S. Foreign Policy

By Tom Barry

Understanding politics in America and U.S. foreign policy means knowing about the right wing. The leading ideologues and strategists of the right wing—who hail from such groups as the Project for the New American Century, American Enterprise Institute, and Empower America—have set the hawkish and unilateralist direction of the Bush foreign and military policy.

Anticommunists: Until the collapse of the Soviet bloc, militant anticommunism served to unify right-wing sectors around a foreign policy that stressed military budget increases, rationalized U.S. support for dictatorial regimes, and supported military intervention. Unlike cold war liberals, who also identified themselves as anticommunists, the militant anticommunists of the right believed that the fight against communism needed to be fought at home as well as abroad, and they advocated aggressive rollback strategies rather than merely containment and deterrence. Militant anticommunism no longer functions as the backbone of the right's approach to international affairs, although anti-communist convictions still shape the foreign policy agendas of many right-wing ideologues regarding U.S. relations with China, Cuba, and North Korea. This political agenda of crushing all forms of communist governance has created fissures within the right, dividing the proponents of free trade from those who resist establishing normal business relations with countries ruled by Communist parties.

Christian Right: Before the 1970s, the U.S. evangelical movement was a subculture that kept its distance from electoral politics. With a new focus on social conservatism, Republican Party strategists together with neoconservatives and right-wing ideologues encouraged the politicization of the evangelical sectors as part

of the New Right fusionism that ushered Ronald Reagan into the presidency in 1981.

Conservative Internationalists: Neoconservatives often use this label to describe themselves. It distinguishes them from the paleoconservatives, from the traditional isolationism of many core Republicans, and from the liberal internationalists found mainly in the Democratic Party.

Conservative Mainstream: Today's conservative mainstream encompasses all those elements of the right who believe that it is possible to operate within the electoral arena, including all the groups in this glossary. The mainstream includes think tanks and front groups as well as major constituency organizations like the Christian Coalition. The conservative mainstream may call for radical changes in domestic and foreign policies, but it does not embrace the methods of domestic right-wing vigilante groups, although most sectors of the right have supported U.S. assistance to foreign right-wing vigilante groups. Membership in the conservative mainstream does not equate to resisting social change. Indeed, many conservative groups espouse radical policy agendas. However, conservatives react negatively to changes that are regarded as part of progressive, secular, or liberal policy agendas.

Libertarians: Conservative libertarians have long been part of the conservative mainstream in their embrace of free market solutions and processes and in their opposition to government involvement in social and economic matters. Conservative libertarians share concerns about government infringement on individual civil liberties with progressive civil libertarians. Libertarians also share concerns about U.S. interventionism and foreign aid with paleoconservatives.

National Security Militarists: Closely connected to what President Eisenhower termed the “U.S. military industrial complex,” national security militarists are among the chief proponents of major increases in the U.S. military budget and transformations in military capacity, arguing that the U.S. must maintain military superiority. Closely allied with the most militant anticommunist sectors of the right, the militarists have in recent years rallied around a grand strategy of U.S. global supremacy built on the foundation of unchallenged military power in order to maintain “the American peace” throughout this century.

Neoconservatives: Neoconservatives constitute an intellectual current that emerged from the cold war liberalism of the Democratic Party. Unlike other elements of the conservative mainstream, neoconservatives have historical social roots in liberal and leftist politics. Disillusioned first with socialism and communism and later with new Democrats (like George McGovern) who came to dominate the Democratic Party in the 1970s, neoconservatives played a key role in boosting the New Right into political dominance in the 1980s. For the most part, neoconservatives—who are disproportionately Jewish and Catholic—are not politicians but rather political analysts, activist ideologues, and scholars who have played a central role in forging the agendas of numerous right-wing think tanks, front groups, and foundations. Neoconservatives have a profound belief in America’s moral superiority, which facilitates alliances with the Christian Right and other social conservatives. But unlike either core traditionalists of American conservatism

or those with isolationist tendencies, neoconservatives are committed internationalists. As they did in the 1970s, the neoconservatives were instrumental in the late 1990s in helping to fuse diverse elements of the right into a unified force based on a new agenda of U.S. supremacy.

New Right: In the 1970s this manifestation of American conservatism represented a revival of the coalition of libertarians, traditionalists, and anticommunists that gave Barry Goldwater the Republican nomination in 1964. This fusionist movement, however, differed in that it included a politicized evangelical sector (the Christian Right), Democrats disaffected with the liberal platform of the new Democratic Party, and the strong intellectual influence, particularly in foreign policy issues, of the neoconservatives.

Paleoconservatives: In direct contrast to neoconservatives, paleoconservatives reject internationalism and interventionism that is not directly related to protecting U.S. national interests (largely defined as economic interests). Their roots can be traced back to the conservative isolationists and profascists of the 1930s and to the America First movement of the 1940s. After the end of the cold war, the paleoconservatives were one of the few political sectors that criticized the new military interventionism, including both the Gulf War and the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s. On economic issues such as free trade, the paleocons are nationalists and protectionists, while on most domestic issues their posture is one of reactionary populism that includes elements of racism and nativism.

Social Conservatives: This sector, which is mostly focused on domestic issues, arose from the traditionalist backbone of the U.S. conservative movement. Unlike libertarians, social conservatives hold that government has the God-given mandate to enforce a moral order shaped by Christian values. Although not all social conservatives are part of the Christian Right, most support the notion of a “culture war” to protect what they regard to be traditional American values from erosion due to secularism, feminism, and cultural relativism. The international perspective of social conservatives has historically been viewed through the prism of anticommunism, but in the 1990s, neoconservative authors and activists like Samuel Huntington and William Bennett were instrumental in internationalizing the paranoia that fueled the domestic culture wars of the right by positing that Judeo-Christian values and civilization were threatened around the world.

Sources: Amy E. Ansell, ed. *Unraveling the Right: The New Conservatism in American Thought and Politics* (Westview Press, 1998); Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (Guilford Press, 2000); Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (Guilford Press, 1995). Highly recommended, also, are two glossaries compiled by Political Research Associates that focus on right-wing populism and the Christian Right: http://www.publiceye.org/research/Chart_of_Sectors.htm and http://www.publiceye.org/glossary/glossary_big.htm