



## City Research Online

### City, University of London Institutional Repository

---

**Citation:** Hirst, A. (2012). Leo Strauss and International Relations: The politics of modernity's abyss. *International Politics*, 49(6), pp. 645-670. doi: 10.1057/ip.2012.23

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

---

**Permanent repository link:** <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/7124/>

**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2012.23>

**Copyright:** City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

**Reuse:** Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

# **Leo Strauss and International Relations: The politics of modernity's abyss**

**Aggie Hirst**

**School of International Politics, City University London, St John Street, EC1V 0HB London, UK.**

**E-mail: [aggie.hirst.1@city.ac.uk](mailto:aggie.hirst.1@city.ac.uk)**

## **Abstract**

This article argues that an engagement with the political philosophy of Leo Strauss is of considerable value in International Relations (IR), in relation to the study of both recent US foreign policy and contemporary IR theory. The question of Straussian activities within and close to the foreign policy-making establishment in the United States during the period leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq has been the focus of significant scholarly and popular attention in recent years. This article makes the case that several individuals influenced by Strauss exercised considerable influence in the fields of intelligence production, the media and think tanks, and traces the ways in which elements of Strauss' thought are discernible in their interventions in these spheres. It further argues that Strauss' political philosophy is of broader significance for IR insofar as it can be read as a securitising response to the dangers he associated with the foundationlessness of the modern condition. The article demonstrates that the politics of this response are of crucial importance for contemporary debates between traditional and critical IR theorists.

## **Introduction**

The political philosophy of Leo Strauss has been the subject of controversy within and beyond the discipline of International Relations (IR) in recent years, due in large part to the issue of the influence of Straussians in the US foreign policy-making establishment during the period leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In Jean-Francois Drolet's view, 'the growth of Straussianism as a school of political thought and its link to the neo-conservative movement and the Republican Party has led to a wide range of contentious claims about Strauss' alleged influence on American politics and foreign policy since the 1980s' (2009, p. 2). Such claims became increasingly widespread in the post-9/11 security environment. As Nicholas Xenos notes,

the onset of the US war on Iraq in the spring of 2003 brought with it a series of articles and radio discussions identifying a small group within and around George W. Bush's administration that had played a central role in shaping its foreign policy on Iraq and with intellectual roots stretching back to the otherwise obscure political philosopher Leo Strauss. (2008, p. 5)

As two of Strauss' former students similarly attest, following 9/11 Strauss came to be viewed as the 'thinker behind ever-larger sets of political actors and policies, but most especially he was being identified as "the brains" behind George W. Bush and the Iraq War' (Zuckert and Zuckert, 2006, p. ix).

From 2003, the question of Straussian influence within the Bush administration received significant attention in the United States and international media (Ackerman and Judis, 2003; Cabrejas, 2003; Frachon and Vernet, 2003; Hersh, 2003; Leupp, 2003; Lobe, 2003; Shorris, 2004). Such was the public intrigue that a play portraying Strauss as 'the guiding light of the neo-conservatives, who are forging America's new foreign policy' (Minowitz, 2009, p. 19) opened in 2003.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a three-part BBC documentary was broadcast in the United Kingdom in 2004, which drew parallels between the rise of militarised Islamic movements and Strauss-inspired neoconservatism.<sup>2</sup> Concurrently, an increase in scholarly engagement with Straussianism occurred during this period, which resulted in the production of several noteworthy texts on the subject (Drury, 1999; Norton, 2004; Zuckert and Zuckert, 2006). Strauss and various Straussians also feature in books dedicated more broadly to post-9/11 US foreign policy (Woodward, 2002; Clarke, 2004; Dorrien, 2004b).

From 2005, a modest body of literature exploring the question of Straussian influence in the US foreign policy establishment emerged in IR (Halper and Clarke, 2004; Connolly, 2005; George, 2005; Williams, 2005; Owens, 2007; Xenos, 2008; Drolet, 2009; George, 2010; Drolet, 2011). This has been applauded on the grounds that 'this is a particularly fascinating issue because Strauss is a much more interesting thinker than he initially appears to be and his political legacy a more potent and compelling factor than is generally realised in an IR context' (George, 2005, p. 175). Reflecting the engagements outside the discipline, examinations of Strauss' thought in IR have tended to focus on the question of the invasion of Iraq. Patricia Owens, for instance, claims that through an exploration of Strauss' thought it 'is possible to understand the contentious political debates surrounding the invasion and occupation of Iraq' (2007, p. 267). Jim George similarly states his intention to 'explore elements of this "Straussian" agenda by emphasising its significance for US and global politics in general and, in more specific terms, for the war in Iraq' (2005, p. 174).

There are at least three problems with the existing IR literature on Strauss and the Straussians, which this article seeks to address. First, recent contributions in the discipline have emphasised a connection between Straussian thought and the broader neoconservative movement in the United States because, as Jim George asserts, 'neoconservatives have drawn from Strauss a thematic agenda of sorts' (2005, p. 174). Michael C. Williams seems to concur, claiming that 'there is little doubt that Strauss' thinking has been influential in many aspects of neoconservatism, and on the personal intellectual trajectory of key individuals' (2005, pp. 308–309).<sup>3</sup> Although explorations that draw out these connections certainly have purchase in IR, I would suggest that there exists a propensity to render neoconservatism and Straussianism indistinct in the discipline.<sup>4</sup> Although powerful arguments have been made demonstrating their intellectual convergences, such as that developed by Jean-Francois Drolet (2011), it must also be borne in mind that the intellectual roots of neoconservatism extend beyond Strauss (Ehrman, 1995; Kristol, 1995; Stelzer, 2004; Murray, 2006; Drolet, 2011), and that by no means all or even most neoconservatives have engaged in a sustained manner with Strauss' thought or works.<sup>5</sup> Presenting neoconservatism and Straussianism as one and the same phenomenon may serve rhetorical purposes, but such a conflation risks overstating the scope of Straussian influence, leaving those relying upon this connection as the basis of their argument open to the charge of imprecision, exaggeration and generalisation (Zuckert and Zuckert, 2006; Minowitz, 2009). Accordingly, this article restricts itself to an exploration of the significance of Straussian thought and the activities of a group of Straussians during the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq, leaving the question of the broader neoconservative movement to one side.

A related problem is raised by James Costopoulos. He alleges that the existing literature fails to adequately demonstrate what comprises Straussianism as a political orientation. He asks:

what are the intellectual commitments that 'Straussians' share?... This question is never asked and therefore never answered. Any serious effort to connect Leo Strauss and the 'Straussians' to the Bush administration must answer this question. If no answer is possible, then no connection exists. (Costopoulos, 2005, pp. 271–272)

Building upon existing work in IR and beyond, this article explicitly engages with this challenge, demonstrating that several noteworthy features of Strauss' thought can be identified and traced through the interventions of a group of Straussians active during the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq in the fields of intelligence production, the media and think tanks.

Finally, in addition to conflating Straussianism and neoconservatism, existing accounts have frequently engaged with Strauss' political philosophy only to the extent of connecting certain of Strauss' ideas to the conduct of Straussians in recent US foreign policy decisions, most often his apparent advocacy of the use of deceit in the political establishment, understood in terms of the Platonic 'Noble Lie' (George, 2005). However, this curtails the process of exploration prematurely insofar as it does not endeavour to tease out what may be at stake in Strauss' thought. Although these connections are significant in the study of US foreign policy, they are in themselves not the end of the story. The politics of Strauss' response to the foundationless condition of modernity, which underpins these connections, is of considerable significance in an IR context, both in the context of US foreign policy and more broadly for IR theory.

