

How Ideology Became Policy: The U.S. War in Iraq and the Role of Neo-conservatism

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Preface

I have spent much time reflecting on the decision to go to war in Iraq and the high cost paid by our service members for what I now believe to be a mistake. In Iraq, U.S. losses include 4,488 killed in action and 32,222 wounded in action. In no way do these numbers reflect the deep loss felt by the family members of these brave young men and women. Numbers will never be able to quantify the deep hole left in the lives of those who lost a loved one to this war. Nor will numbers ever quantify the daily sacrifices made by families to care for their wounded warriors. In economic terms, the war cost over two trillion dollars, but estimated long-term cost could be as high as six trillion. One could also argue that the region is less stable now than it was prior to the Iraq war. The truth is that the Iraq War has alienated U.S. friends and allies around the world and exposed the limits of U.S. military power for all to see and exploit. In addition, it has encouraged Russian and Chinese strategic hostility, transformed Iraq into a recruiting and training ground for Islamist terrorism, and promoted the expansion of Iranian power in the region. The world now faces the real possibility of a Shiite regime in Baghdad aligned with Tehran, which could undermine Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states with significant Shiite minorities, or even provoke a regional civil war along sectarian lines.

The cost of this war of choice genuinely hits home when I consider the price paid by my former mentor General James Cerrone and his wife Betty. They lost their son 1LT Michael Cerrone in Iraq in 2006. When I worked for then Major Cerrone, Mike and his brother James were just little kids, full of energy running around the back yard. Mike chose to follow in his

father's footsteps and became an officer (West Point Class of 2004) and was assigned as a platoon leader in Company A, 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and 82nd Airborne Division. On November 12, 2006 Lieutenant Cerrone exited his Humvee to check out a suspicious car. His gunner, Specialist Harry Winkler was covering the platoon from the turret. As Mike neared the vehicle, a man exited the car and approached the Humvee. The man detonated a bomb strapped to his body. Specialist Winkler and First Lieutenant Cerrone died in the blast. Mike was doing what his father had trained me and countless other leaders to do – Mike was leading from the front. Mike and Harry will forever be remembered for their brave and heroic sacrifice. My criticism of the decision to go to war in Iraq in no means intended to reflect negatively upon the brave sacrifices of our fine men and women in uniform. As a veteran I have great respect for those who serve our country and appreciate the sacrifices that they and their families shoulder for all of us. For that very reason, I am furious when soldiers are unnecessarily placed in harm's way, and I am outraged when leaders fail to perform due diligence before committing our service members to action. Anger has motivated me to write about this topic, painful as this story is to tell. It is sad and infuriating when I now read President Bush and Vice President Cheney's pre-war speeches. Claims from the famous Cincinnati speech in which President Bush asserts, "Iraq possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons" and is "seeking nuclear weapons (*We Will Prevail* 192)." Even more chilling are the claims of operational links between Iraq and al Qaeda. Vice President Cheney in his Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) speech was absolutely certain: "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us" (1). There are

several rogue states with weapons of mass destruction (from here referred to as “WMDs”), but what made Iraq an immediate threat was the claims of operational ties to al Qaeda. President Bush and other war proponents repeatedly spoke of al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein and 9/11 in the same breath. Bush declared in September 2002, “You can’t distinguish between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein when you talk about the war on terror” (Remarks by President Bush and President Uribe of Columbia, September 2002). Those in charge could not have galvanized public support for an invasion of Iraq absent a deliberate conflation of Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda into a single terrifying threat. The President and Vice President presented a compelling yet false case for war, and the U.S. people and their elected representatives believed it. The Congress voted overwhelmingly to support the action in Iraq (374 to 156, or 71% approval). The resolution supporting the Iraq war (October 16, 2002) gained more support than the resolution for the first Gulf War (January 12, 1991). The claims of Iraq’s reconstituted WMD program appeared credible in light of Saddam Hussein’s past history and conduct. The administration was also making the rounds on the Sunday morning talk shows claiming to have conclusive evidence supporting operational links between al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime. The case seemed plausible and in the words of then CIA Director Tennant, “A slam dunk.” Most people of adult age at the time remembers Secretary Powell’s presentation to the United Nations. It had enormous impact and influence in this country and worldwide. It convinced many people in the U.S. that we were on the right course. Notably, in his autobiography, *It Worked for Me in Life and Leadership*, Colin Powell cites members of congress telling him that his presentation persuaded them to vote for the resolution (223).

In *My American Journey*, Colin Powell maintained,

Many of my generation, the captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels seasoned in the Vietnam War vowed when it was our turn to call the shots, we would not quietly acquiesce in half-hearted warfare for half-baked reasons that the American people could not understand or support. If we could make good on that promise to ourselves, to the civilian leadership, and to the country, then the sacrifices of Vietnam would not have been in vain (149).

This is part of the iron that has driven my research. As a young Army officer, I was trained to evaluate the strength of an intelligence briefing based on three questions formulated by then General Powell. The three questions to be asked of the briefer are: (1) What do you know for certain (This is information that has been verified with multiple sources)? (2) What do you wish you knew (The question is intended to identify key missing pieces of information that the intelligence community is unable to verify)? and (3) What do you think (based on experience and information the briefer provides their best assessment of the situation)? It is important to keep in mind that intelligence typically involves a certain amount of judgment. One never knows all the facts prior to rendering a decision and it is critical for decision makers to know how much of the intelligence assessment is based on fact vs. the briefer's best estimate. Secretary Powell's presentation put me firmly in the camp of supporters of the resolution to authorize military action in Iraq. If Secretary Powell was convinced then I was convinced. I assumed that Colin Powell was adhering to the rules he had helped to promote and create. Not only did I trust Secretary Powell's evaluation of the intelligence, I trusted that he fully knew what this decision would mean to the soldiers on the ground. I felt Colin Powell was committed to protecting our troops and not repeating the mistakes of the past.

The neoconservatives had no such reluctance when it came to the use of military power. They had a “ready explanation” for the 9/11 attacks, provided intellectual justification for the war, and persuaded a new President George W. Bush, untutored in foreign policy, that a global assault on al Qaeda had to include regime change in Iraq. It was time for U.S. to use its military power to change the world for the better. This reflected the core neoconservative belief in U.S. exceptionalism: The idea that the United States is the indispensable power in the international order and has a moral responsibility to promote democracy in other countries with force if necessary. Hence, the removal of Saddam Hussein represented an opportunity to remake the Middle East. They postulated a free and democratic Iraq would lead to an outbreak of democracy in the region.

To neoconservatives, the flourishing of democracy in the region would cement America’s image as a benevolent hegemony around the world. But there are serious structural flaws underlying the concept of “America’s benevolent hegemony.” First, benevolent hegemony rests on a belief in U.S. exceptionalism that most non-Americans simply find non-credible. Few people in the rest of the world believe the United States acts disinterestedly in international politics. U.S. has interest as well as values, and, when it has to choose between the two, it will usually choose the former. Thus, while attempting to establish democracy in Iraq, it then allies itself with dictatorships in Egypt and Pakistan and with a theocracy in Saudi Arabia, because the governments in Cairo, Islamabad, and Riyadh are more important to the United States as partners in the war on terrorism than they would be as democracies.

This paper is limited in scope to the influence of neoconservative ideology on the George W. Bush Administration’s decision to invade Iraq. There are many other contributing

factors and possible theories on why the U.S. invaded Iraq. Many have observed a link between those who would profit from a war in Iraq and those in power with ties to private companies, such as Vice President Cheney. Others point to the vote in congress and how it could have been influenced by lobbyists for the vast military industrial complex. There are too many possible angles to cover them all, but the rhetorical glue that holds all these arguments together – the blind faith that provided the ideology -- is the influence of neoconservative thinking upon key elected leaders. Neoconservatives were pervasive in the George W. Bush Administration. Of the twenty-five founding members of the Project for a New American Century¹, ten entered the new administration. Key among them was Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz. These individuals had access at the highest level, and they used that access, along with a damaged post 9/11 U.S. psyche, to transition neoconservative ideology into official U.S. policy. The Post 9/11 U.S. psyche was one of a country in a “defensive crouch” and focused on protection. Neoconservatives leveraged the fear generated by the 9/11 attacks to advocate the assertive promotion of democracy through military force.

¹ The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) was an American think tank based in Washington, D.C. and founded by William Kristol and Robert Kagan. The PNAC’s stated goal is “to promote American global leadership.” Fundamental to the PNAC is the promotion of American exceptionalism.

Introduction

In the weeks that followed the 9/11 attacks, George W. Bush transitioned from an American president pursuing a domestic agenda to a national leader rallying a nation seeking vengeance and justice against those who committed the terrorist acts. In the State of the Union address following the 9/11 attacks, President Bush argued, “Our war against terror is only beginning” (2002 State of the Union). He singled out three nations – Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as constituting an “axis of evil.” This proposition evoked clear moral issues, which contrasted the forces of good versus the forces of evil and it became President Bush’s rallying cry to the U.S. electorate. Indeed in the months that followed, President Bush frequently returned to the “axis of evil” theme. He used this argument in an attempt to persuade the U.S. public that the time had come to defend the country against terrorist attacks. This included taking preemptive military action against those countries identified as possessing weapons of mass destruction and willing to collaborate with terrorist groups trying to harm the United States.