### **The Politics of Modernity's Abyss**

The political philosophy of Leo Strauss can be read as one possible response to what he perceived to be the condition of foundationlessness underpinning modernity. As Drolet has argued, for Strauss the 'Enlightenment's doctrinal worship of reason had led to a world without any commanding truth in which all opinions are deemed of equal worth... This created a moral void at the heart of modern societies' (2009, p. 6). Such a void or abyss represents the emptiness left once all foundational beliefs have been undermined; it signifies the vacuum remaining once values, ontology and metaphysics have been shown to be without essential or stable foundations. In Grace Jantzen's words, the abyss signifies 'the removal of guarantees of certainty or ontological foundations upon which truth, whether metaphysical, ethical, or political could be grounded, the end of a "metaphysics of presence" as an anchor point for truth' (2003, p. 256). Strauss was profoundly affected by this destabilisation of the foundations of metaphysics, and deeply preoccupied with the philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger, from which he saw it to be emanating (Lampert, 1996; Zuckert, 1996; Smith, 2007). Indeed, it has been suggested that Heidegger 'is the unnamed presence to whom or against whom all of Strauss's writings are directed' (Smith, 2007, p. 109).

Strauss traced the undermining of metaphysical foundations through modern philosophy, from Machiavelli (Strauss, 1973), through Nietzsche (Strauss, 1965) and Heidegger (Strauss, in Pangle, 1989), and perceived its ramifications in modern social science, in which objectivity was no

longer possible (Strauss, 1973), and the crisis of Western politics, in which the West had lost its identity and purpose (Strauss, 1978). The consequences of this destabilisation were that, by

denying the significance, if not the existence, of universal norms, the historical school destroyed the only solid basis of all efforts to transcend the actual y Since any universal principles make at least most men potentially homeless, it depreciated universal principles in favour of historical principles... The only standards that remain were of a purely subjective character, standards that had no other support than the free choice of the individual. No objective criterion henceforth allowed the distinction between good and bad choices. Historicism culminated in nihilism. The attempt to make man absolutely at home in this world ended in man's becoming absolutely homeless. (Strauss, 1965, pp. 15–18)

The undermining of the foundations of society meant, for Strauss, a descent into relativism and nihilism. This is because the abyss renders man unable to judge or conceptualise the good; for Strauss, man 'cannot live without light, guidance, knowledge; only through knowledge of the good can he find the good that he needs' (1965, p. 74). This condition is both empty and terrifying because 'the Nothing... cannot arouse an enthusiastic and life-inspiring Yes' (Strauss, in Lampert, 1996, p. 195). The exposure of the abyss entails that justice cannot be possible for Strauss; he claims that Socrates concedes to Thrasymachus, in Plato's Republic, that justice is simply a socially necessary artifice (Strauss, 1978, p. 83), that the will of the stronger comprises justice, as no foundational premises exist.<sup>6</sup>

Strauss' life's work can be read as an attempt to counter or mitigate this descent into nihilism and despair; in Larry George's estimation, Strauss' thought can be understood as 'a lifelong crusade against "relativism" and "historicism" ' (2010, p. 262). Such a crusade was necessary for Strauss precisely because of the power of the Nietzschean and Heideggerian challenges to metaphysics. As Rosen notes, it is 'quite clear from Strauss's own words that he has no adequate defense against Heidegger's fundamental views, nor does he find any prospect of assistance in the various philosophical positions of his day' (2009, p. 123). The primary means by which he sought to mitigate the (in his view) pernicious effects of the consequent foundationlessness was an advocacy of the development of social myths that might serve as substitute premises from which society might infer its meaning and purpose. Strauss refers to such myths as 'salutary opinions'; he claimed that it 'would not be strange if Socrates had tried to lead those who are able to think toward the truth and to lead the others toward agreement in salutary opinions or to confirm them in such opinions' (1978, pp. 53–54). For Strauss, 'opinion is the element of society y [and] every society rests, in the last analysis, on specific values or on specific myths, i.e., on assumptions which are not evidently superior or preferable to any alternative assumptions' (Strauss, 1973, p. 222). Such opinions or myths provide the basis from which society takes its bearings, from which its *raison d'être* might be inferred:

For if even the best city stands or falls by a fundamental falsehood, albeit a noble falsehood, it can be expected that the opinions on which the imperfect cities rest or in which they believe will not be true, to say the least. Precisely the best of the non-philosophers, the good citizens, are

passionately attached to these opinions and therefore passionately opposed to philosophy which is the attempt to go beyond opinion toward knowledge. (Strauss, 1978, p. 125)

This sentiment is echoed in Strauss' assertion that 'untrue stories are needed not only for little children but also for the grown-up citizens of the good city, but it is probably best if they are imbued with these stories from the earliest possible moment' (Strauss, 1978, p. 98).

To mitigate the pernicious consequences of the abyss, then, ideas and opinion must be in constant circulation and reaffirmation for Strauss: 'even a mass culture and precisely a mass culture requires a constant supply of what are called new ideas, which are the products of what are called creative minds: even singing commercials lose their appeal if they are not varied from time to time' (Strauss, 1995, p. 5). Thus, he claims, 'the good city is not possible without a fundamental falsehood; it cannot exist in the element of truth' (Strauss, 1978, p. 102). The notion of justice is one such falsehood or myth for Strauss, which, as Lampert shows, can be seen in Strauss' reading of the Republic: the latter is 'an ironic justification precisely of the *adikia* (unjust) – that comes out beautifully in the Thrasymachus discussion', in which justice 'loses the trial, it wins only through the myth at the end, that is, through a *kalon pseudo* [beautiful lie], that is, through a deed that is strictly speaking *adikon*' (2009, p. 71). In other words, as a consequence of the abyss, justice is exposed as a myth, a beautiful lie. Because no truth exists for Strauss in social science, philosophy or justice, opinion must operate in its place such that society may function. A process of generating and disseminating opinion can thus be seen to be a central dimension of Strauss' thought. This is reflected in two telling features of Strauss' thought: the friend/enemy binary and the rehabilitation of the notions of the 'regime' and 'tyranny'.

The conceptualisation of the friend/enemy binary is most frequently associated with the thought of Carl Schmitt, rather than with that of Leo Strauss. Significant ongoing debate exists regarding how Schmitt's oeuvre might be read in an IR context, the friend/enemy binary residing at the very core of this. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to explore this in detail, a particularly interesting dimension of this is the division of opinion between those, on the one hand, who read Schmitt's thought as intimately connected to fascist politics (Howse, 1998, 2003), and those, on the other, who read his existential decisionism as challenging the ontological totalisation of neo-liberal orthodoxy (Mouffe, 2007; Odysseos, 2007), in a manner that resembles, according to Prozorov (2007), a form of 'Foucauldian ethics'.<sup>7</sup>

Entangled within this broader debate is the question of Strauss' relationship with Schmitt's thought, an issue that is itself subject to considerable disagreement. While Prozorov (2007) and Mouffe (2007) challenge the notion that Schmitt's formulation maps easily onto Strauss' political philosophy, and thereby to Straussian foreign policy activities, Sheppard, for instance, argues that 'Strauss followed Schmitt in using his conception of the political to point out the inherent weaknesses and deficiencies of modern liberalism' (2006, p. 66), his conception of the political understood as the claim that if 'the distinction between friend and enemy ceases even as a mere possibility, there will be a politics-free *weltanschauung*, culture, civilisation, economy, morals, law, art' (Schmitt, cited in Meier, 2006, p. 13). Although a thorough treatment of this debate cannot be offered here, my concern is to demonstrate the operation of the logic of a dichotomous

conceptualisation of friends and enemies in Strauss' thought, and this can be done leaving aside the question of whether or not this emanates from Schmitt.