The Bush Administration based its decision to invade Iraq upon four assumptions. The first assumption was that Saddam Hussein’s regime was on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons and had already amassed stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. The second assumption was that the regime had meaningful links with Al Qaeda and had something to do with 9/11. The third assumption was that, within Iraq, the regime’s fall would be followed by rapid and peaceful democratization. The fourth assumption was that a similar democratic transformation would be precipitated elsewhere in the region. This democratization would lead to a new eagerness among Arab governments to make peace between Israel and a

presumptive Palestinian state. If these four assumptions held true, the future of the Middle East would forever be altered by replacing dictatorships with democracy. The Bush Administration maintained that the first two assumptions (WMD and links to Al Qaeda) were solidly supported by intelligence. This paper will explore how neoconservative ideology informed the Bush Administration's interpretation/use of intelligence, leading to the decision to invade Iraq (Gordon, *Prewar Slide Show Cast Iraq in Rosy Hues*).

Neoconservative Influence

When defining the neoconservative movement one has to understand the coalition is broad, containing sub-coalitions that disagree on some of the details of their policy preferences. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to identify a clear thread that connects the various sub-coalitions of contemporary foreign policy neoconservatives, namely that the moral purpose of U.S. power is to change the world for the better (Lynch 188). The philosopher Leo Strauss, an early neoconservative thought leader, advocated the notion that free nations have a moral duty to oppose a tyrant. This core belief evolved into U.S. exceptionalism – the idea that the United States is the indispensable power in the international order and has a moral responsibility to promote democracy in other countries, with force if necessary. Hence, neoconservatives look to remake substantial parts of the world in the United States image (Halper and Clark 2004). With respect to the Gulf War and, in particular Saddam Hussein, while he may have been defeated, he was not deposed, which allowed him to continue threatening U.S. economic and political interests in the region. Post-Gulf War Iraq reconfirmed for neoconservatives that military victory was not enough and that the United States needed to pursue regime change (Kurth 593).

Ten years after the invasion of Iraq, many still wonder why President Bush ordered the invasion in the first place. It is especially curious given the absence, during the run-up to the invasion (and since), of any evidence of either Iraqi complicity in the al Qaeda attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, or an operational relationship between al Qaeda and the Baathist regime in Baghdad. To be sure, momentum for a war with Iraq had existed

before 9/11 and even before President Bush took office, as “hawks” were scattered throughout the halls of Congress and the national security bureaucracy during the 1990s. But a war against Iraq in response to 9/11 was strategically nonsensical.

Douglas Feith, who served as undersecretary of defense for policy during George W. Bush’s first term, claims that in the wake of 9/11 attacks, “we could not define the enemy with precision with any short, clear formulations.” Iraq, however, “was on the minds of many Administration officials” who shared “a common assumption ... that a global war on terrorism would, at some point, involve a showdown with Iraq” (*How Bush Sold the War, 2008*). He also recounts his agreement with Donald Rumsfeld’s judgment, expressed three days after the 9/11 attacks, that the U.S. response to the attacks should be a “sustained, broad campaign” against targets well beyond al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Rumsfeld’s injunction, “Don’t over-elevate the importance of al Qaida” (Feith, *War and Decision 49*), indicated that the war on terrorism was going to be a general one against all purveyors of terrorism, and not just against those who aided, abetted, and perpetrated the 9/11 attacks.

Afghanistan’s link to 9/11 was self-evident. The attacks were planned in Afghanistan by a resident terrorist organization that enjoyed a geographic and ideological sanctuary in Afghanistan, courtesy of the Taliban regime in Kabul. Afghanistan was al Qaeda’s central hideout, and the Taliban was comprised of al Qaeda’s ideological soul mates. In the wake of 9/11, no president could have refused military action against Afghanistan. In contrast, the Bush administration simply asserted Iraq’s connection to 9/11 for the purpose of mobilizing public

and congressional support for a war that otherwise would have been a hard and perhaps impossible sell.

Policymakers and commentators who had been gunning for Saddam Hussein even before the Gulf War of 1991 successfully converted public rage over the al Qaeda attacks into a war to bring down the Iraqi dictator (Davis 35). They transformed the reality of Osama bin Laden as an avowed enemy of “apostate” secular regimes in the Middle East into the fantasy of Osama bin Laden as an operational ally of Saddam Hussein. President Bush and other war proponents repeatedly spoke of al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein, and 9/11 in the same breath. As President Bush declared in September 2002, “You can’t distinguish between al Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror ... I can’t distinguish between the two, because they’re both equally as bad, and equally as evil, and equally as destructive” (Remarks by President Bush and President Uribe of Columbia, September 2002). Thus, Saddam Hussein was suddenly depicted as a crazed, undeterrable dictator just months away from acquiring nuclear weapons and gleefully handing them over to bin Laden. Public and congressional support for an invasion of Iraq simply could not be mustered absent a deliberate conflation of Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda into a single terrifying threat. Richard A. Clarke, the former counterterrorism czar for both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, believes that,

“Any leader whom one can imagine as President on September 11 would have declared a ‘war on terrorism’ and would have ended the Afghan sanctuary by invading. Almost any President would have stepped up domestic security and preparedness measures. Exactly what did George Bush do after September 11 that any other President one can imagine

wouldn't have done after such attacks? In the end, what was unique about George Bush's reaction to terrorism was his selection as an object lesson for potential state sponsors of terrorism, not a country that had been engaging in anti-U.S. terrorism but one that had not been, Iraq (Clark 244)."

Why did Bush select Iraq? Largely because of key neoconservatives and their allies. Indeed, it is impossible to explain the road from 9/11 to the invasion of Iraq without recognizing the tremendous influence of the neoconservative opinion, both inside and outside the administration, on the Bush White House. Accurately and colorfully described by Alan Weisman as,

"that rowdy collection of former liberal Democrats, Wilsonian globalist, and Trotskyites who soured on the New Left for its wimpy, weak-kneed response to the adventurism of the Soviet Union, and for its aversion to the use of military force regardless of consequences (3)."

The neoconservatives had a ready explanation for the 9/11 attacks, provided intellectual justification for the war, and persuaded a new President George W. Bush, untutored in foreign policy, that a global assault on al Qaeda had to include regime change in Iraq. Moreover, the neoconservatives reinforced the president's predisposition to see the world in terms of good versus evil and to view the use of military power as the decisive determinant of relations among states.

There was never a neoconservative faction or conspiracy to subvert Bush's foreign policy. Bush did not even have a well-formulated foreign policy before 9/11, and there was

nothing secret about the neoconservatives or their views. The leading neoconservatives were public intellectuals who openly associated with each other and published extensively on foreign policy. They shared a combative ideology about the nature of the world and America's role in it, an ideology to which President George W. Bush, Vice President Cheney, and Secretary Rumsfeld were instinctively disposed, especially after 9/11. These neoconservatives were not bashful about pushing their view on non-neoconservative policymakers; exhortation was their stock-in-trade. In effect, the neoconservatives constituted an ideological interest group that sought to influence the formulation and execution of U.S. foreign policy, and influence it they did.

In *America Alone: The Neo-Conservative and the Global Order*, a 2004 definitive assessment of neoconservative ideology and its influence on post 9/11 U.S. foreign policy, Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke persuasively assert:

The situation of unending war in which we find ourselves results in large part from the fact that the policies adopted after 9/11, the initial strike against the Taliban aside, were hardly specific to that event. Unlike the policy of containment that evolved in direct response to Soviet moves in Central and Eastern Europe and involved radical new thinking on the part of those involved, the post 9/11 policy was in fact grounded in an ideology that existed well before the terror attacks and that in a stroke of opportunistic daring by its progenitors, has emerged as the new orthodoxy. The paper trail is unambiguous. Minds were already made up. A preexisting ideological agenda was taken off the shelf, dusted off, and relabeled as the response to terror.... In neo-conservative eyes, the Iraq war was not about terrorism;

it was about the pivotal relationship between Saddam Hussein and the assertion of U.S. power. Hussein provided, in effect, the opportunity to clarify America's global objectives and moral obligations. His continued survival in power was a metaphor for all that had gone wrong with U.S. foreign policy since the Soviet collapse in the sense that the first Bush administration's Realpolitik and Clinton's wishful liberalism had left the Iraqi dictator in power. Iraq was now the arena in which to demonstrate the crucial tenets of neo-conservative doctrine: military preemption, regime change, the merits of exporting democracy, and a vision of U.S. power that is "fully engaged and never apologetic (*American Alone*, 206)."

The influence of neoconservative thinking on the Bush Administration's response to the 9/11 attacks is undeniable and becomes increasingly visible in formal policy documents.

President Bush's post 9/11 receptivity to the neoconservative agenda was manifest in the administration's provocative new security strategy. In September 2002 the administration revealed the new strategy in the nation's formal policy document on security, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS), which embraced regime change in rogue states, aggressively promoted democracy, viewed U.S. military supremacy as a given, and, in a stunning departure from traditional U.S. foreign policy norms, asserted the right to launch preventive wars to protect national interests. Before turning to that pivotal document, however, an understanding of neoconservative foreign policy ideology is in order.

Six core propositions define the essence of the neoconservative persuasion. The first is that "evil is real," and the second is that "for evil to prevail requires only one thing; for those

confronted by it to flinch from duty (Bacevich 73).” The foundation of these propositions was the Anglo-French appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s, and the event to which neoconservatives constantly refer as the starting point for foreign policy instruction. The third proposition is that “U.S. ideals define America’s purpose, to be achieved through the exercise of superior U.S. power (Bacevich 73).” For neoconservatives, U.S. values and strategic interests are inseparable. Spreading democracy abroad is the paramount strategic interest, and the United States should not hesitate to use its global military primacy to clear obstacles to democracy. The fourth proposition is an “appreciation for authority” stemming from the neoconservatives hatred of the New Left’s counterculture and political radicalism of the 1960s. They despised liberal Democrats who turned against the Vietnam War and succumbed to political correctness at home. The fifth is that “the United States after Vietnam confronted a dire crisis” with unspeakable consequences – i.e., that America had not only lost the will to win the Cold War but also, under the guidance of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger and later Jimmy Carter, had actually sought to appease the Soviet Union via the mechanism of *détente*. And the sixth is that “the antidote to crisis is leadership,” as exemplified by Ronald Reagan’s determination to win the Cold War once and for all (Bacevich 73).

Central to neoconservative ideology is the perpetuation of America’s post-Cold War, global military supremacy via – if necessary – unilateral preventive military action against rising rogue states seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. Neoconservative intellectuals, many of them Jewish, sympathetic to the Likud Party’s imperial security ambitions for Israel, and haunted by the consequences of appeasing Hitler in the 1930s, have provided the core of the neoconservative construct of the world and America’s role in it. The neoconservative agenda

also commands support, in varying degrees, among the broader conservative community. In fact, the first George W. Bush administration was populated by prominent neoconservatives and other proponents of perpetual U.S. military primacy, the deputy secretary of defense, and the head of the Defense Policy Board. Together with such influential neoconservative commentators as Robert Kagan, William Kristol, Charles Krauthammer, and Lawrence Kaplan, these individuals provided both the intellectual and policy foundation of President Bush's post-9/11 foreign policy².

Central to neoconservative political thought is that the security of the United States is ultimately assured only in a world of democracies – that is, a world rid of totalitarianism, autocracy, and terrorism (A democratic world would be a peaceful world because, as neoconservatives believe, as did Woodrow Wilson) democracies do not fight each other. But a democratic peace is not inevitable. Achieving it requires an activist U.S. foreign policy based on military primacy and a willingness to use force to ensure the ultimate triumph of U.S. political values. Neoconservatives also believe people around the world aspire to these values, but do not prevail everywhere because of persistent tyranny. They believe this to be especially true in the Middle East.

For neoconservatives, as well as for President George W. Bush after 9/11, tyranny and terrorism are moral evils that the United States is obligated to destroy. “Wherever we carry it, the U.S. flag will stand not only for our power, but for freedom,” the president declared in his June 2002 speech to West Point’s graduating class. He continued, “Our nation’s cause has

² At first the offensive takes place in the pages of US newspapers and magazines. William Kristol and Robert Kagan write articles for the magazines *Foreign Policy* and the *Weekly Standard*; columnists Charles Krauthammer is syndicated in over 400 newspapers and is a regular contributor on FOX News.

always been larger than our nation's defense. We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace – a peace that favors human liberty. We will defend the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent. Building this peace is America's opportunity and America's duty."

A seminal neoconservative document was the 1992 *Defense Planning Guidance*, written for then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney by then Pentagon analysts Paul Wolfowitz who later served the George W. Bush administration as deputy secretary of defense and L. Lewis "Scooter" Libby who later became Vice President Cheney's chief of staff. The guidance called for establishing America's military primacy over Eurasia by preventing the rise of any hostile power capable of challenging that primacy. It also endorsed a policy of preventive disarmament of any rogue state seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction. The document was never translated into policy because George H. Bush was defeated for reelection in 1992, but leaked excerpts of the document provoked sharp condemnation on Capitol Hill.

Neoconservatives also condemned restrictive use-of-force doctrines favored by realists such as Casper Weinberger and Colin Powell. The Weinberger – Powell doctrine defined "the national interest" as consisting of a grid of key ground, sea lanes, industrial centers, strategic choke-points and the like. Kagan and Kristol argued, "This narrow, materialistic definition of interest was foisted upon our foreign policy establishment by realists in the middle of the century and it should be supplanted by a foreign policy based on honor and greatness in the service of liberal principles (National Interest and Global Responsibility, 23-24)." In his essay *Statesmanship in the New Century*, Wolfowitz contends, "the core of U.S. foreign policy is ... the universalization of U.S. principles." He wrote, "Nothing could be less realistic than the version

of realism that dismisses human rights as an important tool of foreign policy.” In his view, citing the triumph of democracy in the Philippines, “*democratic* change is not only a way to weaken one’s enemies, it is also a way to strengthen our friends (319-320).” Indeed, for neoconservatives, a democratic Middle East was the ultimate goal of regime change in Iraq. Neoconservatives not only subscribed to the “democratic peace” theory. They also believed the United States could establish democracy in Iraq and that Iraq’s example would provoke the fall of other tyrannical dominoes in the region. George W. Bush, characteristically, had no doubts.

“Iraqi democracy will succeed,” he declared in a November 2003 speech to the National Endowment of Democracy, and that “success will send forth the news, from Damascus to Tehran – that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution (Heilburn 265).”

The election of George W. Bush in 2000 ushered the neoconservatives into power, and by the time Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq in 2003 he had become a de facto neoconservative. Of the twenty-five founding members of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), ten entered the new administration: Dick Cheney (VP), L. “Scooter” Libby (Cheney’s chief-of-staff), Donald Rumsfeld (secretary of defense), Paul Wolfowitz (deputy secretary of defense), Richard Perle (defense policy board chair), Paula Dobriansky (undersecretary of state for democracy and global affairs), Peter Rodman (assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs), Zalmay Khalilzad (special envoy to the Middle East and later ambassador to Iraq), Elliott Abrams (National Security Council staff member responsible for Middle East policy), and Eliot Cohen (DPB member). Other neoconservatives

who were not PNAC founders also assumed key positions. Prominent among them were Douglas Feith (undersecretary of defense policy) and John Bolton (undersecretary of state for arms control and international security and later, ambassador to the United Nations)” (Barry 1-3). The neoconservatives’ influence was evident in President Bush’s wholesale embrace of their foreign policy ideology and language in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The adoption of neoconservative ideology was manifest in numerous presidential speeches, but most significantly in the pivotal foreign policy document of his presidency – the 2002 publication of the *The National Security Strategy*.

Neoconservatives like to suggest that Bush arrived at a neoconservative foreign policy on his own. But to believe that assertion is to ignore the reality that Bush entered office as a foreign policy novice. The 9/11 attacks created an opportunity for neoconservatives to provide a ready-made explanation and course of action. It also ignores Bush’s arrival at the White House as a self-avowed realist who was critical of Clinton’s interventions in Haiti and the Balkans because they were not firmly anchored in threats vital to U.S. security interests. In a November 1999 speech to the Federation of American Scientists, Bush declared that “a President must be a clear-eyed realist,” a statement that reflected the foreign policy approach of his father’s administration and of former secretary of defense Dick Cheney. Until 9/11 the Bush White House did not take the al Qaeda threat seriously; on the contrary, the president displayed a general disinterest in foreign policy. President Bush showed a much greater interest in such domestic issues as tax cuts, educational reform, deregulation, government support of faith-based charities, expanded oil drilling in Alaska, and federally restricted funding for stem cell research. Further, he did not support significant increases in defense spending.

During the 2000 election campaign Al Gore had called for a larger five-year defense spending plan than Bush had proposed. Moreover, he registered no note-worthy departure from his predecessor's policies toward Iraq, Iran, and North Korea; indeed, Kaplan and Kristol complained that Bush "proceeded to water down even the demands that the Clinton team had imposed on Iraq (*War Over Iraq*, 71)."

Then came 9/11, which immediately transformed Bush into a foreign policy president and prepared the way for him to endorse the neoconservative's vision of the world and America's role in it. "Bush the realist became a zealous Wilsonian," observes Robert Litwak (25)." As Kaplan and Kristol recounted, "Bush transformed himself from a realist following in his father's footsteps to an internationalist touting America's ideals as sincerely and forcefully as Harry Truman, John Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan before him (*War Over Iraq*, 72)." The blunt assessment of the prestigious London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies is:

the events of September 11, 2001 provided hawks, including those of "utopian" persuasion, with opportunity to push Iraq to the top of the agenda. They successfully exploited the belief in the upper tier of the government immediately after the attacks that there was a better than even chance that Iraq had been involved, and the more broadly held concern that Baghdad might in the future supply WMD to terrorists. In bureaucratic terms, this resulted in the insertion of a single provision, at the end of a presidential guidance document otherwise dedicated to the government's response to 11 September, instructing the military to prepare for war with Iraq (*Strategic Survey 2002-2003*, 177)."