Albeit rarely, if ever, stated directly in his own voice, the presence of this binary in Strauss' thought is discernible. It is appealed to, for instance, in his observation that the city 'separates itself from others by opposing or resisting them; the opposition of "We" and "They" is essential to the political association' (Strauss, 1978, p. 111). Similarly, he states that in society, 'the just man is he who does not harm, but loves, his friends and neighbors, i.e., his fellow citizens, but who does harm or who hates his enemies, i.e., the foreigners who as such are at least potential enemies of his city' (Strauss, 1965, p. 149).<sup>8</sup> Robert Howse offers a particularly insightful account of Strauss' relationship with the friend/enemy binary. He claims that, for Strauss, 'the political is coeval with the friend/enemy distinction, for only this distinction seems capable of explaining or legitimizing the application of rules within society that are not applied to others on the outside'. However, he continues, Strauss' formulation also 'lays bare the problematic character of the friend/enemy distinction from the perspective of pure natural right. It points to the limits of politics, to the tension between the demands of politics and the unqualified good for man' (1998, p. 80). Strauss, in this reading, both identifies and follows the logic of the friend/enemy binary, but also indicates its constructed and contingent nature, exposing, in a pseudo-deconstructive manner, at least for those able to see, its constituted rather than eternal nature. Thus, the logic of the friend/enemy binary can be seen to be at work in Strauss' thought. As will be further demonstrated below, the operation of this dichotomy plays a crucial role in the generation of salutary opinions.

In conjunction with this binary are two terms that run as Xenos notes (2008: xi), through Strauss' thought: the concept of the 'regime' and the related notion of 'tyranny'. More than simply the ways in which the practical infrastructure of society is organised, the regime refers, for Strauss, to the modes of life within a society, the premises and values upon which society rests, the very foundations of society. Strauss states that for the ancients, 'the regime is the "form" of the city... [and] who is or is not a citizen depends already on the form' (1978, p. 46). He comments elsewhere: 'what it means to be a good citizen depends entirely on the regime. A good citizen in Hitler's Germany would be a bad citizen elsewhere' (1973, p. 35). For Strauss, the citizen is fundamentally constituted in light of the regime; as Machiavelli showed, 'while men are by nature selfish, and nothing but selfish, hence bad, they can become social, public spirited, or good. This transformation requires compulsion. The success of this compulsion is due to the fact that man is amazingly malleable' (Strauss, 1973, p. 42).<sup>9</sup> The regime is thus crucial to the ways in which individuals and society are constituted, and plays a central role in the generation of society's opinions. Like the friend/enemy binary, and indeed reflecting its operation, it guards against descent into relativism by contributing to constituting society as something in particular.

Part of how such a constitution can occur is the positioning the regime against an enemy regime. Strauss' use of the term 'tyranny' functions in precisely this manner. He states:

A social science that cannot speak of tyranny with the same confidence with which medicine speaks, for example, of cancer, cannot understand social phenomena as what they are... Present day social science finds itself in this condition... Once we have learned again from the classics what tyranny is, we shall be enabled and compelled to diagnose as tyrannies a number of contemporary regimes which appear in the guise of

dictatorships. (Strauss, 1973, p. 95)

Strauss thus explicitly endeavoured to rehabilitate the notion of tyranny in the context of foreign policy. As one Straussian noted,

to the best of my recollection, in the political science of the 1930s neither Hitler nor Stalin was referred to as a tyrant. Their regimes were called dictatorships, or totalitarian, in deference to the quest for 'value free' objectivity. Yet this 'objectivity' made it impossible to understand the political reality. Strauss's *On Tyranny* was written in part to restore the classical term and with it the classical understanding. (Jaffa, 1999, p. 44)

The notion of tyranny functions alongside the concept of the regime in order to designate society's enemy in morally clear terms. It is thus closely related to Strauss' awareness and mobilisation of the friend/enemy binary. These features of Strauss' thought have important implications both for the study of contemporary US foreign policy and in the context of IR theory.

### **Straussians and US Foreign Policy**

An exploration of the individuals and interventions that influenced the decision to invade Iraq is of crucial significance to contemporary IR scholarship, not least as a consequence of the leading roles played by the United States and United Kingdom in its undertaking and the ongoing devastation it has resulted in. Owing to the problems associated with the tendency to conflate Straussianism with neoconservatism more broadly, this article restricts itself to exploring the interventions of a small group of Straussian individuals active in this context.<sup>10</sup> These are: William Kristol, Harvey Mansfield, Gary Schmitt, Abram Shulsky, Harry Jaffa and Paul Wolfowitz.<sup>11</sup> These Straussians occupied various influential positions during the period immediately before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Kristol chaired the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) and serves as editor of the *Weekly Standard*; Mansfield is William R. Kenan, Jr Professor of Government at Harvard and received a National Humanities Medal from President Bush in 2004; Schmitt ran PNAC as its Executive Director; Shulsky headed the controversial Office of Special Plans (OSP); Jaffa is Professor Emeritus of Government at the Claremont Graduate School and Distinguished Fellow at the Claremont Institute; and Wolfowitz served as Deputy Defense Secretary. These Straussians inherit from Strauss a sense of the constituted nature of social opinions and the imperative to generate and disseminate these such that society may cohere. Their interventions in the spheres of intelligence production, the media and think tanks follow Strauss' logic of generating opinion, reflect his emphasis on the friend/enemy binary, and mobilise the terms 'regime' and tyranny' extensively.

#### Straussians and intelligence production: Rejecting objectivity; creating reality

Shulsky, Schmitt and Wolfowitz were highly active in the sphere of intelligence production during the period in question, and indeed for many years before this.<sup>12</sup> Their interventions in this sphere

follow the logic of Strauss' position that objectivity cannot be possible given conditions of foundationlessness; they advocated and engendered changes in intelligence praxis that clearly reflect Strauss' thought.

Traditionally, the intelligence community had operated from the assumption that its practices could lead to objective conclusions. This theoretical premise was derived in large part from the ideas and practice of Sherman Kent, a Yale Professor who served in the CIA during World War II and for 17 years during the Cold War. According to Peter Boyer, Wolfowitz was sceptical of these methodological assumptions: he had 'deep and abiding suspicions about the inviolability of the intelligence community's culture and processes, a scepticism that dates back to his earliest days in government service' (2004, p. 4). This was because, Shulsky notes, these assumptions reflect

the tremendous optimism of the social sciences of the 1940s and 1950s... that the new methodology of social science would begin to bear fruit and result in a much more scientific understanding of human behaviour... on the model of the physical sciences. (1995, p. 20)

This belief cannot, for Shulsky, be sustained: ' "scientific" social science is much more problematic [than it seems] and y the model of the physical sciences is not applicable. This', he continues, 'undercuts Kent's belief in intelligence as universal social science and forces us back to the main issue of how the information needs of a government should be met' (1995, p. 20). The question remaining if objectivity is impossible is, then, for Shulsky, meeting the needs of policy makers. Strauss' influence is clearly discernable here; Schmitt and Shulsky note that 'the trends in political science that Strauss polemized against... also affected the world of intelligence' (1999, p. 407). Shulsky and Schmitt propose two changes to intelligence production methodology. First, they insist that the focusing on the particularities of the nation being studied must be central to intelligence production:

national security... cannot be considered independently of the nation's type of government (or regime) and its ideological outlook. Although adherents of Realpolitik would argue that a nation's interests are determined by the objective factors of the international system, ideological view, and a country's political culture more generally, affect how a government perceives them. For example, a regime's ideological character may determine whether or not it views a given foreign country as a threat. (1995, p. 3)

The presence of the concept of the 'regime' is highly significant here; it echoes Strauss' identification and use of the term as noted above. Second, they argue that intelligence production must be more closely guided by policy makers. In Shulsky and Schmitt's words,

having some collection capability under the control of policy-makers with specific needs, such as the military, is likely to make the resulting intelligence more relevant... [C]loseness to policymakers, despite the threat to 'objectivity' that entails, makes sense if it grounds the analysts in concern for concrete policy issues that must be addressed in instrumentally useful ways. (2002, pp. 50–54)

Similarly, Wolfowitz argues that ‘the policy process should drive intelligence production’ (1995, p. 75).