Neoconservative White House speechwriter (and coiner of the “axis of evil” phrase)

David Frum, in his 2003 memoir of the impact of 9/11 on President Bush, traced the transformation of Bush’s thinking from realism to idealism with respect to the war on terrorism. This change was reflected in Bush’s broadening conception of the source of the terrorist challenge to include the absence of democracy in the Middle East. Traditional U.S. policy had favored stability over justice, but the “pursuit of stability in the Middle East had brought chaos and slaughter to New York and Washington. Bush decided that the United States was no longer a status quo power in the Middle East (231).” Iraq quickly began moving to the center stage in the Bush White House, with Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz pushing the Iraq agenda. Within hours after the attacks, Iraq popped up in the White House Situation Room discussions. The apparent assumptions, unsupported by any hard evidence, were that no terrorist organization could possibly have carried out such an action on its own – i.e. without rogue state support – and that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was the probable state sponsor. Expecting to attend meetings focused on al Qaeda, “I walked into a series of discussions about Iraq,” recalls Richard Clarke, the Bush White House’s counterterrorism director:

At first I was incredulous we were talking about something other than getting al Qaeda. Then I realized with almost a sharp physical pain that Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were going to try to take advantage of this national tragedy to promote their agenda about Iraq. Since the beginning of the administration, and well before, they had been pressing for war against Iraq (*Against All Enemies*, 30).

When Clark said that the focus should be on Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, Wolfowitz countered that the main threat was Iraqi terrorism. “I said, that’s interesting, because there hasn’t been any Iraqi terrorism against the United States for over eight years (*Against All Enemies* 30).” Further Clarke asserts, “For Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz, Iraq was the most dangerous thing in national security ... a rigid belief and a decision already made. No fact or event could derail (*Against All Enemies*, 265).” Thus, from the start, neoconservatives inside the administration’s upper reaches were prepared to lump together Iraq and al Qaeda into an undifferentiated terrorism threat and to use the al Qaeda attacks as the fulcrum for a war on Iraq that would finish off Saddam Hussein once and for all.

Secretary of State Colin Powell opposed the Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz option and persuaded the president to focus on al Qaeda first. “Any action needs public support,” he argued. “It’s not just what the international coalition supports: it’s what the U.S. people want to support. The U.S. people want us to do something about al Qaeda (*Woodward, Bush at War*, 49).” Clarke added, for good measure: “Having been attacked by al Qaeda, for us to now go bombing Iraq in response would be like our invading Mexico after the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor (*Against All Enemies*, 31).” According to Powell biographer Karen DeYoung, the proposed Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz option made it “clear to Powell that some of his colleagues were trying to use the events of September to promote their own policy obsessions and settle old scores (*The Life of Colin Powell*, 379).”

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and a receptive president combined to permit the translation of the neoconservatives’ ideology into established U.S. foreign policy, the major

tenets of which were laid out in the White House's 2002 *National Security Strategy*. The document is a symphony of neoconservative themes, objectives, and language: (a) The universality of core U.S. political values, (b) the presence of evil regimes, (c) the need to perpetuate America's global military primacy, (d) the confidence in force as an instrument of overseas regime change, (e) the imperative of democratic expansion, and (f) the embrace of preventive war are all there. What quickly became known as the "Bush Doctrine" consisted of *The National Security Strategy* (NSS) and key antecedent presidential pronouncements, including Bush's speeches before the Warsaw Conference on Combating Terrorism on November 6, 2001; his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002; his remarks before the student body of the Virginia Military Institute on April 17, 2002; and his speech to the graduating class at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on June 1, 2002. By the fall of 2002 the administration had in place a clear, declaratory use-of-force policy whose objectives was stated in the title of the NSS's chapter 5: "Prevent Our Enemies from Threatening Us, Our Allies, and Our Friends with Weapons of Mass Destruction."

The NSS opens by declaring the universality of U.S. values, a key tenet of neoconservative ideology:

The great struggles of the twentieth between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise ... People everywhere want to be able to speak freely; choose who will govern them; worship as they please; educate their children – male and female; own property; and enjoy the benefits of their labor.

These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society - and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom loving people across the globe and across the ages (59).

It then states the basis and goals of the U.S. national security strategy: The U.S. national security strategy will be based on a distinctly U.S. internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interest. The aim of the strategy is to help make the world not just safer but better (60).

As for threats to the United States, the *NSS* holds that the “gravest danger our nation faces lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology (iv).” Specifically, the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by enemies of the United States. “Our enemies have openly declared that they are seeking weapons of mass destruction, and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination. The United States will not allow these efforts to succeed (iv).” Of particular concern is the possible acquisition of WMD by terrorist organizations via the assistance of rogue states. The *NSS* presumes the terrorist organizations are clients or allies of rogue states with Iraq and North Korea mentioned by name. The presumption is that rogue states would be the most likely suppliers of WMD to terrorist organizations. Therefore, the logical action is to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use WMD against the United States and our allies and friends. The *NSS* states preventive force is imperative because fanatical terrorist organizations and reckless dictators are undeterrable. It stipulates,

Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the U.S. can no longer solely rely on reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first ... Traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and targeting of innocents, whose so-called soldiers seek martyrdom in death and whose most potent protection is statelessness (14).

To sustain a capacity for effective preventive military action, the *NSS* contends that the United States "must build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge (29)," reflecting another central tenet of neoconservative ideology. This stipulation means that our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States. Additionally, the *NSS* provided the intellectual rationale and policy framework for preventive war against Iraq as well as any other rogue state that had, or might someday have, the temerity to challenge America's post-Cold War global hegemony. The state challenge was cast in terms of WMD acquisition, especially concerning nuclear weapons. In its essence, the Bush Doctrine was about forcible and preventive counter-proliferation to preserve America's military primacy and freedom of military action and to spread U.S. political values abroad. As such, the doctrine was a dream come true for neoconservative and nationalist hawks.

The Case for War

By the time President George W. Bush ordered U.S. forces to invade Iraq, he and other top officials in his administration had painted a terrifying picture of Saddam Hussein. The dictator was depicted as a Hitler with weapons of mass destruction, a despot on the verge of acquiring the ultimate weapon of mass destruction and determined to use it against the United States. It was a picture that justified preventive war. The President and other war proponents played down the risk of a protracted war involving tens of thousands of U.S. casualties and trillions of dollars. The war would be a “cakewalk,” a larger-scale repeat of the unexpectedly swift and seemingly decisive victory in Afghanistan. Saddam Hussein’s regime was militarily much weaker than it had been in 1991, and the oppressed Iraqi people, upon liberation, would naturally work to establish institutions of democratic governance.

The Iraqi threat was cast most starkly in two key speeches: Vice President Cheney’s speech to the 103rd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) on August 26, 2002, and President Bush’s speech at the Cincinnati Museum Center on October 7, 2002. Cheney, in his speech, called Iraq “a mortal threat” to the United States: “The Iraqi regime has ... been very busy enhancing its capabilities in the field of chemical and biological agents. And they continue to pursue the nuclear program they began so many years ago.” Cheney added, “Many of us are convinced that Saddam Hussein will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon.” Once he acquired the full panoply of WMD, “Saddam Hussein could then be expected to seek domination of the entire Middle East, take control of a great portion of the world’s energy supplies, directly threaten U.S. friends throughout the region, and subject the United States or

any other nation to nuclear blackmail.” Cheney was absolutely certain: “Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us.”

In Cincinnati, Bush said Iraq was “a grave threat to peace” because of its “history of aggression” and “drive toward an arsenal of terror.” Iraq “possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons” and “is seeking nuclear weapons.” Bush then went on to explain why Iraq is different from other countries or regimes that also have terrible weapons:

While there are many dangers in the world, the threat from Iraq stands alone because it gathers the most serious dangers of our age in one place. Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction are controlled by a murderous Tyrant who has already used chemical weapons to kill thousands of people. This same tyrant has tried to dominate the Middle East, has invaded and occupied a small neighbor, has struck other nations without warning, and holds an unrelenting hostility toward the United States. By its past and present actions, by its technological capabilities, by the merciless nature of the regime, Iraq is unique.

Bush went on to assert that Iraq possessed: (1) a biological weapons arsenal capable of killing millions; (2) ballistic missiles with ranges to strike Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey and other nations; and (3) a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical or biological weapons across broad areas. Indeed, “we’re concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using these unmanned aerial vehicles for missions targeting the United States.” The threat, moreover, was critical:

Some ask how urgent this danger is to America and the world. The

danger is already significant, and it only grows worse with time. If we know Saddam Hussein has dangerous weapons today – and we do – does it make any sense for the world to wait to confront him as he grows even stronger and develops even more dangerous weapons?