During the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq, these Straussians occupied highly influential positions within the intelligence community. In October 2001, Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld established the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group, although this was kept secret for more than a year (Lang, 2004). Simultaneously, the structure of the Iraq Desk at Near East and South Asian Affairs was abruptly changed and this resulted in the creation of a new entity, the OSP, during late summer 2002. This agency was dedicated to exploring the possible connections between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.<sup>13</sup>

Intelligence production at the OSP was conducted in ways that reflect Wolfowitz, Shulsky and Schmitt’s prescriptions for reform mentioned above; practices central to the Kentian model were suspended and political interests played a central role. As a former National Security Council expert on Iraq has argued, the OSP ‘dismantle[d] the existing filtering process that for fifty years had been preventing the policymakers from getting bad information’ (Pollack, cited in Hersh, 2005, p. 223). During this period, the OSP sidestepped practices of peer review, the verification of material by comparison with other existing information, and other traditional procedures designed to ensure that only reliable information reached policy makers.<sup>14</sup> This process became known as ‘stovepiping’.

Stovepiping refers to the direct feeding of unsubstantiated information straight to the highest levels of the political establishment. In Gordon Mitchell’s words, ‘this transmission occurs through channels that circumvent institutionalised vetting procedures used to validate and coordinate intelligence assessments amongst the intelligence community’s numerous institutional entities producing official reporting’ (2006, p. 15). This shift in verification procedures was defended by Wolfowitz:

we must accelerate the speed with which information is passed to policy makers and operators. We cannot wait for critical intelligence to be processed, coordinated, edited and approved – we must accept the risks inherent in posting critical information before it is processed. (cited in Mitchell, 2006, p. 15)

This coincides closely with these Straussians’ commitment to conducting intelligence production with the aims of policy makers in mind.

There were at least two major disagreements between the OSP and the CIA/DIA during this period, namely the question of a connection between the 9/11 attacks and Saddam Hussein, and the issue of the latter’s possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Although Admiral Bob Inman, a former Deputy Director of the CIA, submitted that ‘there was no tie between Iraq and 9/11, even though some people tried to postulate one... I know of no instance in which Iraq funded direct, deliberate attacks on the United States’ (cited in Lang, 2004), the OSP insisted that such a connection did exist. Similarly,

CIA analysts also generally endorsed the findings of the International

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which concluded that y[Iraq's] present capabilities were virtually nil. The IAEA possessed no evidence that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear program and, it seems, neither did US intelligence. In CIA Director George Tenet's January 2002 review of global weapons-technology proliferation, he did not even mention a nuclear threat from Iraq. (Ackerman and Judis, 2003)

In contrast, the OSP insisted that Saddam Hussein had these at his disposal.

These claims were codified in a series of 'talking points' produced at the OSP. These talking points were 'a series of bulleted statements, written persuasively and in a convincing way, and superficially they seemed reasonable and rational' (Kwiatkowski, 2004). These points 'were to be the only briefings provided on Iraq' (Lang, 2004). They emphasised that 'Saddam Hussein has gassed his neighbors, abused his people, and was continuing in that mode, becoming an imminently dangerous threat to his neighbors and to us', that 'Saddam Hussein had harboured al-Qaida operatives and offered and probably provided them with training facilities – without mentioning that the suspected facilities were in the US/Kurdish-controlled part of Iraq', and that 'Saddam Hussein was pursuing and had WMD of the type that could be used by him, in conjunction with al-Qaida and other terrorists, to attack and damage American interests, Americans and America'. They concluded that

Saddam Hussein had not been seriously weakened by war and sanctions and weekly bombings over the past 12 years, and in fact was plotting to hurt America and support anti-American activities, in part through his carrying on with terrorists – although here the intelligence said the opposite. (Kwiatkowski, 2004)

All of this led Kwiatkowski to reflect that,

with the talking points, many of the propagandistic bullets that [we] were given to use in papers for our superiors to inform them – internal propaganda – many of those same phrases and assumptions and tones, I saw in Vice President Cheney's speeches and the president's speeches. So I got the impression that those talking points were not just for us, but were the core of an overall agenda for a disciplined product, beyond the Pentagon. Over at the vice president's office and the Weekly Standard, the media, and the neoconservative talking heads and that kind of thing, all on the same sheet of music. (cited in Lang, 2004)<sup>15</sup>

Kwiatkowski claims that the talking points were only distributed following 'Shulsky's approval', and the modifications that occurred over time were 'directed or approved by Shulsky and his team' (Kwiatkowski, 2004). In Lang's estimation, 'Shulsky seems to have set out to use the OSP as the means for providing the Bush administration policymakers all the ammunition they needed to get their desired results' (2004). This is consistent with these Straussians' agenda of a policy-driven intelligence production process and represents a suspension of the Kentian methods as Strauss' rejection of positivism implies. As Shulsky reiterates, 'why fight it out on policy grounds if one can win by manipulating the intelligence product and arrogating its aura for one's position?' (1995, p. 27). Thus, Strauss' thought can clearly be discerned in the context of intelligence production.

## Straussians and the Media: Making manifest friends and enemies

In conjunction with their activities in the sphere of intelligence production, these Straussians enacted concurrent interventions in the media that reflect Strauss' thought. In this context in particular, the friend/enemy binary and the notions of the 'regime' and 'tyranny' are clearly in evidence. Kristol was particularly visible in media during this period, publishing regularly in the Weekly Standard, as well as appearing regularly on Fox and MSNBC (Halper and Clarke, 2004, p. 188), and on Good Morning America, The Week with David Brinkley and The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer (Dorrien, 2004a, p. 126). Mansfield, Wolfowitz, Schmitt and Jaffa were also active in this sphere.

Just as the Straussians in the realm of intelligence production had propounded a version of events that divided the world into friends and enemies, so too did the Straussians in the media. As Mansfield commented, 'these people are not just others whom we can understand if we look hard at them and see that underneath them they're really like us. No, they're different from us. They're our enemies' (Mansfield, 2002). This 'enemy' was comprised, these Straussians insisted, of an amalgamation of Saddam Hussein, terrorists and WMD; indeed Kristol claimed a connection between Iraq and terrorism existed on the evening of 9/11 itself:

I think Iraq is, actually, the big, unspoken sort of elephant in the room today. There's a fair amount of evidence that Iraq has had very close associations with Osama bin Laden in the past, a lot of evidence that it had associations with the previous effort to destroy the World Trade Centre [in 1993]. (cited in Lobe, 2003)

During the period of the establishment of the OSP and its intelligence production activities, Kristol placed a strong emphasis on the dangers of the combined threats posed by Iraq, terrorism and WMD in the Weekly Standard. In one article, he argued that 'Iraq is the threat and the supreme test of whether we as a nation have learned the lesson of September 11'. He continues,

but after September 11, we have all been forced to consider another scenario. What if Saddam provides some of his anthrax, or his XV, or a nuclear device to a terrorist group like al Qaeda? Saddam could help a terrorist inflict a horrific attack on the United States or its allies... To this day we don't know who provided the anthrax for the post-September 11 attacks. We may never know for sure. (Kagan and Kristol, 2002)

Wolfowitz also contributed to disseminating the connection in the public

realm:

our successes in recent months in capturing terrorists demonstrate clearly that the effort we have mobilized at the same time to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass terror has not distracted us from the hunt for al Qaeda. But make no mistake; these are not two separate issues. Disarming Saddam's weapons of mass terror is a second front in the war on terrorism. (cited in Rhem, 2003)

As well as his concurrence with Kristol that the issues were not separate, what is especially noteworthy here is Wolfowitz's use of the new term 'weapons of mass terror' as a substitute for the usual 'weapons of mass destruction'. That opinion is malleable and ideas productive is demonstrated here; this Straussian attempt to conceptually conjoin disparate notions reflects Strauss' thought.