Bush then postulated an Iraqi alliance with Al Qaeda and Iraq's possible transfer of WMDs to Al Qaeda:

We know that Iraq and the Al Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy – the United States. We know that Iraq and Al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back more than a decade. ...and we know that after 9/11, Saddam Hussein's regime gleefully celebrated the terrorist attack on America. Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorist. Alliance with terrorist could allow the Iraqi regime to attack America without leaving any fingerprints ... Saddam Hussein is harboring terrorists and the instruments of terror, the instruments of mass death and destruction. And he cannot be trusted. The risk is simply too great that he will use them, or provide them to a terrorist network.

In addition, Bush did not see any meaningful difference between terrorist groups and rogue states: "Terror cells and outlaw regimes building weapons of mass destruction are different faces of the same evil. Our security requires that we confront both."

Bush then turned to the Iraqi nuclear threat. He claimed that the evidence, including Saddam Hussein's "numerous meetings with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls his

‘nuclear mujahedeen, ’ supported the conclusion that “Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program.” The threat was near and horrific:

If the Iraqi regime is able to produce, buy, or steal an amount of highly enriched uranium a little larger than a single softball, it could have a nuclear weapon in less than a year. And if we allow that to happen, a terrible line would be crossed. Saddam Hussein would be in a position to blackmail anyone who opposes his aggression. He would be in a position to dominate the Middle East. He would be in a position to threaten America. And Saddam Hussein would be in a position to pass nuclear technology to terrorists.

The president concluded his portrayal of the Iraqi threat by invoking the specter of a nuclear 9/11:

Some Citizens wonder, after 11 years of living with this problem why do we need to confront it now? And there’s a reason. We’ve experienced the horrors of September the 11th. We have seen that those who hate America are willing to crash airplanes into buildings full of innocent people. Our enemies would be no less willing, in fact they would be eager, to use biological or chemical, or nuclear weapons. Knowing these realities, America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud (President Bush, “Outlines Iraqi Threat.” Cincinnati Museum Center. 7 October 2002).

Noah Feldman has observed that the U.S. invasion of Iraq, “was the product of several disparate, mutually conflicting strands of thought, some benightedly idealistic, others brutally

realist, and almost all based on some misunderstanding of the likely consequences of the invasion of Iraq itself (19).” A review of prewar administration statements and of the neoconservatives’ official and unofficial arguments reveals no coherent U.S. grand strategy for Iraq. Such a strategy would have recognized the limits of U.S. military power as an instrument of foreign political change and paid at least some attention to how a successful post-war Baathist political order would be established in Iraq. Rather, we find an assortment of declared and undeclared war aims with differing appeals to various policymakers who themselves were motivated by disparate and sometimes contradictory agendas. The administration’s war aims included: preventing nuclear proliferation, completing the “unfinished business” of the 1991 Gulf War, demonstrating a willingness to use U.S. military power, asserting the principle of preventive military action, intimidating Iran and North Korea, transforming the Middle East, vindicating the Pentagon’s revolutionary employment of force and last but not least, ridding the world of evil.

The very number and diversity of aims, and the mutual antagonism of some, reflect a lack of consensus on purpose of the war and a lack of confidence in the persuasiveness of any single aim. Was the purpose of the war avenging 9/11, eliminating weapons of mass destruction, knocking off an ally of Osama bin Laden, punishing a dictator, freeing an oppressed people, flexing America’s high-tech military muscle, helping Israel, democratizing the Middle East, intimidating other rogue states, suppressing global terrorism, destroying evil, or all of the above? Did the multiplicity of war aims betray the war proponents’ need to view the war as a necessity vs. a war of choice? The failure to discover Iraq’s much hyped WMDs or an operational linkage between Saddam Hussein’s regime and al Qaeda certainly produced an

official shift of emphasis toward establishing freedom and democracy in the Middle East as the central justification for the war.

It remains unclear how seriously war proponents took the Iraqi threat that they so grossly inflated for political purposes. Four months after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld acknowledged that the administration “did not act in Iraq because we discovered dramatic new evidence of Iraq’s pursuit of weapons of mass murder. We acted because we saw the existing evidence in a new light, through the prism of our experience on September 11th (Rumsfeld, Testimony on Iraq. July 9, 2003).” In other words, the administration acted on the basis of a theoretical threat. It supposed the possibility of a future similar attack, armed this time with Iraqi supplied weapons of mass destruction, and acted to foreclose that theoretical possibility.

In his account of the Bush administration and the war on terror, Douglas Feith, a prominent neoconservative who served as undersecretary of defense for policy from 2001 to 2005, claims:

no one I know believed Saddam Hussein was part of 9/11 plot; we had no substantial reason to believe he was. Nor did we have any intelligence Iraq was plotting specific operation with al Qaida or any other terrorist group. The administration’s rationale for war did not depend solely on concern about weapons of mass destruction, much less on whether Saddam Hussein had WMD stockpiles on hand. The real threat was Saddam Hussein’s retention of personnel and facilities to produce chemical and biological weapons and the intention to reinvigorate his programs (Feith, 215).

The theory postulated that Saddam Hussein so armed could then transfer weapons of mass destruction to anti-U.S. terrorist organizations, or could launch a new assault on Kuwait since possession of weapons of mass destruction could put Saddam Hussein in a position to deter the United States from interfering. This argument doesn't explain how Saddam Hussein's possession in 1991 of a truly robust arsenal of deliverable chemical and biological munitions failed to deter the United States from taking action to push him out of Kuwait. In addition, this line of reasoning fails to explain why Saddam Hussein didn't restart WMD production following the first gulf war.

Thus, the United States went to war against Saddam Hussein's hostile intentions and the chance that he might resume production of chemical and biological weapons. As Richard Betts observes, "The intelligence community had almost no hard evidence that Iraq was retaining the chemical and biological weapons it had at the time of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, or had manufactured new ones, or was reassembling its nuclear weapons program (118)." The intelligence community "failed to uncover much new information after United Nations Special Commission on Iraq inspectors left Iraq in 1998. Much of the information it did get came from defector reports that turned out to be fabricated and unreliable (118)." Iraq's hostility was considered a given, as was its retention of chemical and biological weapons that had gone unaccounted for in 1998. The intelligence community had been shocked by how much Saddam Hussein's nuclear program had been successfully concealed before the Gulf War, and the Iraqi dictator, at least until November 2002 (when he agreed to permit the return of U.N. inspectors), was still acting as if he had something to hide.

That the administration deliberately deceived the U.S. electorate by postulating both Iraqi WMD threat and an Iraqi al Qaeda alliance far beyond the available evidence is no longer a matter of dispute. After 9/11, when it was clear that the CIA would not forcefully advocate regime change in Iraq, neoconservatives established the Office of Special Plans and the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group, both situated in the Pentagon. Both intelligence research units also bypassed the normal interagency vetting process. It was the Office of Special Plans that helped get congressional leaders on board by directly briefing them with evidence that Baghdad had chemical and biological weapons and would soon have nuclear weapons. Briefings to leaders in Congress also included confirmation of a close relationship between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda (Betts, 118). Evidence put forth in congressional testimonies, speeches, interviews, and articles and at meetings with Members of Congress included uncorroborated and questionable intelligence that was cherry-picked to convince audiences that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (Halper and Clarke 2004). Neoconservatives and their allies also pressured intelligence agencies and analysts to validate their claims, such as the story that Saddam Hussein attempted to acquire yellowcake uranium from Niger and that Saddam Hussein was behind the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center (Phythian 2008). Cheney became the neoconservatives' most powerful ally in creating an environment where intelligence agencies and analysts felt pressured to validate administration claims about Iraqi stocks of WMD and links to al Qaeda (Phythian, 2008). On multiple occasions between September 2001 and February 2003, Cheney and his chief of staff went to the CIA headquarters to discuss intelligence – which entailed repeatedly asking analysts to “restate their judgments (Phythian, 216).”

Information on the threats that Saddam Hussein posed WMD was coupled with assurances that removing him would be relatively straightforward, while Iraqi oil revenues would make reconstruction cheap. Intelligence and assessments of war costs that contradicted the neoconservative line were ignored or buried (Kaufmann 21). The ability of neoconservatives to disseminate their version of evidence was buttressed by an ability to secure allies in the media, especially talk radio and cable news. These media allies were effective in mobilizing the attentive public to support neoconservative ideas as witnessed by favorable opinion polls; 70-90 percent of the public in late 2002 believed Saddam Hussein was planning a WMD attack on the United States (Kaufman, 43).

In surveying the discrepancies between what Bush and other top administration officials were publicly claiming and what was actually known at the time, Joseph Pfiffner concluded:

From the publicly available evidence, the president misled the Country in implying that there was a connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11. The administration's claims about Iraq's nuclear capacity were based on dubious evidence that was presented in a misleading manner. Claims about chemical and biological weapons were based on legitimate evidence that was widely accepted internationally ... Claims of Saddam Hussein's ability to deliver these weapons, however, were exaggerated. Finally, there was circumstantial and inconclusive evidence that in 2002 the intelligence community may have been under pressure to support the administration's goals (25)."

In the summer of 2002, Marine General Anthony Zinni, the president's special envoy to the Mideast, signaled that the military was not in favor of a war in Iraq. "I can give you many more priorities (Isikoff and Corn 28)." Zinni further argued that a "war would be expensive,

stretch the military, and antagonize America's allies. It would interfere with efforts to defeat al Qaeda and end up requiring the United States to keep troops in Iraq forever." He added, "It's pretty interesting that all the generals see it the same way, and all the others who have never fired a shot and are hot to go see it another way" (Isikoff and Corn, 28).

In an even more extensive survey of the evidence, Chaim Kaufmann contends the administration was guilty of deliberate "threat inflation." He defines threat inflation as: (1) claims that go beyond the range of ambiguity that disinterested experts would credit as plausible; (2) a consistent pattern of worst-case assertions over a range of factual issues that are logically unrelated; (3) use of double standards in evaluating intelligence in a way that favors worst-case threat assessments; or (4) claims based on circular logic, such as Bush administration claims that Hussein's alleged hostile intentions were evidence of the existence of WMD whose supposed existence was used as evidence of his intentions. Kaufman maintains that "administration exaggerations of the Iraqi threat during 2002-2003 qualify on all four grounds. The errors did not result from mistakes by U.S. intelligence agencies. Rather, top officials knew what policy they intended to pursue and selected intelligence assessments to promote that policy based on their political usefulness, not their credibility (29)." Wolfowitz virtually admitted as much when he told a *Vanity Fair* interviewer in May 2003, "We settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on, which was weapons of mass destruction, as the core reason (Tannenhaus).

A 2004 study by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace also detected a politically driven shift in intelligence assessment in 2002. It discovered a wide gap between

what was claimed and what was known, especially the alliance between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. The endowment reported:

There was and is no solid evidence of a cooperative relationship between Saddam Hussein's government and al Qaeda. There was no evidence to support the claim that Iraq would have transferred WMD to al Qaeda and much evidence to counter it. The notion that any government would give its principal security assets to people it could not control in order to achieve its own political aims is highly dubious (Cirincione, Matthews and Perkovich, 7).

In his exhaustive study of the administration's threat statements and the actual document-by-document intelligence available to the administration, John Prados, an analyst with the National Security Archive and long-standing observer of the CIA, concluded that the administration "consistently distorted, manipulated, and ignored intelligence information, as the president, vice president, secretaries of defense and state, and others, sought to persuade the country that the facts about Iraq were other than what the intelligence indicated (Prados xi-xii)." It was a case study in government dishonesty in which deception was systematic and carried out purposefully to create the conditions the administration hoped would justify a war.

Writing in 2006, CIA analyst Paul Pillar, who served as the national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia from 2003 to 2005, declared that the Bush administration "used intelligence not to inform decision making, but to justify a decision already made. It went to war without requesting any strategic level intelligence assessments on any aspect (18)." The intelligence community, on its own initiative, conducted an assessment of the problems the United States was likely to face in a post-invasion Iraq. The analysis presented a picture of a

political culture that would not provide a fertile ground for democracy and foretold a long, difficult, and turbulent transition. It projected that a Marshall Plan-type effort would be required to restore the Iraqi economy, despite Iraq's abundant oil resources. It forecast a deeply divided Iraqi society, with Sunnis resentful over the loss of their dominant position and Shiites seeking power commensurate with their majority status, and there was a significant chance that the groups would engage in violent conflict unless an occupying power prevented it. The assessment anticipated a foreign occupying force would itself be the target of resentment and attacks – unless it established security and put Iraq on the road to prosperity in the first few weeks or months after the fall of Saddam Hussein (Pillar, 21).

The intelligence community also assessed the likely regional consequences of overthrowing Saddam Hussein and concluded the any value Iraq might have as a democratic exemplar would be minimal because of its being imposed by an outside power. It also determined that war and occupation more likely would boost political Islam and increase sympathy for terrorists' objectives, and Iraq would become a magnet for extremists from elsewhere in the Middle East (19). Pillar then went on to discuss the discrepancies between the administration's public statements and the intelligence community's judgments, with the greatest being the relationship between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda. The enormous attention devoted to this subject did not reflect any judgment by intelligence officials that there was or was likely to be anything like the alliance the administration said existed. The reason the connection got so much attention was that the administration wanted to hitch the Iraq expedition to the war on terror and the threat the U.S. public feared most, thereby capitalizing on the country's militant post 9/11 mood.

In a September 2006 interview with CBS News correspondent Katie Couric, President Bush himself confessed, “one of the hardest parts of my job is to connect Iraq to the war on terror (Johnson Transcript: President Bush).” The Bush White House may well have believed that a war with Iraq was necessary to prevent Saddam Hussein from acquiring nuclear weapons and possibly transferring them to al Qaeda. The shock of 9/11 frightened many Americans into believing all sorts of terrifying possibilities, and the White House, after all, had the responsibility of protecting the country from future attacks. A near universal assumption within the national security community was that additional terrorist attacks were forthcoming. The White House was not alone in imagining the horror of 9/11 style attacks conducted with weapons of mass destruction. The 2002 *National Security Strategy* was quite right to define the marriage of radicalism and technology as a potentially grave security threat. And it was certainly reasonable, given Saddam Hussein’s long-standing enmity toward the United States as well as his track record of reckless miscalculation, to imagine the possibility of his collaboration with anti-American terrorist organizations.

Yet it bears repeating that by March 2003, when Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was launched, there was no evidence of Iraqi complicity in al Qaeda’s 9/11 attacks. Additionally, though the White House had sought to conflate al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein as a unitary threat, no hard evidence exists of any operational collaboration between the terrorist organization and Baghdad’s Baathist regime. Notwithstanding official talk of smoking guns and mushroom clouds, no one found evidence of a functioning Iraqi nuclear weapons program, much less an imminent Iraqi bomb. Saddam Hussein’s purported nuclear program was thus simply wished into imminent capabilities.

Furthermore, there was no reason to believe that Saddam Hussein's potential use of WMDs, had he possessed them, was exempt from the grim logic of nuclear deterrence. True, he had employed chemical weapons against Iranian infantry and Kurdish villagers in the 1980s, but his victims were incapable of effective retaliation in kind. More notable was his refusal during the Gulf War of 1991 to launch such weapons against Israel or Coalition forces, both of which were capable of devastating retaliation. Saddam Hussein was prone to miscalculation. Witness his disastrous invasions of Iran and Kuwait and his repeated misjudgments of America's willingness to use military force. Saddam Hussein was prone to miscalculation, but never was he suicidal. He loved himself more than he hated the United States. Unlike Hitler in his bunker, Saddam Hussein chose capture rather than suicide. As Steven Metz observed, "Hussein had a penchant for miscalculation, not for suicide. He was willing to use chemical weapons against his own people, but had not used them against coalition forces in 1991 specifically because he knew to do so would risk his own grasp on power and survival. Despite the claim of the administration, nothing, not even September 11, had changed Hussein's desire for survival and retention of power (117)."

The portrait of Saddam Hussein as undeterrable was of course a necessary ingredient in the case for preventive war. A deterrable Hussein would have been just that – deterrable – and therefore unworthy of a war. He would have been similar to other rogue dictators, none of whom had ever employed WMD against the United States, Israel, or a treaty ally of the United States. Saddam Hussein ruled a state consisting of vast assets including: economic and governmental infrastructure, military forces, and population that were subject to devastating U.S. retaliation. This largesse put Hussein in a strategically different category from bin Laden,

who led an elusive, transnational terrorist organization with little in the way of exposed assets. The Bush administration's presumption of rogue state irrationality was in fact a recipe for repeated strategic miscalculation. The presumption assumes a generic irrationality irrespective of specific regimes' circumstances and regime leaders' personalities, and it does so even with few historical examples of genuinely insane state leaders. Political extremism and radicalism are not synonymous with irrationality. Bin Laden demonstrated an impressive capacity to calculate ends and means relationships, and to plan and execute successful terrorist operations.

The White House's suggestion that Saddam Hussein might transfer nuclear munitions to al Qaeda was always far-fetched. First, the Iraqi dictator could never be sure such a transfer could be made undetected. Further, just as all Stalinist styled dictators, he was not in the habit of handing over power, to say nothing of the destructive power of nuclear weapons, to any organization outside his complete control. Hussein was certainly aware that bin Laden regarded the Baathist regime in Baghdad as an apostate government. As Steven Metz has observed, "No state has ever given terrorists more power than it, itself possesses. There is no incentive for rogue regimes to hand over their hard won nuclear capabilities, prestige and power to Al Qaeda. Regimes like Kim Jong Il's North Korea, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Iran, or Saddam Hussein's Iraq tend to be paranoid and obsessed with finding and eliminating alternative sources of power to their rule. The President and others repeatedly said that Saddam Hussein "could" hand over WMD to al Qaeda. It is certainly technically possible, but they never provided more than vague innuendo to suggest what incentives Saddam Hussein might have gained from doing so. This is because the proposition does not bear scrutiny (35)." The White House presumed an Iraqi willingness to transfer WMDs to al Qaeda on the basis of a

shared hatred for the United States. This supposition ignored Hussein's regional focus, especially on Iran, an enemy he always regarded as more dangerous than the United States. It also ignored Hussein's paramount interest in maintaining and increasing his own power. Far from advancing his regional and personal agendas, an Iraqi WMD attack on the U.S. homeland would have guaranteed a regime destroying U.S. retaliatory response.

There were always powerful barriers to cooperation between al Qaeda and the Baathist Iraq, and many experts, including Brent Scowcroft, George H. W. Bush's national security adviser, repeatedly pointed out before the Iraq War. "Saddam Hussein's goals have little in common with the terrorist who threaten us, and there is little incentive for him to make common cause with them," Scowcroft wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed urging Bush administration not to attack Iraq. "He is unlikely to risk his investment in weapons of mass destruction, much less his country, by handing such weapons to terrorists who would use them for their own purposes and leave Baghdad as the return address." Even "threatening to use these weapons for blackmail – much less their actual use – would open him and his entire regime to a devastating response by the U.S. (*Don't Attack Saddam*)." Al Qaeda regards nationalism as an apostate threat, a divider of Muslims from one another. Osama bin Laden's stated goal was the reestablishment of the caliphate (a politically indivisible Muslim community), and he viewed Saddam Hussein and all other secular Arab leaders as infidels. Hussein's role models were Saladin and Stalin, not Mohammed. Saddam Hussein spent eight years waging war against the existential threat to his regime posed by the Ayatollah Khomeini's Iranian theocracy, Osama bin Laden could never have been a trustworthy ally. In the context of the National Security Council's examination of who was behind the 9/11 attacks, two experts

on Islamic terrorism observed, “bin Laden was deeply contemptuous of Saddam Hussein. For believers like bin Laden, Saddam Hussein was the second coming of Gamal Abdel Nasser, a secular pharaonic ruler who destroyed the religion and oppressed the Umma (the community of Muslim believers). There is little evidence that Saddam Hussein viewed bin Laden and his ilk any differently than Nasser viewed Islamist activists (Benjamin and Simon, 254).”

No post-invasion evidence emerged to support the existence of an al Qaeda-Saddam Hussein alliance. The 9/11 Commission reported in 2005 that while there may have been contacts between al Qaeda and the Baathist regime, “we have seen no evidence that these ... ever developed into a collaborative operational relationship. Nor have we seen evidence indicating that Iraq cooperated with al Qaeda in developing or carrying out attacks against the United States (*Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, 66).” A more definitive 2007 Pentagon sponsored study based on 600,000 documents seized in Iraq found no smoking gun, i.e. direct connection between Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and al Qaeda. The study also concluded that while Saddam Hussein’s regime did provide some support to other terrorist groups in the Middle East, the “predominant targets of the Iraqi state terror operations were Iraqi citizens, both inside and outside Iraq” (Woods and Lacey, 1-2).

The Bush administration understood the domestic political importance of publicly asserting a collaborative al Qaeda-Iraq relationship even if such a relationship did not exist: it suggested a connection between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks to the U.S. electorate that was out for revenge. After the 9/11 attacks, Douglas Feith established a Policy Counter Terrorism Evaluation Group for the purpose of finding links between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein’s regime. The group provided an alternative intelligence that differed from that of the CIA and

other intelligence agencies, all of which had concluded there was no convincing evidence of an operational relationship between Osama bin Laden and Baghdad. The group's assessment, entitled "Iraq and al-Qaida: Making the Case," was based on an examination of existing intelligence and claimed that the intelligence agencies were ignoring reports of collaboration. The group offered no new intelligence to support its conclusions that Iraq and al Qaeda had a "mature, symbiotic relationship." Subsequently, in March 2007, the Pentagon's acting inspector general rebuked Feith's efforts to claim such a relationship as "inappropriate" because he failed to clarify why his conclusion diverged from those of the rest of the intelligence community (Jehl, *Pentagon Reportedly Skewed CIA's View of Qaeda Time*).

What of Iraq's nonnuclear weapons of mass destruction? As the invasion neared, the administration assumed that Iraq had some chemical munitions and biological agents that remained unaccounted for by the UN inspection regime following the Gulf War in 1991. In August 1995, General Hussein Kamel, who was Saddam Hussein's son-in-law and former director of Iraq's Military Industrial Corporation (responsible for all of Iraq's weapons programs), defected to Jordan. Kamel told debriefers that all of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons had been destroyed on his orders back in 1991. More instructive, in November 2002, Saddam Hussein succumbed to the pressure of a huge U.S. military buildup in Kuwait and the Bush administration's increasingly strident rhetoric about the necessity of regime change in Baghdad. He permitted the UN inspectors to return and gave them more or less unfettered access to suspected weapons sites. Thus, U.S. diplomacy had in effect forced Saddam Hussein to capitulate on the very issue that formed the primary public rationale for the coming war. If he had WMDs, the inspectors, who then had access to previously off-limits presidential palaces

and other government compounds, would eventually find them. The inspectors had four months to find any WMDs and examined 141 sites before they were pulled out because of the impending U.S. invasion. They reported that there was “no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq (Kaufmann, 25).” The White House was completely indifferent to the inspection team’s failure to discover any WMDs, even though the suspected sites that the United States and several other countries supplied to the team were supposedly the best that the various intelligence agencies could give. Blix (leader of the UN inspection team) was prompted to wonder, “How could there be 100-percent certainty about the existence of weapons of mass destruction, but zero-percent knowledge about their location (156)?”

The conclusion that regime change always trumped finding WMDs as a war aim is reinforced by the Pentagon’s invasion plan, which displayed a manifest indifference to seizing suspected WMD sites. There was no directive from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to search for WMDs. Only on the eve of the invasion did the U.S. Army’s chief intelligence officer for the invasion take it upon himself to throw together a scratch force to search the more than 946 locations the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) had identified as possible WMD storage sites or production facilities (Woodward, *State of Denial*, 349-350).” The DIA was unable to prioritize the locations and in many instances they dated from the 1991 Gulf War. To seize and secure Iraq’s suspected WMDs would have required a sufficiently large and dedicated invasion force to capture the hundreds of suspected sites quickly and to seal Iraq’s long borders to prevent munitions and chemical and biological warfare substances from being spirited out of the country. For example, U.S. forces failed to secure the 120-acre Tuwaitha Nuclear Research

Center (believed to have contained approximately two tons of partially enriched uranium) before unknown people ransacked it (Barton, *U.S. Has Not Inspected Iraq Nuclear Facility*). If, in fact the main purpose of the invasion was to disarm Iraq, then the invasion plan should have reflected that objective. But the plan did not!

In *COBRA II: The inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, an incisive assessment of the invasion plan and its implementation, Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor identified a surprising contradiction. The United States did not have nearly enough troops to secure the hundreds of suspected WMD sites that had supposedly been identified in Iraq or to secure the nation's long, porous borders. Had the Iraqis possessed WMD and terrorist groups been prevalent in Iraq as the administration so loudly asserted, U.S. forces might well have failed to prevent WMD from being spirited out of the country and falling into the hands of the dark forces the administration had declared war against (503). Those who planned Operation Iraqi Freedom, chief among them Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and U.S. Central Command commander Tommy Franks, either did not take the proliferation threat seriously or were dangerously derelict in their duty. Rumsfeld and Franks dived into the minutia of planning the invasion, but they apparently paid little attention to the requirement of seizing control of Iraq's much touted WMD. However, during the invasion Rumsfeld declared, "We know where they are (This Week with George Stephanopoulos, March 30, 2003)."

Iraq's conventional military forces were certainly no threat by 2003, and the Bush administration was quite right to convey the impression that the regime's conventional forces could and would be quickly destroyed. The Iraqi air force and navy had virtually disappeared in the 1990s, and the Iraqi army had been reduced to a paper force. Crippled in 1991, further

guttled by twelve years of military sanctions, commanded by professionally inferior regime loyalists, and badly positioned and trained to repel a foreign invader. The army was incapable of defending Iraq, much less invading its neighbors in the Middle East. It imploded upon contact with U.S. forces. Indeed, until the very end, Saddam Hussein continued to regard an internal coup as the greatest danger his regime faced (Gordon 147). Notwithstanding the 1991 Gulf War and the more recent U.S. destruction of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, he still viewed the United States as a weak willed superpower incapable of forcing him from power. Thus, on the eve of the U.S. invasion, Saddam Hussein was contained and deterred. He posed no significant threat to the United States and no unmanageable threat to regional U.S. security interests. Iraq was nuisance and an irritant but not a deadly menace. As Colin Powell told an interviewer a week after the 9/11 attacks, “Iraq isn’t going anywhere. It’s in a fairly weakened state. It’s doing some things we don’t like. We will continue to contain it (DeYoung, *Soldier* 376).”

Mobilizing U.S. public opinion for war with Iraq required presenting a worst case depiction of its threat while putting the costs and consequences of overthrowing Saddam Hussein in the best possible light. Yes, a war was necessary, but it was going to be quick and cheap. The administration correctly judged the destruction of the dictator’s regime to be a relatively easy military task, but it profoundly misjudged its potential political and strategic results. War planning focused almost exclusively on dispatching the old regime as rapidly and cheaply as possible and at the expense of thinking about what would replace it and how. In some cases, the administration’s war aims amounted to little more than expectations based on wishful thinking and reinforced by the self-serving embrace of faulty historical analogies. For

example, the administration assumed that some form of democratic governance would naturally arise from the ashes of Baathist rule. After all, had not democracy emerged in Japan during America's postwar occupation? The administration further assumed that America's manifestly good intention in Iraq and the Iraqi people's gratitude for being liberated from tyranny would foreclose the possibility of postwar armed resistance to U.S. forces. Again, was this not the case when the Allies liberated France?

"We have great information," Cheney assured skeptical House Majority Leader Dick Arme in the summer of 2002. "They're going to welcome us. It will be like the U.S. army going through the streets of Paris. They're sitting there ready to form a new government. The people will be so happy with their freedoms that we'll probably back ourselves out of there within a month or two (Draper, 178)." The White House felt the war in Iraq was going to be easier than what transpired in Afghanistan. "It is important for the world to see that first of all, Iraq is a sophisticated society with about \$16 billion in annual oil income," President Bush declared to a group of U.S. conservative thinkers in the Oval Office just before the invasion. "The degree of difficulty compared to Afghanistan in terms of the reconstruction effort, or from emerging from dictatorship, is like infinitesimal. I mean Afghanistan has zero." By contrast, "Iraq is a sophisticated society. And it's a society that can emerge and show the Muslim world that it's possible to have peace on its borders without rallying the extremists. And the other thing that will happen will be, there will be less exportation of terror out of Iraq (Draper, 189)."

Confidence that a quick and easy victory lay ahead in Iraq begs the question of "how to assess the guileless optimism of the war's architects. Especially when professed by men who vaunt their lack of illusions. Had they never heard of worst-case scenarios? What sort of

foreign policy assumes that democracy has no historical, cultural, and economic preconditions? The apparent assumption was that democracy is society's natural state and that it automatically resurfaces once "unnatural" tyranny is removed. "There was a tendency among promoters of the war to believe that democracy was a default condition to which societies would revert once liberated from dictators (116)," recounts Francis Fukuyama. There seemed to be no recognition, much less an understanding, of the often long and violent history characterizing the transition from autocracy to democracy. Nor was there recognition of the possibility that antidemocratic organizations, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, would exploit free speech and other democratic institutions to expand political power.

Danielle Pletka, the American Enterprise institute's vice president for foreign and defense policy studies, confesses that before the invasion:

I felt secure in the knowledge that all who yearn for freedom, once free, would use it well. I was wrong. There is no freedom gene, no inner guide that understands the virtues of civil society, of secret ballots, of political parties. And it turns out that living under Saddam Hussein's tyranny for decades conditioned Iraqis to accept unearned leadership, to embrace sect and tribe over ideas, and to tolerate unbridled corruption (*There's No Freedom Gene*).

The administration's other apparent assumption was that the instrument of tyranny's removal in Iraq – U.S. military power – was irresistible. There was no expectation of an insurgent response, much less an appreciation of the limits of U.S. conventional military power for effecting fundamental political change in foreign lands. Perhaps this arrogance was not surprising for a White House and neoconservative community mesmerized by America's

military power and committed to a “war on terror” that from the beginning inflated the importance of military solutions to what at bottom are political problems. The U.S. military experience in Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia ought to have alerted policymakers to the risks inherent in a Western military invasion of a non-Western country. It was apparently unimaginable to the administration’s principal war proponents that some Iraqis, especially those of the politically dominant minority Sunni Arab community who were about to be forcibly disposed of their power, might resist by all available means, including insurgent guerrilla warfare.

Conclusion

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and a receptive president combined to permit the translation of the neoconservatives' ideology into established U.S. foreign policy. The Bush Administration based its decision to invade Iraq upon neoconservative assumptions. The first assumption was that Saddam Hussein's regime was on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons and had already amassed stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. The second assumption was that the regime had meaningful links with Al Qaeda and had something to do with 9/11. The third assumption was that, within Iraq, the regime's fall would be followed by rapid and peaceful democratization. The fourth assumption was that a similar democratic transformation would be precipitated elsewhere in the region. This democratization would lead to a new eagerness among Arab governments to make peace between Israel and a presumptive Palestinian state. If these four assumptions held true, the future of the Middle East would forever be altered by replacing dictatorships with democracy. The Bush Administration maintained that the first two assumptions (WMD and links to Al Qaeda) were solidly supported by intelligence that we now know to be false.

The strategy embraced the core belief of neoconservatives in U.S. exceptionalism – the idea that the United States is the indispensable power in the international order and has a moral responsibility to promote democracy in other countries, with force if necessary. Hence, neoconservatives viewed the terrorist attacks on 9/11 as an opportunity to assert America's military primacy and remake the Middle East by establishing a democratic Iraq. Neoconservatives believed that Iraq offered a seemingly low-cost opportunity to demonstrate the credibility of U.S. power and to strengthen deterrence by putting other actual and aspiring

rogue states on notice that defying the United States invited military destruction. Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld also thought that America's reputation for being unwilling to use military power encouraged America's enemies to be aggressive.

The combination of self-serving assumptions about the danger and urgency of the Iraqi threat to America's security and of the equally self-serving thinking about the costs and consequences of removing that threat by force condemned Operation Iraqi Freedom to strategic failure. The Bush administration wanted war with Iraq because it wanted to validate neoconservative thought. Hence, the administration conjured up the specter of a grave and gathering threat to the United States that did not in fact exist. It is chilling to read President Bush's prewar speeches now, knowing that the claims are false. Examples are the claims from the famous Cincinnati speech in which President Bush asserts, "Iraq possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons" and is "seeking nuclear weapons." Even more chilling are the claims of operational links between Iraq and al Qaeda. Vice President Cheney in his VFW speech was absolutely certain: "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us." President Bush and Vice President Cheney may indeed have believed, or convinced themselves, that Saddam Hussein posed such a danger. But it is also true that selling the war as one of necessity, rather than as the war of choice it actually was, was essential to mobilizing the necessary public and congressional support for launching it. Pitching Saddam Hussein as a "mad" and "unbalanced" leader who was prepared to attack the United States, armed with weapons of mass destruction, and allied to al Qaeda proved a powerful and terrifying image to an U.S. electorate still reeling from the shocks of 9/11. Any

U.S. president who failed to protect the homeland from such a despot would be derelict in his duties as commander-in-chief. But the Iraq that the Bush administration invaded posed no significant, much less mortal, threat to the United States.

In hindsight, the war was about the arrogance of power, an interpretation perfectly consistent with the realist theory of international politics. This theory holds, among other things, that power unbalanced is power inevitably asserted. Free of the restraining influence of the Soviet Union, the United States finally moved to assert the full measure of its global military hegemony. The neoconservatives' dream come true turned into a recipe for disastrous strategic overreach. History is littered with examples of great powers overreaching and the U.S. experience has been no exception. In Iraq in 2003, as in Korea in 1950 and Vietnam in 1965, its excessive confidence in its own military power propelled the United States into a situation in which that power came up short of achieving the political purpose for which it was employed. The supreme irony, of course, is that in Iraq a military action that was in part consciously designed to awe the world and to establish the image of America's military irresistibility - degenerated quickly into an embarrassing advertisement of the limits of U.S. conventional military supremacy and of the persistence of the U.S. public's intolerance of protracted warfare against irregular enemies.

In the end, the decision to invade Iraq has turned out to be one of lingering consequence. While the invasion removed Saddam Hussein and his regime from power and permitted the installation of a nominally democratic political system in Baghdad, truth is the Iraq War has alienated U.S. friends and allies around the world and exposed the limits of U.S. military power for all to see and exploit. In addition, it has retarded the recapitalization of U.S.

air and naval power, weakened the dollar, encouraged Russian and Chinese strategic hostility, transformed Iraq into a recruiting and training ground for Islamist terrorism and promoted the expansion of Iranian power in the region. The world now faces the real possibility of a Shiite regime in Baghdad aligned with Tehran that could undermine Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states with significant Shiite minorities.

There are many other questions that deserve an answer that the scope of this paper and time limited me from addressing. Research into the vetting of intelligence during the run up to the war with Iraq would contribute to a better understanding of just how the White House was able to make such outrageous and false claims. If WMD was the number one concern, then why were no military units tasked with securing suspected WMD sites? Why did the war plan have no provision for controlling the country after the defeat of the Iraqi army? What happened to the realist foreign policy voices in the administration – Secretary Rice and Secretary Powell? Why did no senior leaders resign in protest over this decision? How did the decision to invade Iraq later impact the Obama Administrations options in Syria? These are just a few of the questions I think deserve further research. As for the evidence presented in this paper, the logical conclusion is that the Bush Administration fixed the intelligence around the policy to invade Iraq, a policy orchestrated by neoconservative ideologes.

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