In addition to the development of particular conceptualisations of an enemy figure, these Straussians' interventions in the media are riddled with distinctively Straussian terminologies, namely the terms 'regime' and 'tyranny'. Following the 9/11 attacks, the question of removing Saddam Hussein's regime, as well as linguistically connecting him with the Taliban is in evidence: Ousting Saddam, like ousting the Taliban, is only the first step in a long process. Everyone knows we can remove an evil regime. The question is, are we willing to expend the security, financial, diplomatic, and political resources to make the successor regime a success. (Wolfowitz, 2002, p. 3)

Mansfield also emphasises the connection by invoking the notion of the regime, claiming about invasion of Iraq that the ' "war on terror" and this war are one and the same. We should certainly pursue those regimes that use terrorism as well as the actual terrorists themselves' (cited in Turner, 2003). Jaffa also utilised the term, asking in relation to Saddam Hussein's acquisition of 99 per cent of the vote in the Iraq elections, 'does that make his regime any less tyrannical?' (2003).

As this shows, the notion of tyranny was also mobilised. A month after the attacks, for instance, Schmitt argued that 'the Iraqi dictator has made it known time and again that the "mother of all battles" continues. And, like all tyrants of his maniacal stripe, he seeks not only to hold onto power but to claim a place in history' (Schmitt, 2001). Similarly, Kristol noted that the 'Arab world may take a long time coming to terms with the West, but that process will be hastened by the defeat of the leading anti-western tyrant' (Kagan and Kristol, 2002).

Importantly, these terms had significant productive effects. The figure of the 'regime' became highly visible in the context a central narrative surrounding Iraq, namely 'regime change'. Tellingly, Kristol noted this: 'President Bush's advocacy of "regime change"... is a not altogether unworthy product of Strauss' rehabilitation of the notion of regime' (Lenzner and Kristol, 2003). Similarly, the notion of tyranny was applied extensively, and may have occupied an even more central rhetoric role if the proposed 'War on Tyranny', which was called for to replace the War on Terror (Engdahl, 2005), had taken hold. This is not to suggest that these Straussians enjoyed a monopoly on the use of these terms, nor that they were the only people to employ them. Rather, it can be seen that these Straussians in the media acted consistently with Strauss' thought in emphasising the notion of an enemy and making extensive use of the terms 'regime' and 'tyranny'.

#### Straussians and think tanks: 'Leading' social opinion

These Straussians were also active in a variety of think tanks during the period in question. Although their various affiliations are also worthy of consideration, 16 of particular significance here is PNAC. PNAC was founded by Kristol, along with Robert Kagan, in 1997, and Schmitt was its Executive Director. Wolfowitz was also a member. PNAC's activities attracted considerable attention during this period, not least as a consequence of the open letters it sent to President Bush. In a similar

manner to the Straussians active in the intelligence community and the media, the Straussians involved in PNAC endeavoured to emphasise the presence of an enemy and a connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11. In one letter, the signatories urged the President

to accelerate plans for removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. As you have said, every day that Saddam Hussein remains in power brings closer the day the terrorists will have not just airplanes with which to attack us, but chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, as well. (PNAC, 2002)

In another such letter, the signatories stated:

it may be that the Iraqi government provided assistance in some form to the recent attack on the United States. But even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. (PNAC, 2001)

Here, the signatories argue that Iraq ought to be targeted and Saddam Hussein removed even in the absence of any evidence linking him to the 9/11 attacks. This might suggest that the need for proof was not a primary concern for these Straussians at this stage; they were keen to proceed with an invasion without it. That evidence was not a vital condition for these Straussians should come as no surprise in light of the politicisation of intelligence explored above.

In conjunction with these letters, Kristol disseminated a series of PNAC internal memoranda to his colleagues during this period. The content of these reflects the agenda outlined here, but of particular significance is that the recipients are referred to as 'opinion leaders' in each. This seems to echo Strauss' focus on the generation of salutary opinions; Straussians referring to one another as opinion leaders appears to reflect Strauss' imperative that opinions be generated and disseminated opinion in society.

PNAC's offices closed in 2006. Gary Schmitt commented that year: 'when the project started, it was not intended to go forever. That is why we are shutting it down. We would have had to spend too much time raising money for it'. He continues, significantly, that anyway 'it has already done its job... Our view has been adopted' (cited in Reynolds, 2006). That PNAC's 'job' was to ensure the adoption of its members' views is consistent with Strauss' emphasis on the production of social opinion.

Thus, several distinctively Straussian ideas and premises can be perceived in the interventions of these Straussians. Strauss' rejection of the possibility of objectivity is reflected in their activities relating to intelligence production; his explicit intention to rehabilitate the notions of the regime and tyranny is mirrored by these Straussians' continuous mobilisation of these terms; and his emphasis on the friend/enemy binary is shown across these spheres. An intellectual heritage can, consequently, be traced between Strauss' political philosophy and these Straussians' activities leading up to the invasion of Iraq, issues key to the study of contemporary US foreign policy.

## **Strauss and IR Theory**

As well as the significance of Strauss' thought in the context of the invasion of Iraq, it also has important connotations in the context of contemporary IR theory. Strauss' preoccupation with the abyss underpinning Western philosophy and society reflects the ongoing debates regarding methodological, epistemological and ontological assumptions that have been central to the so-called Fourth Great Debate in IR. The question of the foundations upon which claims might be made is an issue that resides at the heart of the debate between traditional and critical theorists. Traditional theorists have charged that critical scholars have endangered the premises upon which IR scholarship depends; Robert Keohane, for instance, objects 'to the notion that we should happily accept the existence of multiple incommensurable epistemologies, each equally valid. Such a view seems to me to lead away from our knowledge of the external world, and ultimately to a sort of nihilism' (1989, p. 249). He continues:

I fear that many feminist theorists of international relations may follow the currently fashionable path of fragmenting epistemology, denying the possibility of social science. But I think this would be an intellectual and moral disaster... [because] 'in a world of radical inequality, relativist resignation reinforces the status quo'. (1989, p. 250)

For Keohane, such a problematisation of epistemology appears to lead to a situation wherein morality and knowledge perish, to a relativist space wherein one is resigned to the status quo. This is because, as David Campbell notes,

'end of philosophy' – the problematic turn that signifies, among other developments, the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics and its many offspring – appears to pose something of a hurdle for thinking through the ethical challenges of our era. Not least of these obstacles is the view that in the wake of the Heideggerian critique, the ground for moral theory has been removed, because the ethos of moral philosophy cannot remain once the logos of metaphysics has gone. (1999, p. 30)

Apprehension of this kind is also in evidence in Ken Booth's invocation of Richard A. Wilson's analogy: 'Rights without a metanarrative are like a car without seat-belts; on hitting the first bump with ontological implications, the passenger's safety is jeopardised' (2005, p. 270). Here, the problematisation of ontology is noted for undermining the 'safety' of those wishing to engage in knowledge claims. In this account, although a fixed or stable set of ontological premises would serve to secure the subject, disrupting or undermining these renders him/her manifestly unsafe. The fear associated with this lack of safety seems to be related to the possibility of knowledge and judgement. As Booth notes elsewhere, such thought 'offers no escape from might is right' (1991, p. 316).

This concern with the logic of 'might is right' relates to the question of the rise of far-right politics in the twentieth century. As Campbell notes, such thought has prompted a 'range of concerns – the German Historikerstreit, the wartime writings of Paul de Man, and various attempts at Holocaust revisionism, along with Heidegger's own Nazi affiliations – that many take to be proof of the dangers that post-metaphysical thinking portends' (1999, p. 30). These concerns reside at the

heart of Strauss' political philosophy. Strauss was so profoundly troubled by Heidegger because he read the latter as having concluded that 'ethics is impossible, and his whole being was permeated by the awareness that this fact opens up an abyss (Strauss, 1989, p. 28). Strauss was disturbed by the relationship he perceived between the Nietzschean/Heideggerian destabilisation of metaphysics and the rise of Nazism; for Strauss, the 'particular horror of modern tyranny has been its alliance with perverted philosophy' (Bloom, 1974, p. 388).

The risk, as Strauss saw it, was that in the absence of fixed moral standards, no boundaries or barriers exist to curb the worst excesses of human behaviour: Heidegger became a Nazi in 1933. This was not due to a mere error of judgement on the part of a man who lived on great heights high above the low land of politics. Everyone who had read his first great book and did not overlook the wood for the trees could see the kinship in temper and direction between Heidegger's thought and the Nazis. (Strauss, 1989, p. 30)

Strauss also looks further back, to Nietzsche, claiming that the 'case of Heidegger reminds one to a certain extent of the case of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, naturally, would not have sided with Hitler. Yet there is an undeniable kinship between Nietzsche's thought and fascism' (Strauss, 1989, p. 31). In short, for Strauss, as for Keohane and Booth, undermining epistemological or ontological foundations means that values and moral premises cannot be securely held, and this means that there is no protection against the rise of fascism, the supposed political culmination of nihilism. The exposure of the abyss, in this account, paves the way for the related evils of despair and Nazism.

Strauss' underlying project can be read as an attempt to offset the dangers associated with the destabilisation of the foundations upon which philosophy and society had hitherto rested. As such, it may be hoped that it could have purchase in assuaging the concerns raised by Keohane and Booth. The exposure of the abyss leads, for Strauss, to conditions wherein values become relative and the reason of the strongest prevails, and he consequently endorses the generation and dissemination of socially salutary opinions in order that society may be rendered safe from these dangers. However, the interventions of the Straussians discussed here highlight a problem with this solution. The political outcome of the process of opinion formation proposed by Strauss has at its core precisely the logic of 'might is right' that Booth fears; these Straussians generated ideas about the relationship between 9/11, Iraq and WMD in accordance with their political agenda, and successfully instantiated this in the popular consciousness. This conforms to the logic of the domination of the strongest that Booth identifies; the Straussian discourse prevailed over competing claims and accounts in the fields of intelligence production, think tanks and the media for reasons other than their intrinsic plausibility, such that their account became the dominant opinion.

Thus although Strauss attempts to avoid conditions wherein 'might is right' by generating socially salutary opinions, his thought reflects precisely this tendency. Strauss' attempt to offset this logic by avoiding nihilism through the generation of opinion was thus not successful; in advocating the generation of salutary opinions by those occupying positions of power, he ensured the perpetuation of the logic of the domination of the strongest. The salutary options developed and disseminated in the service of particular political ends amount precisely to a politics following the logic of 'might is right'. This might suggest that Strauss' attempt to generate substitute foundations to secure the modern condition against the dangers of nihilism cannot assuage the concerns raised

by Keohane and Booth; the generation of opinions as substitute foundations can only lead back to the totalising political outcomes they seek to avoid.

## Conclusion

The political philosophy of Leo Strauss is thus of import in IR in the context of the study of both contemporary US foreign policy and IR theory. In the first case, the Straussians' interventions in intelligence production, the media and think tanks reflect Strauss' thought in several crucial ways, namely the impossibility of objectivity in the foundationless modern condition, the operation of the friend/enemy binary, the rehabilitation of the notions of regime and tyranny, and the generation and dissemination of socially salutary opinions in order that society might avoid a descent into relativism and nihilism. While I do not claim that the Straussians were the only group intent on realising the invasion of Iraq, nor that the individuals discussed here were not motivated by issues other than their Straussian worldview, the relationship between Strauss' thought and the activities of Straussians within and close to the political establishment amounts to an important layer of analysis relating to the broader issue of the invasion, and reposes enduring questions about the relationship between philosophical traditions and political praxis.

Concurrently, Strauss' thought can be read as a response to, and an attempt to offset, the dangers he associated with the exposure of the foundationlessness of the modern condition. His advocacy of the generation and dissemination of socially salutary opinions as a means by which to counter the onset of relativism and nihilism appears to amount to an attempt to challenge the logic of 'might is right', which is risked, for Strauss, when such foundations are undermined. However, Strauss' project of opinion construction recreates exactly the logic of 'might is right' he appears to have been at pains to resist; by generating salutary opinions that masquerade as truth, a project of ontological totalisation occurs. This has important political implications: as Emmanuel Levinas notes, 'political totalitarianism rests on ontological totalitarianism' (Levinas, 1990, p. 206). Such a relationship poses vital questions for those in IR engaged with the problem of theoretical foundations; if a self-conscious generation of opinion risks bringing about a totalising politics through the logic of the domination of the strongest, such a process does not address the concerns raised by Keohane or Booth, or indeed Strauss, regarding the desire to secure the subject against the supposed relativistic or nihilistic dangers of the abyss. On the contrary, it brings about precisely the logic of 'might is right' that they identify as the terrible consequence of the exposure of the abyss. This suggests that it is not in itself, as Strauss, Keohane or Booth claim, the destabilisation of metaphysical foundations that leads to totalising politics following the logic of the domination of the strongest. It is, rather, precisely the attempt to secure against such foundationlessness by imposing (pseudo-)ontological categories or principles that leads directly to such politics.

This may suggest that while projects of opinion construction cannot challenge the logic of 'might is right', a deconstructive approach that, while still proffering active and productive projects of political praxis, perpetually disrupts and resists the instantiation of any such project as final or given, may prove more fruitful in this context. This is because such a project restlessly intervenes to prevent the ontological totalisation that is the condition of possibility of political totalisation of the

kind generated by the Straussian construction of socially salutary opinions. In short, if the movements of deconstruction can resist the ontological totalisation that is the condition of possibility of political totalisation, it may be better placed to challenge the logic of 'might is right' than alternative processes of construction that reproduce the problem of ontological totalisation.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to Larry George, Maja Zehfuss, Angie Wilson and Chris Rosedale for their engagement with this article and the broader project from which it is taken. Thanks are also extended to Rob Howse for informative discussions relating to several issues raised in it, and to an anonymous reviewer.

### **About the Author**

Aggie Hirst is Lecturer in International Politics at City University London. Her research interests lie at the intersection between post-9/11 US foreign policy and IR theory. She is the author of a forthcoming book entitled *Leo Strauss and the Invasion of Iraq: Encountering the Abyss* (Routledge). She is also currently co-organising a forum with Millennium (forthcoming 2013) exploring the question of political violence and the so-called 'Death of God'.

### **Notes**

1 The play, entitled *Embedded*, was written and directed by Tim Robbins, and was staged in Los Angeles, New York, London, Chicago and elsewhere. It featured parodies of members of Bush's war cabinet chanting and proclaiming their allegiance to Strauss (see Minowitz, 2009, p. 20).

2 The documentary, *The Power of Nightmares*, was written and directed by Adam Curtis and enjoyed a good deal of publicity, including a screening at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005.

3 He continues: 'it is equally important not to over-estimate the influence or the specificity of the Straussian position... [because] the roots of neoconservatism are broader than Straussian philosophy alone'.

4 Such a conflation is demonstrated, for instance, in Jim George's reference to 'Straussian inspired neo-conservatives' (2005, p. 174).

5 Whether or not such a sustained engagement with Strauss' political philosophy is the necessary condition for inclusion in the category 'Straussian', or indeed the only or principle means by which Straussian influence is possible, is itself an important question. I would submit that the dissemination of Straussian ideas has been pervasive in ways other than direct engagement with his writings; as the article will show, textual study is by no means the only way in which Strauss' ideas have been in circulation within the neo-con movement and beyond. However, claiming such indirect influence remains highly contentious, and the surrounding difficulties adequately demonstrating it are frequently appealed to as part of rebuttals on the part of those sympathetic to Strauss and the Straussians. This is part of the reason why this article restricts itself to a focus on those who can more directly be said to have been influenced by Strauss and be shown to operate in light of his teachings.

6 For a fuller exploration and defence of this claim regarding Strauss' conceptualisation of justice,

see Aggie Hirst (forthcoming). For a sense of how centrally this conceptualisation resides in the Straussian worldview, see the introduction to Harry Jaffa's introduction to *Crisis of the House Divided*, in which he states that it was 'not meant to be a book about American History, except incidentally. It is in the form of a disputed question, itself a form of the Socratic dialogue. It was born in my mind when I discovered – at a time when I was studying the Republic with Leo Strauss – that the issue between Lincoln and Douglas was in substance, and very nearly in form, identical with the issue between Socrates and Thrasymachus' (1982, p. v).

7 At stake here is an interesting and important issue relating to the question of liberalism's relationship to the War on Terror. The critical interventions of Prozorov, Odysseos and Mouffe, among others, are focused upon highlighting that, in the latter's terms, 'Bush's war against terrorism is presented as the direct implementation of a Schmittian understanding of the political. To avoid the "clash of civilizations" to which this type of politics is leading, we must come back to the liberal approach and work towards the establishment of a cosmopolitan world order' (2007, p. 147). While I am certainly sympathetic to this challenge to the totalising tendencies of (neo)liberal orthodoxy, I am not entirely sure that Schmitt offers the best means by which to advance this critique. For further discussion of this question, see Aggie Hirst, *Leo Strauss and the Invasion of Iraq: Encountering the Abyss*.

8 That enemies need only be 'potential' is noteworthy here. It suggests that the political defined in these terms relies upon a sense of constant possible threats and dangers rather than constant struggle against a particular enemy. The function of such an amorphous yet ever-present threat is not to orient society in a constant condition of conflict but rather to situate and thereby contribute to rendering it a coherent social group by reference to an outside or otherness that threatens it.

9 For further discussion of the question of Strauss' understanding of the constitution of subjectivity, see Aggie Hirst (2010).

10 Although other Straussians could be identified, a detailed study of these individuals demonstrates significant connections between Strauss' thought and their activities, and satisfies critics' demands for specificity.

11 The degree to which Wolfowitz can be described as a Straussian has been a point of contention. While critics such as Drury (1999) and Norton (2004) identify him as belonging to this group, and Jeane Kirkpatrick stated in 2002 that 'Wolfowitz is still a leading Straussian' (Mann, 2004, p. 28), Minowitz claims, in contrast, that according to Francis Fukuyama, Wolfowitz 'never regarded himself as a Strauss prote'ge'', and that he was 'much more heavily influenced by Wohlstetter' (2009, p. 25), his PhD supervisor. According to Solomon (2007, p. 13), Wolfowitz himself asserted on the matter: 'I don't particularly like the [Straussian] label, because I don't like labels that much'. Whether this implies a dislike of the Straussian label in particular or labels more generally is unclear. Minowitz concedes that he can be identified as a 'Straussian "in recovery"' (2009, p. 25) and that he 'exited early in the journey' (2009, p. 250) to becoming a Straussian. That he may not have realised the entire process does not entail that he was not influenced by it, as the exploration later affirms.

12 All three were involved in the early 1990s in the Consortium for the Study of Intelligence's Working Group on Intelligence Reform, a group established explicitly to reform intelligence practices that met over a period of 2 years, indeed Schmitt was the Group's Co-ordinator and co-edited the book publishing its findings. Schmitt is also a former executive director of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, a position to which he was appointed by Reagan in 1984, and has been involved in the activities of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Shulsky held a position as a senior scholar at the National Strategy Information Centre (NSIC), as well as working for the RAND Corporation. He was also active alongside the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in the 1980s, and Director of the Office of Special Plans from its inception in 2002. Wolfowitz was a member of the Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the US Intelligence Community in the mid-1990s.

13 The question of the OSP as the appropriate name for the office within which interventions were made has been the subject of some debate. The Department of Defense's 2007 review concludes that the 'term Office of Special Plans has become generic terminology for the activities of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, including the Policy Counter Terrorism Evaluation Group and Policy Support Office'. The term will be employed in this generic capacity in what follows not least because those calling for the DoD inquiry, as well as the popular and scholarly debate surrounding the affair, have done so.

14 This is not to suggest that such methods are themselves unproblematic nor that they should not be subject to critique. Rather, it is to highlight the problems associated with the deliberate removal of practices intended to promote the reliability of information.

15 The connection made here between the activities of Straussians in the sphere of intelligence and those involved in producing the Weekly Standard is noteworthy, and will be explored later.

16 These Straussians have considerable institutional affiliations: Jaffa is Distinguished Fellow at the Claremont Institute; Schmitt, Mansfield and Wolfowitz are connected to the American enterprise Institute; Shulsky has worked for the RAND Corporation; Kristol is closely connected to the Carnegie Endowment; Shulsky, Schmitt and Wolfowitz have had dealings with the NSIC.

## References

- Ackerman, S. and Judis, J.B. (2003) The first casualty. *New Republic* 228 (25), 30 June.
- Bloom, A. (1974) Leo Strauss: September 20, 1899 – October 18, 1973. *Political Theory* 2(4): 372–392.
- Booth, K. (ed.) (1991) Security and emancipation. *Review of International Studies* 17(4): 313–326.
- Booth, K. (ed.) (2005) *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*. Boulder, CO; London: Lynne Rienner.
- Boyer, P.J. (2004) The believer. *The New Yorker* 1 November.
- Cabrejas, J. (2003) Behind Bush's drive to war. *The Humanist* November/December.
- Campbell, D. (1999) The deterritorialization of responsibility. In: D. Campbell and M. Shapiro (eds.) *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics*. Minneapolis, MN; London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Clarke, R.A. (2004) *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror*. New York; London; Toronto; Sydney: Free Press.
- Connolly, W.E. (2005) *Pluralism*. Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press.
- Costopoulos, J. (2005) Anne Norton and the 'Straussian' Cabal: How not to write a book. *Interpretation: A Journal of Philosophy* 32(3): 269–281.
- Department of Defense Inspector General. (2007) Review of pre-Iraqi war activities of the office of the under secretary of defense for policy. 9 February, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/dod/ig020907-decl.pdf>.
- Dorrien, G. (2004a) 'Benevolent global hegemony': William Kristol and the politics of American Empire. *Logos* 3.2 (Spring).
- Dorrien, G. (2004b) *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Drolet, J.-F. (2009) The cryptic Cold War realism of Leo Strauss. *International Politics* 46(1): 1–27.
- Drolet, J.-F. (2011) *American Neoconservatism: The Politics and Culture of a Reactionary Idealism*. London: Hurst and Company.
- Drury, S.B. (1999) *Leo Strauss and the American Right*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Ehrman, J. (1995) *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1994*. New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press.

- Engdahl, F.W. (2005) Behind Bush II's 'War on Tyranny'. 12 February, [http://www.studien-vonzeitfragen.net/Zeitfragen/War\\_On\\_Tyranny\\_/war\\_on\\_tyranny\\_.html](http://www.studien-vonzeitfragen.net/Zeitfragen/War_On_Tyranny_/war_on_tyranny_.html).
- Frachon, A. and Vernet, D. (2003) The strategist and the philosopher: Leo Strauss and Albert Wohlstetter. Counterpunch, 2 June.
- George, J. (2005) Leo Strauss, neoconservatism and US foreign policy: Esoteric nihilism and the Bush doctrine. *International Politics* 42: 174–202.
- George, L. (2010) Leo Strauss's squid ink. In: T. Burns and J. Connolly (eds.) *The Legacy of Leo Strauss*. Exeter, UK; Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic.
- Halper, S. and Clarke, J. (2004) *America Alone: The Neo-conservatives and the Global Order*. Cambridge; New York; Melbourne; Madrid; Cape Town; Singapore; Sao Paulo: Cambridge University Press.
- Hersh, S.M. (2003) Selective intelligence. *The New Yorker* 12 May.
- Hersh, S.M. (2005) *Chain of Command*. London; New York; Toronto; Dublin; Camberwell, Australia; New Delhi; Auckland; Rosebank, South Africa: Penguin.
- Hirst, A. (2010) Straussianism and poststructuralism: Two sides of the same coin? In: T. Burns and J. Connolly (eds.) *The Legacy of Leo Strauss*. Exeter, UK; Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic.
- Hirst, A. (2013) *Leo Strauss and the Invasion of Iraq: Encountering the Abyss*. Routledge.
- Howse, R. (1998) From legitimacy to dictatorship – And back again: Leo Strauss critique of the anti-liberalism of Carl Schmitt. In: D. Dyzenhaus (ed.) *Law as Politics: Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism*. Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press.
- Howse, R. (2003) The Use and Abuse of Leo Strauss in the Schmitt Revival on the German Right – The Case of Heinrich Meier. Working Paper.
- Jaffa, H.V. (1982) *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln–Douglas Debates*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Jaffa, H.V. (1999) Strauss at one hundred. In: D.L. Deutsch and J.A. Murley (eds.) *Leo Strauss, the Straussians and the American Regime*. Lanham, MD; Boulder, CO; New York; Toronto; Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Jaffa, H.V. (2003) American conservatism and the present crisis. 12 February, [http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.917/article\\_detail.asp](http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.917/article_detail.asp).
- Jantzen, G.M. (2003) Eros and the abyss: Reading medieval mystics in postmodernity. *Literature and Theory* 17(3): 244–264.
- Kagan, R. and Kristol, W. (2002) What to do about Iraq? *The Weekly Standard* 21 January.
- Keohane, R.O. (1989) International relations theory: Contributions of a feminist standpoint. *Millennium* 18(2): 245–253.
- Kristol, I. (1995) *Neo-conservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea, Selected Essays, 1949–1995*. New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Tokyo; Singapore: The Free Press.
- Kwiatkowski, K. (2004) The New Pentagon papers. Salon, 10 March.
- Lampert, L. (1996) *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lampert, L. (2009) Strauss's recovery of esotericism. In: S.B. Smith (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*. Cambridge; New York; Melbourne; Madrid; Cape Town; Singapore; Sao Paulo; Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Lang, W.P. (2004) Drinking the Kool-Aid. *Middle East Policy Council Journal* XI(2).
- Levinas, E. (ed.) (1990) Freedom of speech. In: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lenzner, S. and Kristol, W. (2003) What was Leo Strauss up to? *The Public Interest* Fall: 153.
- Leupp, G. (2003) Philosopher kings: Leo Strauss and the neocons. Counterpunch 24 May.
- Lobe, J. (2003) Iraq: The schemers get their way. *The Asia Times* 17 July.
- Mann, J. (2004) *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*. New York; Toronto; London; Dublin; Camberwell, Australia; New Delhi; Auckland; Rosebank, South Africa: Penguin.
- Mansfield, H.C. (2002) Then and now, interview with Gwen Ifill on NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, 13

- September, <http://harveymansfield.org/multimedia/then-and-now-mansfield/>.
- Meier, H. (2006) *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Minowitz, P. (2009) *Straussophobia: Defending Leo Strauss and Straussians against Shadia Drury and Other Accusers*. Lanham, MD; Boulder, CO; New York; Toronto; Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.
- Mitchell, G.R. (2006) Team B intelligence coups. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92(2): 144–173.
- Mouffe, C. (2007) Carl Schmitt's warning on the dangers of a unipolar world. In: L. Odysseos and F. Petitto (eds.) *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.
- Murray, D. (2006) *Neoconservatism: Why We Need It*. New York: Encounter Books.
- Norton, A. (2004) *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*. New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press.
- Odysseos, L. (2007) Crossing the line? Carl Schmitt on the 'spaceless universalism' of cosmopolitanism and the war on terror. In: L. Odysseos and F. Petitto (eds.) *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.
- Owens, P. (2007) Beyond Strauss, lies and the war in Iraq: Hannah Arendt's critique of neoconservatism. *Review of International Studies* 33(2): 265–283.
- Pangle, T.L. (ed.) (1989) *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Project for the New American Century. (2001) Letter to President Bush on terrorism. 20 September, <http://www.newamericancentury.org/Bushletter.htm>.
- Project for the New American Century. (2002) Letter to President Bush on Israel. 3 April, <http://www.newamericancentury.org/lettersstatements.htm>.
- Prozorov, S. (2007) The ethos of insecure life: Reading Carl Schmitt's existential decisionism as a Foucauldian ethics. In: L. Odysseos and F. Petitto (eds.) *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.
- Reynolds, P. (2006) End of the neo-con dream. 21 December, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6189793.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6189793.stm).
- Rhem, K.T. (2003) Wolfowitz says disarming Iraq is 'second front' in War on Terror. 11 March, <http://www.americagov/st/washfile-english/2003/March/20030312153708rethcirj0.0325281.html>.
- Rosen, S. (2009) Leo Strauss and the problem of the modern. In: S.B. Smith (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*. Cambridge; New York; Melbourne; Madrid; Cape Town; Singapore; Sao Paulo; Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmitt, G. (2001) Why Iraq? *The Weekly Standard* 19 October.
- Schmitt, G. and Shulsky, A. (1999) Leo Strauss and the world of intelligence (by which we do not mean nous). In: D.L. Deutsch and J.A. Murley (eds.) *Leo Strauss, the Straussians and the American Regime*. Lanham, MD; Boulder, CO; New York; Toronto; Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Sheppard, E.R. (2006) *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher*. Hanover, NH; London: Brandeis University Press.
- Shorris, E. (2004) Ignoble liars, George Bush, and the philosophy of mass deception. *Harper's Magazine* June.
- Shulsky, A. (1995) What is intelligence? Secrets and competition among states. In: R. Godson, E.R. May and G. Schmitt (eds.) *US Intelligence: Agendas and Reform*. Washington; London: Brassey's.
- Shulsky, A. and Schmitt, G. (1995) Intelligence reform: Beyond the Ames Case. In: R. Godson, E.R. May and G. Schmitt (eds.) *US Intelligence: Agendas and Reform*. Washington; London: Brassey's.
- Smith, S.B. (2007) *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Solomon, L.D. (2007) *Paul D. Wolfowitz: Visionary Intellectual, Policymaker, and Strategist*. West

- Port, CT; London: Praeger Security International.
- Stelzer, I. (2004) *The Neocon Reader*. New York: Grove Press.
- Strauss, L. (1965) *Natural Right and History*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Strauss, L. (1973) *What Is Political Philosophy?* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Strauss, L. (1978) *The City and Man*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Strauss, L. (1989) An introduction to Heideggerian existentialism. In: T.L. Pangle (ed.) *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Strauss, L. (1995) *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, N.D. (2003) The experts weigh in. *The Harvard Salient* 19 February.
- Walt, S.M. (1991) The renaissance of security studies. *International Studies Quarterly* 35(2): 211–239.
- Williams, M.C. (2005) What is the national interest? The neoconservative challenge in IR theory. *European Journal of International Relations* 11(3): 307–337.
- Wolfowitz, P. (1995) Comments. In: R. Godson, E.R. May and G. Schmitt (eds.) *U.S. Intelligence at the Crossroads: Agendas and Reform*. Washington; London: Brassey's.
- Wolfowitz, P. (2002) Afghanistan: Building stability, avoiding chaos. Hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 26 June.
- Woodward, B. (2002) *Bush at War*. New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Singapore: Simon and Schuster.
- Xenos, N. (2008) *Cloaked in Virtue: Unveiling Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Zuckert, C. (1996) *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Zuckert, C. and Zuckert, M. (2006) *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago.