

*Identity and Policy in the U.S. War in Iraq and War on Terror:  
A Constructivist Analysis*

*Karl K. Schonberg  
Associate Professor of Government  
St. Lawrence University  
Canton, New York  
USA*

[ksch@stlawu.edu](mailto:ksch@stlawu.edu)

*Presented at the  
Standing Group on International Relations  
European Consortium for Political Research  
Sixth Pan-European International Relations Conference  
Turin, Italy, 12-15 September 2007*

*Reprint by permission of the author only.*

*Identity and Policy in the U.S. War in Iraq and War on Terror:  
A Constructivist Analysis*

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 revealed to many Americans the unsettling truth that national power does not necessarily produce security--that the United States' technological sophistication and dependence on global trade made it simultaneously more powerful *and* more vulnerable. As it was shaped by U.S. political leaders, this sudden, shocking consciousness of insecurity led to a profound change in U.S. political culture, as international terrorism quickly came to occupy a place in the American psyche akin to the monolithic global threats of the Soviet and Nazi eras. The social context created by 9/11 and the Bush administration's framing of the new reality facing American foreign policy are critical variables in understanding the course of American foreign relations since then. From the days immediately following the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration presented a clear, coherent vision of the world in its public pronouncements, constructing an image of reality which defined the identity of the United States, its enemies, and the rest of the world in ways which served to enable subsequent foreign policy. Realist analyses which describe the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in this era in terms of material capabilities and interests alone are not sufficient in understanding the process. A constructivist perspective which acknowledges the role of ideology and identity in the shaping of policy in this era is necessary for a full understanding of this change.

The Bush administration's successful assertion of a particular vision of American identity in relationship to the identities of other actors in the international system created the political environment that allowed post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy, and the war in Iraq in particular, to be carried out. But while this vision of the world may have been articulated for the immediate purpose of orienting and mobilizing public opinion, this chapter will argue that they were also responsible for creating erroneous expectations in the minds of political elites within the administration. That Saddam Hussein was concealing weapons of mass destruction; that the Iraqi regime had links with al Qaeda; that American forces would be greeted as liberators by grateful Iraqis—are conclusions that follow logically and coherently from the set of beliefs and assumptions that the administration elaborated as it constructed its vision of the world after September 11.

This chapter will argue that dominant ideological principles and conceptions of the identity of the United States and other actors in the system led to the Bush administration to its particular policy choices regarding the invasion and occupation of Iraq. It will focus in particular on the role of five ideas consistent in the statements of the Bush administration about Iraq: nationalism; Manichaeism; the United States as liberator; World War II and the Cold War as analogies; liberal democracy as a transcendent ideal; and the efficacy of military force. It will be argued that serious policy errors resulted from the acceptance of the set of assumptions noted above regarding the identity of the United States, its enemies, and the international community, as well as from repeated failures to understand the implications of U.S. policy in other cultural contexts.

Foreign policy decision makers are certainly members of the social-cognitive system of their societies; it would strain credulity to suggest that individuals in positions of power would somehow shed this prior identity as a result of their positions, particularly since the role of

national leader requires individuals to be symbols of their societies and to advocate policies which are at least ostensibly rooted in their society's values. Though neorealism suggests that societal and leadership identity are subsumed to objective strategic and economic interests calculations, in practice it is impossible to craft specific policy in isolation from the individual assumptions and value judgments of policymakers, and these factors are largely functions of the understanding of these leaders of their own society's identity in relation to that of the Other(s) with whom they are interacting. In assessing threats and opportunities and crafting foreign policy, Ted Hopf suggests that a decisionmaker "reads the other state through her understanding of her own state and that understanding is itself related to the discourses and identities that constitute her."<sup>1</sup> As Jutta Weldes has argued: "Officials do not approach international politics with a blank slate onto which meanings are written as a result of interactions among states... Their appreciation of the world, of international politics, and of the place of their states within the international system, is necessarily rooted in collective meanings already produced, at least in part, in domestic political and cultural contexts."<sup>2</sup> "The job of constructivists," Hopf has added, "is to find out what is on that slate that decision makers are bringing with them in their interaction with external Others."<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of this study to pursue this agenda with regard to post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy, to examine the ideational framework through which the Bush administration understood the United States and the world between 2001 and 2007 in order to better explain the administration's policy choices and their outcomes.

This will be accomplished by undertaking what Hopf has called the "textual recovery of identity," a methodology designed to "recover the identities and discursive formations that constitute the social cognitive structures" of political society. In employing this approach Hopf suggests that the researcher's role is first and foremost to listen to the subjects, to record and report their own assertions of identity while self-consciously avoiding the imposition of the researcher's own framework for understanding or ordering these ideas. The researcher should not look for particular identities, in other words, but rather allow them to emerge from the texts themselves. This method relies on an interpretivist epistemology which in turn depends, Hopf states, on "phenomenology and induction."

Phenomenology implies letting the subjects speak, in this case through their texts. Induction involves the recording of these identities as atheoretically as possible... The trick is to remain ontologically open for as long as possible before imposing an analytical theoretical order, or closure, on the numerous ambiguities and differences in the text.<sup>4</sup>

The texts to be considered in this case are the statements of officials in the Bush administration, which will be examined with the intent of discerning how in each instance the subject speaking claims to understand the identity of the United States, the identities of America's friends and enemies in the world, and the nature of the international milieu in which they interact. This analysis will begin in this chapter with examination of the Bush administration's most significant formal statements regarding the "War on Terror" between 2001-2007, focusing particularly on the president's State of the Union addresses and the administration's 2002 National Security Strategy document.

It is important to acknowledge a number of underlying premises of this methodology. Among these are the presumption that “national interests” do not exist *a priori* but are defined by state foreign policy makers. In this process of interest calculation state leaders will seek to protect and augment national power and security as realists suggest, but leaders’ ideology and understandings of the identity of their own society, other societies, and the international milieu are critical factors influencing their understanding of what comprises these factors and how best to pursue them in any given situation. In order to explain any foreign policy it is therefore necessary to comprehend the ideological and identity lenses through which the architects of that policy perceive the material world.

Political leaders, like all individuals, may make statements which are disingenuous, intended to manipulate the opinions of others in order to accomplish some political goal. It would therefore be far too simplistic to presume that because a political leader makes a statement that it necessarily reflects his or her true beliefs. This fact represents an important point of caution for interpretivist methodologies: it cannot be assumed that any given statement of any political leader is a window into his or her heart of hearts, that we can really know what any political actor truly believes.

While interpretivist analyses should be conducted with this point in mind, it does not present an insurmountable hurdle to such methodologies for a number of reasons. First, while it is fair to assume that political speech is intended to shape the opinion of its audience and is thus manipulative by definition, it is also reasonable to assume that political leaders have beliefs and values which play an important role in defining their political goals, and that much of political speech is an honest attempt to convince others to share both these goals and the underlying beliefs and values.

Second, while it may not be possible to know what a political actor truly believes, it may be equally or more valuable to policy analysis to know what s/he claims to believe and what s/he understands his or her audience to believe. The substance of national identity is amorphous and highly contestable, but for the purposes of this analysis it is less vital to understand how the whole of American society understands itself than it is to grasp how U.S. leaders believe it understands itself. When advocating for a particular foreign policy, presidents frequently base their arguments on either implicit or explicit arguments about who We are, who our friends and enemies are, and what the world is like in which we live. In making these arguments, a president is likely to reveal what he or she believes about the answers to these questions, but certainly will reveal what he or she believes American society as a whole believes. Both of these variables comprise layers of understanding of national identity, and both are therefore of critical importance to illustrating the ways in which national interests are defined from a constructivist perspective.

Thus it is not necessary to comprehend with certainty the true beliefs of U.S. leaders in order to develop our understanding of the role of identity-ideological factors in policy formation. The public policy statements of leaders will not always fully represent deeper beliefs, but for the purposes of this study it will be assumed that national leaders will seek to avoid making statements which run contrary to their deeply held convictions and understandings of reality; while they may describe the world and their preferred policies in ways designed to garner public

support, these descriptions will *tend to be consistent* with their core beliefs and values. More importantly, it is an assumption of this study that leaders will seek to shape policy to approximate their own ideological preferences within the constraints of national political culture as they understand it. In publicly framing foreign policy, in other words, national leaders tend to claim that their own political preferences, determined through their assessment of the nation's interest in the world viewed through their personal cognitive-ideational schemas, are consistent with what they believe to be the public's understanding of national identity. Thus, the arguments of national leaders for particular foreign policies will tend to accurately illustrate both their own individual beliefs, values and assumptions about threats and opportunities in the world, and their own understanding of the identity and values of their society, since the claim that particular policies are consistent with these societal values tends to be a key assertion of all political speech. Such political speech can and should be examined with an eye to understanding both what leaders believe and want in the world and what they believe their society believes and wants. Both of these variables are necessary and valuable to an understanding of the foreign policy process, and both will be elaborated in this study.

### **Ideology and Identity in the Foreign Policy of George W. Bush**

Constructivist theory suggests that the ways in which the leaders of states understand themselves and the world around them is a critically important variable in understanding the policies they pursue. Thus, in order to evaluate the causes of recent U.S. foreign policy, this chapter will consider the ways in which the Bush administration imagined and defined the identity of the United States, its friends and enemies, and the environment in which they interacted in the years after September 11, 2001.

This chapter will contend that the following set of core assumptions were the critical ingredients in the Bush administration's construction of the post-9/11 world: that the promotion of democracy and peace were central goals of American identity and foreign policy; that America itself was profoundly vulnerable to extant but invisible threats, both internationally and domestically; that the world was divided into two camps, loosely defined as "civilization" versus "terrorism" or barbarism; that individuals and groups in the "terrorist" camp were irrational and, by virtue of their rejection of civilized norms, not fully human; that opposition to terrorism and undemocratic governments was a continuation of the United States historic opposition to fascism and other forms of totalitarianism; and that other states which ought to be in the U.S. camp might or might recognize their duty to defend freedom, imposing a moral obligation on the United States to act whether or not international consensus could be reached. The Bush administration's successful assertion of this vision of reality created the political environment which allowed post-9/11 American foreign policy in general, and the war in Iraq in particular, to be carried out.

Foreign policy in the Bush administration has often been referred to as Wilsonian in its moralistic activism and emphasis on democratization.<sup>5</sup> In practice, however, it has tended to regard the means of traditional Wilsonianism—internationally coordinated action through multilateral organizations—as marginally useful at most, even while asserting Wilsonian principles as its desired ends. This chapter will evaluate the influence of Wilsonianism on the rhetoric and substance of U.S. foreign policy in the Bush administration. It will argue that the

administration's policies have been ineffective largely due to its failure to recognize the inherent connection between liberal ends and multilateral means in the logic of traditional Wilsonianism.

Robert Jervis has argued that a central tenet of the Bush Doctrine is that dictatorships tend to pursue aggressive, violent, "evil" foreign policies and are not susceptible to reform or rational deterrence. Overthrowing such governments by force is regarded as legitimate and sometimes necessary for the security of the international system as a whole, which thus requires assertive U.S. hegemony to maintain peace. In this respect, Jervis argues that Bush has combined aspects of Wilsonian internationalism with a realist conception of the utility of the use of force.<sup>6</sup> Or as Jack Snyder has noted, "Bush promises to fight terror by spreading liberal democracy," and claims that strict realists "have lost contact with a fundamental reality' that 'America is always more secure when freedom is on the march.'" <sup>7</sup>

But while advocating the virtues of democracy, Snyder argues, "the Bush administration has shown little patience for the complexities on liberal thought—or for liberalism's emphasis on the importance of international institutions."<sup>8</sup> Even as it has asserted the importance of liberal principles of law and democracy in contemporary international politics, the administration has consistently sought to undermine or dismantle an array of international agreements—notably the Kyoto protocol on climate change, the statute of the International Criminal Court, and the U.S.-Russian Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Most significantly, the Bush administration has carried out an invasion and occupation of Iraq without the approval of the United Nations and despite the opposition of many of its closest allies.

### *Liberal Unilateralism: Ideology in the Administration of George W. Bush*

Many observers have identified the ideological roots of the Bush administration's foreign policy with the Project for a New American Century, a Washington think tank founded by conservative commentator William Kristol in 1997. Closely identified with other conservative research centers including the American Enterprise Institute (which housed the PNAC's offices), the PNAC was the intellectual home for a group of foreign policy scholars and practitioners who would become known as Neo-Conservatives or Neo-Cons, many of whom would play central roles in the creation of the Bush administration's foreign policy. Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Douglas Feith, and many other leading officials in the Bush administration were strongly identified with the neoconservative movement, which called for the building of U.S. defenses to a point of unassailable primacy to which no other challenger could aspire. Andrew Bacevich has described the neocon worldview (and Paul Wolfowitz in particular as being marked by "an extraordinary certainty in the righteousness of American actions married to an extraordinary confidence in the efficacy of American arms."<sup>9</sup> Neoconservatism also focused on the moral necessity of an activist world role, calling for the aggressive promotion of democracy and open markets. It "emphasized changing American foreign policy to become a hegemon and police its international interests as a new kind of benevolent American This would include expanding the military, withdrawing from major treaties, as well as engaging in preemptive strikes against those who would threaten U.S. interests."<sup>10</sup>

Arguing that the foreign policy in the Bush administration has embraced a strategy of American primacy, Colin Dueck has claimed that the Bush administration has “returned to many of the Wilsonian assumptions that characterized the Clinton years.” “International structural pressures cannot explain why... these changes occurred,” Dueck suggests. “The real explanation lies in the influence of distinctive policy ideas, as promoted by leading state officials.” Paul Lyons has argued that in his post-9/11 discourse Bush articulated a “right-wing Wilsonianism” rooted in a conception of America as a “City on a Hill,” a metaphor fundamental to American identity historically and one with crucial religious as well as political meaning embedded within it. Sandra Silberstein has noted that in referring to the United States as a nation “under God” locked in a struggle against “evildoers,” President Bush occupied the role of “national pastor,” much as Wilson had done.<sup>11</sup>

Stanley A. Renshon and Peter Suedfeld have pointed to five central key elements of Bush’s unilateralist Wilsonianism, or what would become known as the “Bush Doctrine:” “American pre-eminence; assertive realism; equivocal alliances; selective multilateralism; democratic transformation.<sup>12</sup> In its first years in office, the Bush administration’s single most cogent effort to describe its approach to foreign affairs was its National Security Strategy of the United States, issued in September 2002. In its most quoted and controversial clauses this document asserted an American right to “act against... emerging threats before they are fully formed,” and stated that the United States would “not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against... terrorists.”<sup>13</sup>

But the National Security Strategy also framed the interests of the United States in terms that were often overtly Wilsonian. It committed the United States to the defense of “human dignity” and a list of human rights principles echoing the 1948 U.N. Universal Declaration. It spoke of bringing “the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.” It suggested that “alliances and multilateral institutions can multiply the strength of freedom-loving nations,” and described the United States as “committed to lasting institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of American States, and NATO,” among others. Downplaying realist concerns about interstate aggression as the most serious threat to global peace, it argued that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.” It spoke of a “distinctly American internationalism” in which the “United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community.” While terrorism was the foremost concern noted in the document, it favored multilateral responses to the problem; “to defeat terrorism in today’s globalized world we need support from our allies,” it noted, and “wherever possible, we will rely on regional organizations and state powers.” It spoke of an “increasingly interconnected world,” in which the United States needed to “invest time and resources into building international relationships.” It noted that the administration had called for large increases in U.S. support for the African Development Fund and the World Bank’s fund for the least developed nations in the world, and expressed support for a new global fund to fight HIV/AIDS organized by the U.N. Secretary General.<sup>14</sup> All of this comprised, in the view of Jackson Diehl of the Washington Post, “a Wilsonian promise to ‘bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets and free trade to every corner of the world.’”<sup>15</sup>

In December 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice echoed the sentiments of the National Security Strategy in an editorial in the Washington Post, arguing that the interdependence of the contemporary world had, in effect, made many of the rules of power politics in the Westphalian system of sovereign states obsolete. Interstate war was no longer the threat it once had been, Rice suggested, but the implosion of social order within states could foster the growth of destructive forces which could now emerge and move more quickly throughout an increasingly globalized world. “The greatest threats to our security are defined more by the dynamics within weak and failing states than by the borders between strong and aggressive ones,” she claimed.

The phenomenon of weak and failing states is not new, but the danger they now pose is unparalleled. When people, goods and information traverse the globe as fast as they do today, transnational threats such as disease or terrorism can inflict damage comparable to the standing armies of nation-states... Weak and failing states serve as global pathways that facilitate the spread of pandemics, the movement of criminals and terrorists, and the proliferation of the world's most dangerous weapons.<sup>16</sup>

Rice asserted, as Bush had done on many occasions, that the moral superiority of democratic governance was not a culturally bounded idea but rather a universal truth. She criticized those who doubted the viability of democracy in non-Western contexts as “dogmatic cynics and cultural determinists,” and asserted the “natural right of all people... to govern themselves in liberty.” And in a profound challenge to one of the core principles of political realism, Rice concluded that the nature of this new international system forced the conclusion that “the fundamental character of regimes matters more today than the international distribution of power”—a claim that G. John Ikenberry felt would make Hans Morgenthau “turn in his grave.”<sup>17</sup> As a result, the principled goal of democracy promotion could not reasonably be seen, in her view, as simply an addendum or alternative to the pursuit of national self-interest. “Attempting to draw neat, clean lines between our security interests and our democratic ideals does not reflect the reality of today's world,” Rice argued. “Supporting the growth of democratic institutions in all nations is not some moralistic flight of fancy; it is the only realistic response to our present challenges.” “If the school of thought called ‘realism’ is to be truly realistic,” she suggested, “it must recognize that stability without democracy will prove to be false.”<sup>18</sup>

In January 2002 Bush elaborated on this worldview in his first State of the Union address after the 9/11 attacks. He claimed that Iran, Iraq, and North Korea were “allies” of terrorism, and that together they constituted an “axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.” Iraq had demonstrated by its actions that it had “something to hide from the civilized world.” Though the particular connections between al Qaeda and these regimes remained murky, it was clear enough that they shared an opposition to “civilized” norms and values.<sup>19</sup>

Though he explicitly praised the “strong leadership” of authoritarian President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, Bush claimed that “America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.”<sup>20</sup> In terms that would have seemed entirely consistent had they been uttered by Wilson, Bush said that

History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight... we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace. All fathers and mothers, in all societies, want their children to be educated and live free from poverty and violence. No people on earth yearn to be oppressed or aspire to servitude or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police... no nation owns these aspirations and no nation is exempt from them. We have no intention of imposing our culture, but America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice and religious tolerance.<sup>21</sup>

Bush returned to these themes in his 2003 State of the Union address, saying that America would accept its responsibility to defend the civilization, peace, and the “hopes of mankind” against a “world of chaos.” In this effort the United States would seek enlist the aid of like-minded countries, but Bush cautioned Americans once again that not every nation would behave honorably, and the U.S. policy could not be hamstrung by the weak-willed. “We’ve called on the United Nations to fulfill its charter and stand by its demand that Iraq disarm,” Bush suggested, but “America’s purpose is more than to follow a process; it is to achieve a result... the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others.” “We will consult,” he said, “but let there be no misunderstanding: If Saddam Hussein does not fully disarm, for the safety of our people and for the peace of the world, we will lead a coalition to disarm him.”<sup>22</sup>

Though Bush continued to stress the humanitarian goals of the United States, in his 2004 address particular emphasis was placed on the universal applicability of democracy and its central importance to U.S. foreign policy. Bush chastised critics who doubted the prospects for democracy in the Middle East. “It is mistaken, and condescending,” he said, “to assume that whole cultures and great religions are incompatible with liberty and self-government. I believe that God has planted in every human heart the desire to live in freedom.”<sup>23</sup> He argued that there were both moral and practical reasons for the United States to promote democracy in the Middle East and around the world. Democratic states would be more stable and friendlier to the United States, Bush claimed; undemocratic societies would breed “despair and anger... [and] continue to produce men and movements that threaten the safety of America and our friends.” He announced a “forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East,” in which the United States would “challenge the enemies of reform, confront the allies of terror, and expect a higher standard from our friends...” Its goal would be to bolster a set of distinct but related pillars of democratic stability in various states, among which were the “development of free elections and free markets, free press and free labor unions.” And he noted the importance of finishing “the work of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq,” which would become exporters of democracy and of examples for emulation throughout the region. “Those nations can light the way for others, and help transform a troubled part of the world,” Bush said.<sup>24</sup>

*America, its Enemies and the World: Identity and Foreign Policy after 9/11*

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the ways in which the Bush administration constructed an identity for the United States, other actors in the international system, and the milieu within which they interacted in the years after 9/11. It is vitally important to note, however, that in this process the Bush administration was both constrained and empowered by both pre-existing U.S. political culture and ideology, and by the material reality of events. The administration had an opportunity to interpret the meaning of 9/11 and the appropriate response to it, but in doing so it was limited, as always, by the nation's common understanding of itself, its values, and its appropriate role in the world. It was similarly faced with a political culture which it had some power to shape but which was ultimately beyond its absolute control. While the Bush administration may have done much in the months after 9/11 to condone or even cultivate an environment of insecurity in the United States, it did not create this environment—the events of September 11 themselves did that. Thus, the constructions of identity of self and other that the Bush administration undertook in the months and years that followed must be understood as attempts both to shape but also act within the confines of what Stuart Croft has called a “social process of crisis.” This process involved complex interactions between events, the preferences of policymakers, and popular culture writ large, and Croft argues that the interpretation of 9/11 within American culture both reflected and reinforced preexisting American images of the United States and global Others and enabled the foreign policy initiatives of the Bush administration. Susan Willis identifies this- culture of post-9/11 America as one in which a climate of paranoia prevailed, exemplified by phenomena such as the Washington DC snipers and anthrax scares, and in which “the intellectual atmosphere... was such that opinion deviating from the officially sanctioned narrative of good vs. evil was actively discouraged, the majority of the media toeing President Bush's war-mongering line.”<sup>25</sup>

On 9/11 itself, President Bush was already asserting a clear vision of the identity and motives of the attackers and of the United States in relationship to them. “America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining,” he said in a nationally televised address on the night of the attacks. “America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world.”<sup>26</sup>

In an address to both house of Congress two weeks later, Bush elaborated on this understanding of the identity of the terrorists, the United States, and the rest of the world. He described the attackers in terms that emphasized a simplistic ideology, unlimited political goals, and implacable hostility to the United States rooted in an irreconcilable conflict between value systems. The 9/11 terrorists were “enemies of freedom,” practicing a “fringe form of Islamic extremism.” “The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews,” he said, “to kill all Americans and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children.” This particular antagonism to the United States emerged from perceptions of the American social and political system and the American “way of life” rather than the U.S. world role. “They hate what they see right here in this chamber, a democratically elected government,” Bush argued. “They hate our freedoms, our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”<sup>27</sup> Conflating Al Qaeda and the Taliban, Bush held that

In Afghanistan we see Al Qaeda's vision for the world. Afghanistan's people have been brutalized. Many are starving and many have fled. Women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough.<sup>28</sup>

But the terrorists' ambitions were not limited to Afghanistan or the Middle East, Bush suggested. "Al Qaeda is to terror what the Mafia is to crime," he said, "but its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere."<sup>29</sup>

The world itself had changed on 9/11, Bush asserted. "Night fell on a different world," he claimed, a world in which "freedom and fear are at war." "This is civilization's fight," Bush held, "the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom." "The civilized world," he said, "is rallying to America's side." But in any case, this new environment would not admit neutrality or indecision. "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists... From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime." Bush suggested that in this new world there could be only two identities, with implacable hostility their only possible relationship. "Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war," he said, "and we know that God is not neutral between them."<sup>30</sup>

The United States, for its part, was "a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom." Bush likened 9/11 to previous eras in American history both in its impact on the nation's psyche and the ethical responsibilities it implied in foreign policy. September 11 had been the only attack on American soil in 136 years, he said, except for "one Sunday in 1941." About Al Qaeda he added that "we have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century... they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism." They were enemies to be challenged, but also to be feared. "They are... sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction," he claimed, and enjoined Americans to "live your lives and hug your children... even in the face of a continuing threat."<sup>31</sup>

This theme of invisible, looming threat emerged more noticeably in Bush's State of the Union address four months later, where he noted that the war in Afghanistan had revealed

the depth of our enemies' hatred in videos where they laugh about the loss of innocent life. And the depth of their hatred is equaled by the madness of the destruction they design. We have found diagrams of American nuclear power plants and public water facilities, detailed instructions for making chemical weapons, surveillance maps of American cities and thorough descriptions of landmarks in America and throughout the world... Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning... tens of thousands of trained terrorists are still at large.<sup>32</sup>

Now the terrorists, who had previously been described as evil and implacable, seemed "mad," maniacal--as utterly irrational, indiscriminate, and unavoidable as an unseen, ticking bomb.

Bush called on all nations to “eliminate the terrorist parasites.” They were no long simply evil; they had become *inhuman*.<sup>33</sup>

And while the 9/11 attacks had been framed immediately afterward primarily as the actions of wicked men, now they were contextualized within the international system of states more familiar to U.S. foreign policy. While al Qaeda had earlier been depicted as the inheritor of previous evil ideologies against which the United States had contended, now it was linked with evil regimes in contemporary states. Among these were North Korea, which Bush said was “arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens;” Iran, which was also “aggressively pursu[ing] these weapons and export[ing] terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom;” and Iraq, which was continuing “to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror.” “States like these, and their terrorist allies,” Bush claimed, “constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred.”<sup>34</sup>

But why would it be assumed, in the absence of any clear evidence of strong ideological or political kinship between any of these states and al Qaeda, that any of them would be tempted to provide WMD to that group, given the enormous potential cost to them of such a policy? Bush hinted at an answer to this question when he suggested that by its actions, Iraq had demonstrated that it had “something to hide from the civilized world.” Though the particular connections that might exist between al Qaeda and these regimes remained murky, it was clear enough that they shared an opposition to “civilized” norms and values. The “axis of evil” provided not just a framework for understanding the U.S. relationship to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea through the comparative historical lens of World War II, but also a mechanism for making al Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks comprehensible within the Westphalian system of sovereign states. If the terrorists were “allies” of states, it should be expected they would share tactics and technology—since this is what allies do. And if the enemy is not an intangible terrorist organization but a state alliance of which it is a part, it is easier to imagine attacking and defeating it within an intellectual and bureaucratic framework that has developed primarily to coerce and deter sovereign states.<sup>35</sup>

If the truly evil regimes in the world were relatively few in number, however, so were the “civilized” states who recognized and were willing to respect their responsibility to band together. Like the townspeople in *High Noon*, who abandon the Sheriff as outlaws approach because they are unwilling to commit themselves to a common defense against evil, many governments in the world might be unwilling to accept their duty. “Some governments will be timid in the face of terror,” Bush said, but added “make no mistake about it: If they do not act, America will.”<sup>36</sup>

A number of authors have commented on the prevalence of analogies of the old west in the Bush administration’s rhetoric surrounding al-Qaeda and the “War on Terror,” as well as on the presence of metaphors of both war and crime. Michael Sherry has suggested that the Bush administration’s framing of the world after 9/11 contained elements of both paradigms, noting that Bush described his approach to the hunt for Osama bin Laden by saying “there’s an old poster out west, as I recall, that said, ‘‘Wanted: Dead or Alive’’” and “announced a ‘Most Wanted Terrorist list’ as part of his effort to ‘round up’ – both cowboy and cop words – ‘the

evildoers.”<sup>37</sup> As in the old west, in the war on terror the struggle to enforce law in a lawless society led Bush to depict U.S. policy as both war and a fight against crime. Wyn Rees and Richard Aldrich have argued that U.S. responses to 9/11 tended to be framed in the language of war as the result of an “historically determined strategic culture” defined by a “national security’ approach towards this threat and has emphasized unilateralism.” In contrast, “Europe, based on its own past experience of terrorism, has adopted a regulatory approach pursued through multilateralism.”<sup>38</sup>

If others could not be counted upon to act in the name of justice in a state of anarchy, the United States had already risen to the challenge in early 2002, Bush argued. America had “saved a people from starvation and freed a country from brutal oppression, he argued. “The mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today women are free, and are part of Afghanistan's new government” “The Islamic ‘street’ greeted the fall of tyranny with song and celebration” in Afghanistan, Bush said.<sup>39</sup> Though he explicitly praised the “strong leadership” of authoritarian President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, he claimed that “America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.”<sup>40</sup> In terms that would have seemed entirely consistent had they been uttered by Woodrow Wilson, Bush said that

History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight... we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace. All fathers and mothers, in all societies, want their children to be educated and live free from poverty and violence. No people on earth yearn to be oppressed or aspire to servitude or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police... no nation owns these aspirations and no nation is exempt from them. We have no intention of imposing our culture, but America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice and religious tolerance.<sup>41</sup>

Bush revisited many of these same themes in his State of the Union address the next year. He said that his administration did not want war, and was driven by just and humanitarian concerns: “We seek peace... If war is forced upon us, we will fight in a just cause... we will bring to the Iraqi people food, and medicines, and supplies and freedom.” He reminded his audience that the threat of terrorism was constant and closer than many might imagine. “There are days when our fellow citizens do not hear news about the war on terror,” he said, but “there is never a day when I do not learn of another threat, or receive reports of operations in progress, or give an order in this global war against a scattered network of killers.” He reminded Americans that “outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons... could also give or sell those weapons to terrorist allies, who would use them without the least hesitation.”<sup>42</sup> And he placed the threat once again within a clear historical context:

America's duty is familiar. Throughout the 20th century, small groups of men seized control of great nations, built armies and arsenals, and set out to dominate the weak and intimidate the world. In each case, their ambitions of cruelty and

murder had no limit. In each case, the ambitions of Hitlerism, militarism and communism were defeated by the will of free peoples, by the strength of great alliances and by the might of the United States of America... Now, in this century, the ideology of power and domination has appeared again, and seeks to gain the ultimate weapons of terror. Once again this nation and all our friends are all that stand between a world at peace and a world of chaos and constant alarm. Once again we are called to defend the safety of our people and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility.<sup>43</sup>

American foreign policy would accept a duty to defend the civilization, peace, and the “hopes of mankind” against a “world of chaos.” In this effort the United States would seek to enlist the aid of like-minded countries, but Bush cautioned Americans once again that not every nation would behave responsibly, and U.S. policy could not be hamstrung by the weak-willed. “We’ve called on the United Nations to fulfill its charter and stand by its demand that Iraq disarm,” Bush suggested, but “America’s purpose is more than to follow a process; it is to achieve a result... the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others.” “We will consult,” he said, “but let there be no misunderstanding: If Saddam Hussein does not fully disarm, for the safety of our people and for the peace of the world, we will lead a coalition to disarm him.”<sup>44</sup>

Bush continued to argue that certain regimes—North Korea, Iran, and Iraq in particular—shared a place with al Qaeda on the other side of a morally and ideologically bifurcated world.<sup>45</sup> On one side were the forces of peace, democracy, and “civilization;” on the other, the forces of aggression, totalitarianism, and barbarism—two camps that Reinhold Niebuhr in an earlier era might have called the “children of light and the children of darkness.” Much of Bush’s analysis of Iraq focused on the personality of Saddam Hussein, who Bush characterized as “a brutal dictator, with a history of reckless aggression, with ties to terrorism, with great potential wealth” and an intent “to dominate a vital region and threaten the United States.” Bush described Hussein as a man who had made agreements for his own purposes and then cynically violated them. “To spare himself, he agreed to disarm of all weapons of mass destruction. For the next 12 years, he systematically violated that agreement.” He had continued to pursue weapons of mass destruction, Bush charged, despite the horrific cost of this policy to his country, resulting from his self-imposed “isolation from the civilized world.” Bush noted Hussein’s disrespect for the United Nations in particular as evidence of his distance from the norms of international society “He has shown instead utter contempt for the United Nations,” Bush said, “and for the opinion of the world.”<sup>46</sup>

In short, Bush argued that past behavior demonstrated the Saddam Hussein was irrational or perhaps mentally deranged. “Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein... is not an option,” he claimed. Bush also presented a clear description of Hussein’s future intentions that seemed fully consistent with the image of him as a megalomaniacal sociopath. “With nuclear arms or a full arsenal of chemical and biological weapons,”<sup>47</sup> Bush suggested,

Saddam Hussein could resume his ambitions of conquest in the Middle East, and create deadly havoc in that region. And... evidence from intelligence sources, secret communications, and statements by people now in custody, reveal that Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of Al Qaeda.

Secretly, and without fingerprints, he could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists, or help them develop their own. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons, and other plans -- this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known.<sup>48</sup>

A year later, in January, 2004, Bush continued to characterize the United States and its friends and enemies in the world in similar terms. “The terrorists,” who he described as “killers who hide in caves,” continued “to plot against America and the civilized world.” As a group, they thus seemed immoral, violent, even animalistic (Bush noted that Saddam Hussein was also “found in a hole”). And in Iraq they had fought without honor, outside of the norms of civilized conduct: they were “thugs and assassins” who “ran away from our troops in battle [but] are now dispersed and attack from the shadows.” Those resisting the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Bush said, were “enemies of freedom will do all in their power to spread violence and fear.”<sup>49</sup>

Michael V. Bhatia has examined the process of naming violent non-state actors, the cognitive and political implications of naming, and “the contested relationship between the actual nature of a movement and the name applied, particularly in terms of the attempt to identify the essence or true nature of a movement and how this relates to other dissenting or surrounding factors.” “Once assigned,” Bhatia suggests, “the power of a name is such that the process by which the name was selected generally disappears and a series of normative associations, motives and characteristics are attached to the named subject.” To name an individual or group “terrorist” or “barbaric” (or “soldier” or “civilized”) is to create an identity for that actor which serves to structure expectations about its motives and likely behavior—and thus constrains the set of relationships which might exist between the observer and actor being named (“soldiers” are motivated by limited political goals and are likely to behave within an honorably code of conduct, but this is not true of “terrorists;” “civilized” actors are capable of rational negotiation; “barbarians” are not). Naming is a cognitive and heuristic process but also a political one, consciously intended by politicians to shape social understandings of the world to suit their preferences, and thus to be examined with a high degree of skepticism. While the Bush administration might not have been doing anything fundamentally new in identifying its enemies as “terrorists,” as Bhatia suggests, “the long historical relationship between the naming of opponents, empire and colonialism, as well as the manner in which the global media frame armed conflict, only provide further reason to doubt the truthfulness of the names assigned, and their ability to address the micro-realities involved in these conflicts and movements.”<sup>50</sup> Robert Ivie has argued in similar terms that “the language of savagery is indigenous to US political culture as the trope that legitimises war and empire.” “Throughout US history, from America's 18th century revolution to the post-World War II American century and from Cold War to the present open-ended war on terror,” US. foreign policy has been, in Ivie's view, “a continuing quest for empire under the sign of civilisation and democracy.”<sup>51</sup> Ikechi Mgbeoji has referred as well to “the enduring notion of the civilised self and the barbaric other... [which] has continued to animate international policy” throughout much of human history.<sup>52</sup>

If America's enemies were terrorists, thugs, and assassins, Bush argued the United States itself had sought and was operating in Iraq with the support of a broad international coalition of states. But he added that were was “a difference... between leading a coalition of many nations, and

submitting to the objections of a few,” noting that “America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our people.”<sup>53</sup>

Bush defined not only American goals in his State of the Union address in 2004, but America itself. And he did it in terms, once again, that sounded unmistakably Wilsonian. “America is a nation with a mission,” he said,

and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a democratic peace -- a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman. America acts in this cause with friends and allies at our side, yet we understand our special calling: This great republic will lead the cause of freedom... The cause we serve is right, because it is the cause of all mankind. The momentum of freedom in our world is unmistakable -- and it is not carried forward by our power alone. We can trust in that greater power who guides the unfolding of the years. And in all that is to come, we can know that his purposes are just and true.<sup>54</sup>

In his 2005 State of the Union address, Bush expanded on the process by which democracy would spread, it’s practical as well as ethical importance to the United States, and the identities and motives of those who opposed it. “The victory of freedom in Iraq will strengthen a new ally in the war on terror,” he argued, “inspire democratic reformers from Damascus to Tehran, bring more hope and progress to a troubled region...” The “advance of freedom,” he said, “will lead to peace.” If, on the other hand whole regions of the world were allowed to remain “in despair and grow in hatred, they will be the recruiting grounds for terror, and that terror will stalk America and other free nations... Our men and women in uniform are fighting terrorists in Iraq, so we do not have to face them here at home.”<sup>55</sup>

Once again, Bush described a world of two warring camps, one representing “tyranny and terror,” “hatred,” and “ideologies of murder;” the other “hope” and “the force of human freedom.” The terrorists, Bush said, were “violently opposed” to what they saw as the “evil principle” of democracy. They sought “to impose and expand an empire of oppression, in which a tiny group of brutal, self-appointed rulers control every aspect of every life.”<sup>56</sup>

Bush said that the United States, on the other hand, had the “ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.” He suggested that the U.S. sought to “build and preserve a community of free and independent nations, with governments that answer to their citizens, and reflect their own cultures.” Bush argued that the aggressive, imperialistic nature of the terrorists’ ideology defined “one of the main differences between us and our enemies that “the United States has no right, no desire, and no intention to impose our form of government on anyone else”—despite the fact that the U.S. military was occupying Iraq and Afghanistan and had installed governments much like the U.S. government in both states.<sup>57</sup>

He once again sought to place contemporary events in an historical context, arguing that Americans had an obligation not only to their own interests today but to the future. “Our generational commitment to the advance of freedom... is now being tested and honored in Iraq,” he said. “The victory of freedom in Iraq will... lift a terrible threat from the lives of our children

and grandchildren.” And he again evoked the memory of Franklin Roosevelt, quoting him as saying “‘each age is a dream that is dying, or one that is coming to birth...’ The liberation of Europe from fascism was only a dream, until it was achieved. The fall of imperial communism was only a dream, until one day it was accomplished.” Bush noted that the tide of history was on the side of democracy, which had a “great momentum in our time, shown by women voting in Afghanistan, and Palestinians choosing a new direction, and the people of Ukraine asserting their democratic rights and electing a president.”<sup>58</sup>

In his 2006 address, Bush returned to the theme of historical trends and responsibilities, but now employed this argument as part of a broader appeal to resist isolationism. Arguing that “the advance of freedom is the great story of our time,” Bush noted that

In 1945, there were about two dozen lonely democracies in the world. Today, there are 122... it is a privilege to serve the values that gave us birth. American leaders from Roosevelt to Truman to Kennedy to Reagan rejected isolation and retreat, because they knew that America is always more secure when freedom is on the march... America rejects the false comfort of isolationism. We are the nation that saved liberty in Europe and liberated death camps and helped raise up democracies and faced down an evil empire. Once again, we accept the call of history to deliver the oppressed and move this world toward peace... Our own generation is in a long war against a determined enemy...<sup>59</sup>

He suggested that at stake in the nation’s choices were not just its interests but its “honor” and “character,” which would be compromised if the temptation to “retreat from our duties in the hope of an easier life” was not resisted. Having previously argued in Wilsonian terms that democracy, international law, and peace were mutually supportive, in his 2006 State of the Union address Bush included another element in this formulation that would have been familiar to Wilson: free trade. “We will choose to build our prosperity by leading the world economy,” he said “or shut ourselves off from trade and opportunity.”<sup>60</sup>

The theme of global interdependence and the need to resist isolationism resonated throughout Bush’s address, even as he returned to constructions of the United States and its enemies that had echoed since 9/11. “Every step toward freedom in the world makes our country safer,” he argued. “We seek the end of tyranny in our world,” he said, because “on September 11, 2001, we found that problems originating in a failed and oppressive state 7,000 miles away could bring murder and destruction to our country.” “We cannot find security by abandoning our commitments and retreating within our borders,” Bush said,

If we were to leave these vicious attackers alone, they would not leave us alone. They would simply move the battlefield to our own shores. There is no peace in retreat. And there is no honor in retreat. By allowing radical Islam to work its will, by leaving an assaulted world to fend for itself, we would signal to all that we no longer believe in our own ideals or even in our own courage. But our enemies and our friends can be certain the United States will not retreat from the world, and we will never surrender to evil.<sup>61</sup>

As for the motives and intentions of the terrorists and undemocratic leaders, Bush's conception was clear, simple, and unwavering. "Dictatorships shelter terrorists and feed resentment and radicalism and seek weapons of mass destruction," he claimed, and "terrorists like bin Laden... seek to impose a heartless system of totalitarian control throughout the Middle East and arm themselves with weapons of mass murder." "Their aim is to seize power in Iraq and use it as a safe haven to launch attacks against America and the world." As it had been with Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the ultimate goal of America's enemies in the War on Terror was nothing short of global domination. Their hope, Bush said, was to "break our will, allowing the violent to inherit the earth."<sup>62</sup>

### *Constructing Iraq*

From the perspective of strategic *realpolitik* the choice of the United States to go to war with Iraq in the spring of 2003 is in many ways a puzzling one. Though Iraq possesses vast deposits of oil, access to that oil would have been more easily gained by removing UN sanctions restricting its sale than by using military force to seize it; the first Gulf War had already demonstrated that Saddam Hussein's regime would attempt to destroy oil resources rather than let them fall into enemy hands, and in any case the instability which has accompanied the current war in Iraq has seriously restricted the amount of oil flowing from the country. Iraq had possessed weapons of mass destruction and the Bush administration claimed to believe that it still did, but even the existence of such weapons would pose at most an indirect threat to the United States itself, and Iraq was only one of many states in the world with WMDs in their military arsenals. By going to war with the Iraq the United States risked alienating popular opinion in many strategically important Muslim states, as well as diverting resources and public attention away from the ongoing war in Afghanistan. Why then would the Bush administration have chosen war with Iraq? The balance of this chapter will argue that the answer to this question can be found in the Bush administration's socio-cognitive construction of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the United States, other friends and enemies of America in the world, and the international system in which they interacted.

In the months before the beginning of the war in Iraq in the spring of 2003, the Bush administration based its case for the necessity of war on a coherent narrative describing the past, present, and future of Iraq's relations with the United States, its regional neighbors, and the wider world. In this narrative Saddam Hussein was a megalomaniacal despot, prone to violence and brutality beyond the norms of civilized society. He was a deranged, evil man, leading a regime with the technological capacity to produce chemical weapons in enormous quantities and deliver them to other states in the region and around the world. In this story Saddam was perhaps psychotic, but not irrational. He was careful, meticulous, calculating, concealing complex weapons programs for years and doggedly rebuilding them after they were destroyed. He was motivated by his own ego ambition for political and military dominance in the Middle East, and by extension by hatred for the United States, the most important obstacle standing in the way of that ambition. Thus, he could be expected to form calculated alliances with terrorist groups and provide them with weapons of mass destruction which they would then deliver to the United States, bringing harm to Saddam's enemy without the risk of accountability for his regime.

The administration's most important single statement of its case for the necessity of war in Iraq came on October 7, 2002 in Cincinnati. With a Congressional vote authorizing the president to use force looming, Bush described the administration's rationale for war by detailing a vision of the identity of the United States, its friends and enemies in the world, and the nature of the international system in which they interacted. He began the speech with a sweeping indictment of Iraq's regime which focused not only on its past behavior but on what it would do in the future, in both cases making assumptions about the answers to these questions which were derived from the administration's general worldview and particular cognitive construction of the Iraqi government. "The Iraqi regime... possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons," Bush said. "It is seeking nuclear weapons. It has given shelter and support to terrorism, and practices terror against its own people. The entire world has witnessed Iraq's 11-year history of defiance, deception, and bad faith." The president then immediately framed this description of Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the context of an understanding of 9/11: "On September the 11th, 2001, America felt its vulnerability... We resolved then... to confront every threat, from any source, that could bring sudden terror and suffering to America."<sup>63</sup>

Bush described Saddam Hussein as "a homicidal dictator who is addicted to weapons of mass destruction," "a murderous tyrant who has already used chemical weapons to kill thousands of people... has tried to dominate the Middle East, has invaded and brutally occupied a small neighbor, has struck other nations without warning, and holds an unrelenting hostility toward the United States." While there were many unsavory and undemocratic regimes in the world, Bush argued, "by its past and present actions, by its technological capabilities, by the merciless nature of its regime, Iraq is unique."<sup>64</sup>

Saddam Hussein's regime had also flouted the norms of international society by building its weapons in secret and in violation of international agreements. Part of Bush's case against Saddam was built on the argument that in addition to being murderous, he was a liar, that besides behaving brutally he had behaved dishonorably. This fact as much as any other seems to have formed the basis for the administration's conclusion that Saddam's regime could not be considered part of the "civilized" world, and indeed had consciously cut itself off from that world. "Every chemical and biological weapon that Iraq has or makes is a direct violation of the truce that ended the Persian Gulf War in 1991," Bush argued. "Saddam Hussein has chosen to build and keep these weapons despite international sanctions, U.N. demands, and isolation from the civilized world."<sup>65</sup>

Bush argued that Iraq had the capability—and implicitly, the intent—to strike at U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf and to kill Americans both in the Middle East and the United States itself. "Iraq possesses ballistic missiles with a likely range of hundreds of miles—far enough to strike Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, and other nations—in a region where more than 135,000 American civilians and service members live and work. We've also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical or biological weapons across broad areas. We're concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVs for missions targeting the United States. And, of course, sophisticated delivery systems aren't required for a chemical or biological attack; all that might be required are a small container and one terrorist or Iraqi intelligence operative to deliver it."

Saddam Hussein had proven “links to international terrorist groups.” He had “provided safe haven to terrorists... to finance terror and gives assistance to groups that use terrorism to undermine Middle East peace.” “We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade,” Bush claimed.<sup>66</sup>

Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases. And we know that after September the 11th, Saddam Hussein's regime gleefully celebrated the terrorist attacks on America. Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists. Alliance with terrorists 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 terror network.<sup>67</sup>

While Bush's point that Saddam's regime could give weapons of mass destruction to a terrorist organization at any moment it chose would have been true had it actually possessed any of these materials, it also would have been true to make this statement of any country that possessed weapons of mass destruction, including U.S. allies and the United States itself. The salient aspect in Bush's argument in this regard was therefore not his stated point that Saddam could do this so much as his implicit point that Saddam would do this. In part, this presumption was based on past behavior—Saddam was indeed unusual among contemporary world leaders in the fact that he had ordered chemical weapons used in interstate warfare and domestic repression. But neither he nor any state leader had ever given weapons of mass destruction to a terrorist organization. The presumption that Saddam Hussein was likely to do so was thus built not on a pattern of past practice but rather on a construction of the identity of Saddam's regime by the Bush administration, in turn built in part on perceptions of that regime's prior behavior. It was this identity construction that led the administration to conclude that this was not only an enemy, but the kind of enemy that might go to such extremes even though it had not done so in the past.

Bush continually linked Saddam's Iraq to September 11. Though the president never explicitly claimed that Saddam was somehow responsible for 9/11, he repeatedly argued that the actors and forces responsible for 9/11 were phenomenologically related, and moved between his framing of 9/11 and impending war in Iraq in such a way that the rhetorical proximity of the issues suggested a relationship between them even where one had not been explicitly stated. As he had from the days immediately after 9/11, Bush drew no distinction in the lead up to the war in Iraq between transnational terrorist groups and enemy states; they were both part and parcel of the axis of evil, the single anti-civilizational movement that threatened America. “Terror cells and outlaw regimes building weapons of mass destruction are different faces of the same evil,” Bush said. “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 a nuclear weapon.”<sup>68</sup>

The Bush administration derived from its construction of the Iraqi regime a clear picture of not only Iraq's existing military capabilities, but the future trajectory of its ambitions and intentions.

Despite what now appears to have been exceedingly scant hard evidence of existing Iraqi WMD programs, to say nothing of evidence of future intent to use such weapons or give them to terrorists, Bush declared in October 2002 that “Saddam Hussein still has chemical and biological weapons and is increasing his capabilities to make more.” “He is moving ever closer to developing a nuclear weapon,” Bush stated, and “has held numerous meetings with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls his “nuclear mujahideen”” Globalization compounded the implications of such actions for the United States, the ease of movement of people and materials that defined the contemporary world order meaning that the existence of even a small amount of dangerous material in the hands of even a few individuals could profoundly threaten vital U.S. security interests. “If the Iraqi regime is able to produce, buy, or steal an amount of highly enriched uranium a little larger than a single softball,” Bush claimed, “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.”<sup>69</sup>

Beneath these statements lay a complex, well-developed web of assumptions and understandings of the identity of the Iraqi regime which allowed the Bush administration to fill in the gaps of technical knowledge about Iraq’s weapons programs that had emerged since the departure of the U.N. weapons inspectors in the late 1990s—substantive questions about what Iraq had and what it could do. But derived from these same identity understandings were even more important conclusions about Iraq’s intentions and ultimate goals—questions about what Iraq would do with materials at its disposal. The existence of weapons stockpiles or WMD programs in different parts of the world did not itself constitute a threat to the United States in the eyes of the Bush administration or any presidential administration. It was the answer to the second set of questions, the conclusion that Saddam Hussein’s regime was likely to use or provide such weapons to terrorists if it had them, that formed the basis for the administration’s judgment regarding the extreme seriousness of the threat.

For its part, the United States in Bush’s narrative was a society which valued peace but felt an obligation to act against injustice and in defense of international law. In accepting the necessity of using force against Iraq America was acting on behalf of the common interests of the international community, Bush argued, and would be joined by a broad coalition of allies. “Many nations are joining us in insisting that Saddam Hussein's regime be held accountable,” he argued. “America is challenging all nations to take the resolutions of the U.N. Security Council seriously... to make the demands of the civilized world mean something.”<sup>70</sup>

Bush’s narrative included a construction of the United States which emphasized a particular set of values and interpretation of the nation’s historical experience. The administration interpreted the lessons of the 9/11, World War II, and the cold war to mean that the international environment was a fundamentally insecure and dangerous one from which the United States could not insulate itself, and that weakness or appeasement in the face of aggression would only whet the appetite of the aggressor. “The dictator of Iraq is a student of Stalin,” Bush said, and “the longer we wait, the stronger and bolder Saddam Hussein will become.”

As Americans, we want peace—we work and sacrifice for peace. But there can be no peace if our security depends on the will and whims of a ruthless and aggressive dictator... Failure to act would embolden other tyrants, allow terrorists access to new weapons and new resources, and make blackmail a permanent feature of world events. The United Nations would betray the purpose of its founding, and prove irrelevant to the problems of our time. And through its inaction, the United States would resign itself to a future of fear. That is not the America I know... We refuse to live in fear. This nation, in world war and in cold war, has never permitted the brutal and lawless to set history's course. Now, as before, we will secure our nation, protect our freedom, and help others to find freedom of their own... The attacks of September the 11th showed our country that vast oceans no longer protect us from danger. Before that tragic date, we had only hints of al Qaeda's plans and designs. Today in Iraq, we see a threat whose outlines are far more clearly defined, and whose consequences could be far more deadly. Saddam Hussein's actions have put us on notice, and there is no refuge from our responsibilities. Like other generations of Americans, we will meet the responsibility of defending human liberty against violence and aggression.<sup>71</sup>

Bush also framed the prospective war in terms that emphasized the United States moral responsibility to defend traditional liberal human rights. "On Saddam Hussein's orders," he argued, "opponents have been decapitated, wives and mothers of political opponents have been systematically raped as a method of intimidation, and political prisoners have been forced to watch their own children being tortured." The United States had a moral duty as well as a prudential responsibility to challenge such practices, Bush claimed, based on this premises of its own national philosophy and founding: "America believes that all people are entitled to hope and human rights, to the non-negotiable demands of human dignity. People everywhere prefer freedom to slavery; prosperity to squalor; self-government to the rule of terror and torture. America is a friend to the people of Iraq." Bush argued that if war were necessary to enshrine these values in Iraq it would be an acceptable sacrifice in defense of the humanitarian interests of the Iraqi people." With the end of the Iraqi regime, even as a result of war with the United States, "the first and greatest benefit will come to Iraqi men, women, and children," Bush said. "The oppression of Kurds, Assyrians, Turkomans, Shi'a, Sunnis, and others will be lifted. The long captivity of Iraq will end, and an era of new hope will begin."<sup>72</sup>

This optimism for Iraq's future after the war was an element of the Bush administration's worldview that was also informed by historical memory of World War II and the cold war, along with a broader sense of the efficacy of military force in accomplishing political and social goals. In World War II the American military victory had been completely decisive, and the occupations of Germany and Japan were peaceful and quickly produced very stable and prosperous democratic states. At the end of the cold war the sudden demise of the Soviet-supported governments throughout Eastern Europe demonstrated that even apparently stable and entrenched autocracies could be deeply unpopular among their own populations by virtue of their repressiveness, and if visibly weakened were prone to sudden collapse. In most cases the fall of those long-standing governments was followed by the rise more democratic regimes and with minimal bloodshed. This had been the case throughout Eastern Europe (Romania being one notable exception), as well as in the Soviet Union itself, and had occurred on the watch of the

administration of George W. Bush's father which included many of the younger Bush's closest advisors in key positions. In any event the president argued in 2002 that the negative consequences of war for Iraq's people would be slight compared to the severity of the oppression they suffered under Saddam; a worse outcome than the status quo was simply unimaginable, Bush held: "The situation could hardly get worse... for the people of Iraq. The lives of Iraqi citizens would improve dramatically if Saddam Hussein were no longer in power... Freed from the weight of oppression, Iraq's people will be able to share in the progress and prosperity of our time."<sup>73</sup>

Beneath this optimistic view of Iraq's future was also a critical assumption about the world-changing power of America—its military, its economy, its culture and ideas. A key element in the Bush administration's worldview as expressed in its public statements regarding Iraq was a belief in the almost limitless capacity of the United States to create social and political change, literally to reshape the world through its material power and transcendent values. "The United States and our allies will help the Iraqi people rebuild their economy and create the institutions of liberty in a unified Iraq at peace with its neighbors," Bush argued. "By our resolve, we will give strength to others. By our courage, we will give hope to others. And by our actions, we will secure the peace, and lead the world to a better day."<sup>74</sup>

The dominant ideas in the Bush administration served not merely to guide or enable policy, but effectively determined it by leaving no alternative to war with Iraq. If the administration's consensus assumptions were correct, it was not simply true that war was justified--not to go to war would have been dangerously irresponsible. As Andrew Flibert has put it, the administration "launched the war because these ideas framed the status quo in Iraq as a serious foreign policy problem, with forcible 'regime change' as the only viable solution... Its belief in the unity of American enemies left it with little alternative to war, given the danger such a reality would pose."<sup>75</sup>

How was the administration able to shape a broad, bipartisan coalition in support of the war on the basis of these arguments? What, in other words, "did the majority of Americans who supported the war at its outset have in common? The shared only their acceptance of a few simple ideas; they were not all ardent Republicans, neoconservatives, evangelicals, or unilateralists." Andrew Flibert has argued that the dominant assumptions within the Bush administration "diffused throughout the country to help generate a pro-war ideational community that included a majority of Americans, acquiring enough discursive hegemony to sustain the American march to war from 2001 to 2003."<sup>76</sup> The war was widely supported because the Bush administration appealed for it in terms which referenced deeply held American values and identity understandings, and interpreted traditional American ideological beliefs in a way which effectively explained recent history.

Ultimately the social-ideational constructions which formed the basis for the war in Iraq were to a large extent created by the effects of the 9/11 attacks on American society, as well as on the small cohort of national leaders surrounding and including president Bush. As Moises Naim has written, "the ultimate enabler-or the factor that made the other enablers possible-was September 11, 2001. Americans felt the attacks like a blow to the head: numbing and disorienting. September 11 was so painful, surprising, and threatening that confusion and suspension of

disbelief became natural reactions.” The effect of 9/11 on U.S. popular culture was not simply to create fear, but to cause fundamental understandings of the world to be cast into doubt. If the world was really so much more threatening than it had previously appeared, then what other facts should be suspect, and indeed could facts and evidence provide a secure basis for critical judgment in international politics at all. The Bush administration’s argument that Iraq should be attacked not because it had WMD’s but because it could not be known not to have them may have made more sense to many Americans in the context of uncertainty and doubt engendered by 9/11.<sup>77</sup>

### *Policy Consequences of Identity Constructions*

The Bush administration’s policies toward Iraq emerged from discursive constructions of the identities of both the United States and Iraq that became dominant among the handful of leaders at highest levels of the U.S. military bureaucracy and within the White House. They are revealed in the statements of the president and his top advisors that form the intellectual basis for the administration’s public case for war, but these public statements are highly consistent with the statements of these same officials in private or during closed-door meetings in the same period. These identity formulations guided policy toward war and shaped the administration’s expectations of what would occur afterward, and within these constructions are embedded the assumptions which gave rise to the two most notable failures of the Iraq war: the belief that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed a threat to U.S. national security requiring the use of preemptive force; and the belief that post-war Iraq would move quickly to stable democracy with minimal need for support by a long-term U.S. military presence.

Andrew Flibbert has identified four sets of mutually reinforcing ideas that formed the ideational basis for the administration’s choice for war in Iraq: “belief in the necessity and benevolence of American hegemony, a Manichaeian conception of politics, a conviction that regime type is the principal determinant of foreign policy, and great confidence in the efficacy of military force.” Together, Flibbert has argued, “these ideas had a constitutive effect on the administration’s understanding of U.S. interests and policy options. More specifically, they defined the social purpose of American power, framed threats to the United States, and determined appropriate solutions to core problems.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly, David Hastings Dunn has argued that “An understanding of the Bush administration’s decision to go to war in Iraq “is impossible without an appreciation of the centrality of the role of ideas in contemporary US foreign policy. Some of these ideas are as old as the republic (such as American exceptionalism and moral certainty), some developed during the Cold War, and others still derive from the Bush administration’s self-identification of itself as ‘neo-Reaganite’ in both domestic and foreign policy—promoting the values and playing the role that Reagan did in the early 1980s.” Among the ideational “drivers” of Bush’s Iraq policy, according to Dunn, were: realist anti-appeasement; U.S. providence/American exceptionalism; assertive unilateralism; a willingness to fight and fighting to win; and threat inflation and conflation.<sup>79</sup>

This chapter will contend that in explaining the belief that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and was likely to use them or give them to terrorists, and the belief that the U.S. war in Iraq would lead quickly to democracy and stability that would allow a withdrawal of most

U.S. troops after a very short occupation, a few central assumptions and values are key. Among these are were a Manichaeian view of world politics which suggested that the conflict in Iraq was part of a broader global war on terror in which the forces of freedom and civilization were pitted against the unified forces of barbarism and evil; a belief in the efficacy of American military power to create political change and reshape the international order; the liberal belief in the universal viability and moral superiority of the American model of democratic governance; and the belief that the United States was a benevolent power fighting for transcendent values and would be seen as such by Iraqis. These ideas combined to support the conclusion that American forces would be greeted as liberators by grateful Iraqis, and that while Iraqi society would require the paternalistic support of the United States to be educated in the norms of democracy, the universal appeal of liberal, democratic values would lead to the quick emergence of stable prosperity in Iraq. From before the war's beginning and throughout its prosecution these ideas dominated official thinking about Iraq at the highest levels of the Bush administration, leading to a generalized failure among top policymakers to understand the conflict from their adversaries' cultural and cognitive perspective. These ideas proved highly durable, crippling the administration's capacity to adapt its policies in the face of growing evidence of the flaws in its previous assumptions.

A Manichaeian sense of international politics led the administration to the conclusion that despite their ideological antipathy with one another, al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's Iraq were natural allies since they were both hostile to the United States. The view of Iraq as a state that posed a direct threat to the United States and would use terrorism to accomplish its goals was in evidence within the Bush administration as early as September 12, 2001, when the president asked his counterterrorism coordinator to seek out connections between Iraq and the terrorist attacks. Bush is reported to have said at NSC meetings in the days that followed, "Many believe Saddam is involved... He probably was behind this in the end... I believe Iraq was involved, but I'm not going to strike them now. I don't have the evidence at this point."<sup>80</sup>

Robert Jervis has noted the possibility of a cognitive psychological basis for the tendency to see unity among enemies.<sup>81</sup> If this tendency exists in individuals it would seem capable of influencing the social construction of reality within groups, which are ultimately collections of individuals susceptible to the same tendencies. It is worth noting that President Bush's private suspicion that Iraq was involved in the 9/11 attack appears to have been shared by large segments of the American public immediately after 9/11, with little evidence to support this conclusion.

Vice President Cheney argued in August of 2002 that the streets in Basra and Baghdad were "sure to erupt in joy in the same way the throngs in Kabul greeted the Americans."<sup>82</sup> Appearing on Meet the Press on March 16, 2003, Cheney said that it was "my belief is that we will, in fact, be greeted as liberators."<sup>83</sup> Paul Wolfowitz stated a similar conclusion in a prewar interview in the Detroit News: "Our principal target is the psychological one, to convince the Iraqi people that they no longer have to be afraid of Saddam... and once that happens I think... you're going to find Iraqis out cheering American troops... I think ethnic differences are there in Iraq but they're exaggerated."<sup>84</sup> The assumption that Iraqis would greet American troops as liberators was a common claim by Bush administration officials, and was premised on a number of the central assumptions of the administration's worldview noted above. The Manichaeian view that Saddam

Hussein was an evil despot whose demise would be celebrated by Iraqis tended to obscure the sectarian cleavages in Iraqi politics, divisions which predated Saddam, but which were certainly critical to understanding his regime's grip on power. Despite the clear contempt of many Iraqis for Saddam and his Baath Party, attitudes among Iraq's Sunnis were distinctly more mixed than among the Shia and Kurds among whom Saddam was more uniformly loathed.

The expectation of a grateful Iraqi reception for American forces was also rooted a benign self-construction of U.S identity within the administration, and a tacit assumption that Iraqis would also see the United States as Americans did. But there was little basis for this belief among many Iraqis, and as Major Michael Eisenstatdt, a U.S. Army intelligence officer and expert on Middle East security issues has suggested, the current war in Iraq cannot be understood "without understanding the end of the '91 war, especially the distrust of Americans" it engendered among Iraqi Shiites.<sup>85</sup> At the end of the first Gulf War the first Bush administration had exhorted the Shiite population of Southern Iraq and the Kurdish population in the North to revolt. When they did, the Iraqi military counterattacked and brutally put down the uprisings, killing untold thousands. The U.S. military stood by, offering no help or support to the uprisings, and even initially allowing the Iraq military to use its helicopters in support of their attacks. Though the United States would spend much of the next decade building what amounted to a stable, autonomous Kurdish state-within-a-state in Northern Iraq, Shiites in the country's South would continue to endure both Saddam's repression and the crushing economic effects of Western-sponsored sanctions for another decade. This experience certainly colored the mindset of many of the Iraqi Shiites who witnessed the American occupation of 2003, whose reactions tended more toward reticence and mistrust than supportive gratitude.

The Bush administration's identity construction of the Iraqi regime also formed the basis of its prewar conclusions about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs. In seeking to understand and predict the behavior of the Iraqi regime in the absence of hard evidence about its capabilities, the administration reached an understanding of Iraq's intentions and likely actions consistent with its understanding of the regime's identity, failing to perceive motives unrelated to this construction. David Kay, who headed the postwar U.S. search for Iraq's purported weapons of mass destruction, reported that his extensive interviews with those involved in Iraq's weapons programs led him to the conclusion that Saddam Hussein had not believed that the U.S. would actually invade, but in any event was more fearful of his own population, of Iraqi Shiites and Kurds, than he was of the United States. His motives were defined primarily by his domestic political context, a reality for most political leaders but one that the dominant cognitive framework of the Bush administration did not account for and could not accommodate. "Totalitarian regimes generally end up fearing their own people more than they fear external threats," Kay said. "We missed that."<sup>86</sup> Thomas Ricks quotes one senior military specialist in Middle East intelligence as believing that Saddam Hussein's concerns about his domestic power base were also reflected in his limited challenges to Western enforcement of the U.N. no-fly zones over Iraq. "He was doing enough to show his people he was confronting the mighty United States, but no more than that... it was calibrated to show defiance, but not to provoke us."<sup>87</sup> Saddam's policies regarding WMD programs may well have been motivated by the same concerns, his refusal to cooperate with weapons inspectors driven by a domestic political interest in defying the West and intimidating his own population as well as regional neighbors. Based on its construction of the identity of Saddam Hussein and his regime, the Bush administration came

to believe that Iraq's policies could only be motivated by a desire to build weapons of mass destruction for intimidation, aggression, and terrorism. In fact they seem to have been undertaken in a calculated attempt to hide the fact that Iraq could not effectively reconstitute its WMD programs, at least after 1998. The Bush administration's inability to consider this possibility even in the face of a now apparent absence of hard evidence of Iraq's advanced WMD development, resulted from the assumptions of its identity construction of Iraq's regime and a failure to comprehend the perspective of the international Other.

At the highest levels of the Bush White House and throughout the military bureaucracy it was assumed that Saddam Hussein's military, if it fought at all, would fight a conventional war in which it would be quickly defeated. Fears that this might not occur tended to stress the use of non-conventional weapons, such as chemical or biological weapons, but not non-conventional tactics. In fact, there was some evidence to suggest that elements of the Iraqi military were being prepared for a protracted guerilla war—prewar intelligence indicated that Saddam Hussein had distributed copies of the film *Black Hawk Down* among his senior commanders, for example, that caches of explosives, small arms and other weapons were being distributed throughout Iraq, that tens of thousands of Iraqi prisoners had been released before the war, perhaps to provide manpower for loosely organized bands of guerilla fighters. The Baath Party itself had been from the earliest days of its history a guerilla organization which still retained the localized cell structure characteristic of guerilla groups. Taken together, and along with the clear disparity of conventional capabilities which would argue strongly against a strategy of confrontation with the U.S. military on its own terms from the Iraqi perspectives, these factors suggest a generalized failure to understand and international conflict from an adversary's perspective throughout the U.S. political and military structure. The assumptions of the Bush administration were defined and bounded by a worldview which did not take account of the differing perspective of the Iraqi regime, and thus failed to adequately predict the way in which that regime would act in the face of an American attack.<sup>88</sup>

By many accounts Donald Rumsfeld felt that the primary mission that would distinguish his tenure as Secretary of Defense was reform of the military to emphasize war fighting by faster, lighter and more technologically advanced forces. The belief that these wars were the future of the U.S. military was consistent in Iraq with the belief that U.S. forces would be greeted as liberators and would be able to quickly turn over power to a stable Iraqi government, then depart. For Rumsfeld, a belief that the United States was essentially a benevolent force and would be understood as such by a non-hostile Iraqi population, went hand in hand with the belief that Iraqi society would quickly return to stability because the promise of democracy would alleviate the prospects of political violence, and the assumption that the war could be won and the occupation carried out with a fraction of the force in the first Gulf War consistent with the doctrine of military reform. As planning for the 2003 war in Iraq began, Rumsfeld effectively discarded existing plans, codenamed "Desert Crossing," which had been developed over the previous decade and called for an invasion force of at least 300,000 troops. Over the months leading up to the war, Rumsfeld and his staff would be locked in an ongoing, occasionally public argument with the Pentagon's senior uniformed military officers over the size of the force, with Rumsfeld pushing for a small force consistent with the doctrine of military transformation. At one point Rumsfeld suggested the possibility of an invasion force comprised of just 10,000 troops, though this was very likely a bargaining position in the bureaucratic struggle over this issue in the

Pentagon rather than a serious proposal. The force that finally invaded Iraq in March of 2003 would be roughly 145,000 troops including both British and U.S. forces. Planning for the war assumed a goal of removing all but 35,000 U.S. troops from Iraq by the end of the summer of 2003, just six months after the initial invasion.<sup>89</sup>

A belief in the capacity of American power to transform the world was clearly in evidence in the Bush administration's thinking about the prospect of war in Iraq. Bush claimed before that war that he intended to "seize the opportunity to achieve big goals. There is nothing bigger than to achieve world peace... There is a human condition that we must worry about... As we think about Iraq... it will be for the objective of making the world more peaceful."<sup>90</sup> This belief went hand in hand with what Andrew Flibert has called "an abiding faith in the efficacy of military force as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy." "With the ongoing revolution in military affairs," Flibert has suggested, observers in and out of the administration expected American military prowess to be unrivalled in the early twenty-first century, delivering greater firepower and costing fewer U.S. casualties than at any prior moment in history... Such confidence in the efficacy of force was linked to a view of Middle East politics as exceptionally brutal and therefore resistant to subtler means of external influence."<sup>91</sup> As PNAC fellow Reuel Marc Gerecht put it in December 2001, "We have no choice but to re-install in our foes and friends the fear and respect that attaches to any great power... Only a war against Saddam Hussein will decisively restore the awe that protects American interests abroad and citizens at home."<sup>92</sup>

In the Bush administration's worldview "the United States, unlike any other great power in human history, was deemed capable of playing a dominant but entirely benevolent role in world politics, since U.S. intentions were believed to be irreproachable. The purported absence of American imperial ambition—'America has no empire to extend or utopia to establish'—derived from a sense of American exceptionalism... a hegemonic America served as keeper of the global order and was entitled to defend its primacy from both latent threats and open acts of defiance."<sup>93</sup> Thus, the use of preemptive force, which would have been intolerable by another state, was justified by the United States in the Bush administration's worldview on the basis of America's unique benevolence and the fact that as the guarantor of global stability it was a unique target for the forces of radicalism and violence in the world.

Many authors have noted the importance of American "exceptionalism" in the intellectual history of U.S. foreign policy, the belief that the United States is a unique society, a "city on the hill" unlike other nations. In fact there is nothing particularly "exceptional" about the fact that Americans have viewed their country as distinct and special; it is certainly possible to find in the foreign policy rhetoric of many societies over time expressions of pride in unique aspects of national culture. What has distinguished American exceptionalism from the cultural pride of other societies is the idea that, at least in politics, what has made America exceptional is not in fact culturally bounded but universally applicable. The enlightenment principles of the American founding, the belief that individual liberty and popular sovereignty could create a better and more just society, have been asserted as ideas that could be applied anywhere, and could knit together the most fractious and diverse polities under a banner of common respect for human dignity and freedom. Japanese and German nationalists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century certainly held that their national cultures were unique and destined for greatness, but tended to equate these ideas to one degree or another with race, and to assume that their racial-cultural superiority

entitled them to dominion over others who were inferior in these ways, but thus would not have held that what made their cultures exceptional were principles universalizable to all human beings. American political philosophy and the orthodox myths of the American historical experience describe a set of beliefs which are consciously blind to race and culture. It is because of this distinction that Americans have been able to engage in the practices of imperialism while simultaneously arguing that they have no empires to build, that the same policies which would be loathsome carried out to achieve the dominance of one culture over another are a moral duty when carried out to confer the blessings of liberty and universal human rights on people living under tyranny.

The importance of the Bush administration's belief in the transformative power of Western democracy is demonstrated by the great stock the administration placed in the prospect of Iraqi elections in early 2005. Consistent with its presumption of the pacifying effects of democratic rule, the administration hoped that these elections would undercut the growing insurgency and put Iraq on a path toward stability and an eventual end of U.S. occupation. Iraqi prime minister Allawi, the U.N.'s Lakhdar Brahimi and others warned the administration that Sunnis would boycott the elections and thus be disenfranchised in the government that would emerge. The CIA also warned that the election would leave Sunnis disenfranchised and thus might further escalate violence. After one CIA briefing making these points Bush looked at briefer and asked derisively "is this Baghdad Bob?" "I'm not hearing that from anyone else but the CIA." Bush said. "I'm depending on the prospect of the elections and an elected government to get the insurgency down and get the security improved."<sup>94</sup>

In retrospect the election seems to have been seen by many Shiites as an opportunity to assert Shiite power in the country, and has had that effect. The government of Iraq in 2007 is one supported by little sense of a common civic interest between political parties primarily formed around ethnic, religious, or clan loyalties. It is a government which has little power over militias and other armed groups throughout the country, in which the government is indeed more controlled by these groups than in control of them. An understanding of the history and culture of Iraq might have led administration officials to the conclusion that elections of 2005 would have produced these effects. But the dominant ideational orthodoxy within the Bush administration appears to have been based in a firm conviction in ability of democracy to quickly take root in any cultural setting due to the fact that democracy was rooted in universal human rights.

"We're sticking with the elections," Bush repeated to his advisors. Privately he expressed anger at the failure of Iraqi leadership, at the fact that national leaders of the caliber needed were not stepping forward to assert control and lead the country. "Why don't they take charge of their own destiny?" Bush asked in a January 10, 2005 NSC meeting. As the administration's attempts to build a stable Iraqi government proceeded slowly in the spring of 2006, White House Chief of Staff Andy Card recalled Bush's frustration rising. "Where's the leader?" he repeated. "Where's George Washington? Where's Thomas Jefferson? Where's John Adams, for crying out loud? He didn't even have much of a personality." Bush's frustration suggested the depth of his administration's belief that the American model of democratic government was universally applicable, and would bring peace to Iraq if only it could be implemented there.<sup>95</sup>

On August 19, 2003, a truck bomb destroyed the United Nations compound in Baghdad, killing 22 people including the U.N. envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello. The next day, Bush met with the National Security Council. His description of the context of these events in this private meeting was much akin to his public rhetoric. “An ugly day for freedom,” he told his advisors. “Terrorists want us to retreat and we cannot. We need to redouble our efforts against terror... Groups that respond by pulling out of Iraq are simply giving in to the killers and rewarding them.” The discussion that followed revealed much about the way in which Bush understood the identity of the United States and its enemies in Iraq. In its public response on Arabic-language television in the region, Bush said, “our theme should be that the Iraqis should not allow foreign fighters to come into Iraq... we need to play on a sense of nationalism that will motivate Iraqis to cooperate with us to exclude the foreigners.”<sup>96</sup>

This assertion seemed to overlook the self-evident fact that by far the largest group of foreign fighters in the country was Americans, and the increasingly apparent reality that much of the insurgency was motivated by the very nationalism that Bush sought to inspire—directed against occupation by a foreign power, the United States. Speaking to reporters two days later Bush revealed more about the way in which he understood the United States and its enemies, saying that Iraq represented “a continuing battle in the war on terror... we found resistance from former Baathist officials. These people decided that, well, they’d rather fight than work for peaceful reconstruction of Iraq because they weren’t going to be in power anymore. I also believe there is a foreign element that is moving into Iraq and these will be al Qaeda-type fighters. They want to fight us there because they can’t stand the thought of a free society in the Middle East. They hate freedom. They hate the thought of a democracy emerging. And therefore, they want to violently prevent that from happening.” He elaborated further in his radio address of August 23, saying that progress in Iraq “makes the remaining terrorists even more desperate and willing to lash out against symbols of order and hope, like coalition forces and the U.N. personnel. The world will not be intimidated. A violent few will not determine the future of Iraq, and there will be no return to the days of Saddam Hussein’s torture chambers and mass graves.”<sup>97</sup>

The Bush administration’s construction of the identity of both Iraq and the United States precluded the possibility of a nationalist resistance to U.S. occupation, which was understood by the Bush administration to be a means to the liberation of the diverse array of groups held together by the authoritarian rule of Saddam Hussein. While the Bush administration appears to have believed that these groups could remain united under the more benevolent rubric of Western democracy, at the highest levels it utterly failed to anticipate the power of subnational sectarian loyalties or the strength of Iraqi nationalism and the hostility that this sentiment would quickly engender against Western soldiers on Iraqi soil. As Gareth Stansfield has written, American policy in Iraq was premised on the “implicit belief that most people in the world are post-ethnic individualists, like Americans believe themselves to be.” As a consequence of this assumption, Stansfield argues, “The continuing hold of ethnic and sectarian allegiances was underestimated. The violence and the centrifugal forces we are witnessing in today’s Iraq are the reckoning for the 30 years of war that the Sunni-dominated regime waged against the Shias and the Kurds.”<sup>98</sup>

The Bush administration not only failed to recognize that Iraqi nationalism would be a factor challenging and complicating the U.S. occupation, but particularly failed to note that resistance

to Western imperialism was in fact a defining facet of this Iraq national identity. Prior to the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Iraq was a center of world civilization; after that experience its global importance was much diminished, and under Ottoman rule in later centuries Iraq would be administratively divided into three regions, centered around Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. The reunification of Iraq under British control in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century amounted to the recreation of an Iraqi political community paralleling the Iraqi cultural identity which had never entirely vanished, and the earliest defining experience of this political community was one of armed resistance to European colonial rule. Resistance to the British occupation of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a history precedent with eerie parallels to the current U.S. occupation, played a critical role in establishing the ways in which modern Iraqis would understand what it meant to be Iraqi.<sup>99</sup> Feisal Amin Rasoul Al-Istrabadi has argued that Iraq's "national history has fostered a true sense of national Iraqi identity that cannot be lightly dismissed. Indeed, as UN officials continually assert, it has been clear for some time that a significant segment—it is difficult to quantify the percentage precisely—of the current insurgency is now composed of Iraqi nationalists fighting against what they perceive as a potential break-up of the country by outside forces."<sup>100</sup>

The Bush administration's belief in the culturally transcendent appeal of Western-style democracy obscured its understanding of the distinctive aspects of Iraqi history and culture that argued against its predictions of a quick war ending with a stable and democratic Iraq. While U.S. leaders identified Saddam Hussein as the primary source of political violence in Iraq, Nimrod Raphaeli has argued that violent political change has been the historical norm in Iraqi politics; the belief that that the promise of democracy in Saddam's absence would lead to a rapid and peaceful power transition was premised on embedded American cultural assumptions rather than a clear understanding of Iraqi history. "Modern Iraqi culture is also marked by tribalism and violence," Raphaeli argues:

On October 29, 1936, Iraqi general Bakr Sidqi led the first military coup in the Middle East. He was assassinated less than a year later. While military coups became frequent in Middle Eastern states, Iraq set another first when, on July 14, 1958, it became the scene of the first Middle Eastern coup to culminate in the execution of the head of state. Another coup led to the execution of General 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, the 1958 coup leader. Several other leaders subsequently died under suspicious circumstances. After a short-lived 1963 attempt to seize power, the Baath party tried again and consolidated control after a 1968 coup. In 1979, vice president Saddam Hussein deposed the president, General Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, who subsequently died from apparent poisoning. Very few Iraqi leaders die of natural causes.<sup>101</sup>

Iraqi historian and sociologist Ali al-Wardi argues that Bedouin culture continues to form the basis of modern Iraqi culture. The three elements central to Bedouin culture according to Wardi are, tribalism, raiding, and chivalry, each of which is in turn rooted in the concept of *taghalub*, or predominance. "The Bedouin individual seeks to persuade by the force of his tribe, his personal strength, and his sense of superiority. Because of a lack of rules to adjudicate conflict, Bedouins use force to avenge transgressions. This, Wardi argues, explains why there is near permanent war in Bedouin society. 'War in the desert is the reality; peace is a fleeting phenomenon.'"<sup>102</sup>

U.S. occupation policies were typically conducted in ignorance of Iraq's culture and traditions, and often offended Iraqi sensibilities in ways which seem in retrospect to have contributed greatly to the emergence of insurgency and civil war. Of the U.S. policies that can be faulted in this regard, none were more destructive than the orders for de-Baathification and dissolution of the Iraqi military issued by L. Paul Bremer in mid-May 2003. In retrospect these were the most catastrophic decisions made by the United States in postwar Iraq. They were the first policies enacted by Bremer in his role as presidential envoy, carried out over the strong objections of the outgoing head of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance Jay Garner and the CIA chief of station. They undercut the efforts at reconstruction which Garner had begun, which had depended on the large-scale use of the Iraqi military for rebuilding efforts, and destroyed ongoing negotiations between U.S. officials and Iraqi military officers which sought to begin payments to former soldiers with the ultimate goal of pacifying and gaining their support for U.S. efforts in Iraq. As a practical matter, they deprived Iraqi society of bureaucrats and technicians at every level of government, from those running the ministries to teachers and low-level government functionaries, ending the careers and pushing to the embittered margins of society many thousands of people whose skills were desperately needed to reestablish a functioning government and economy. They deprived perhaps half a million or more individuals of incomes, creating hardship for many times that number who were their dependents and removing these workers from the already devastated national economic base. They also deprived Iraq of hundreds of thousands of security forces at a time when postwar Iraqi society was marked by widespread criminal violence bordering on chaos. Hundreds of thousands of men were left without jobs, humiliated, and often with access to weapons. The Iraqi army, one of the few symbols of national identity, was eradicated with the stroke of a pen. Faleh Jabar, a scholar of the Baath Party and senior fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace, has argued that "abruptly terminating the livelihoods of these men created a vast pool of humiliated, antagonized, and politicized men." Colonel John Agoglia, Deputy Chief of Plans for the U.S. military's Central Command in 2003-2004 argued of Bremer's orders marked "the day that we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory and created an insurgency." Lieutenant Colonel Alan King, a civil affairs officer in the Third Infantry Division, claimed that "when Bremer did that, the insurgency went crazy. May was the turning point... when they disbanded the military, and announced we were occupiers—that was it. Every moderate, every person that had leaned toward us, was furious."<sup>103</sup>

Driven by a Manichaean conception of politics which viewed all vestiges of the old regime as intolerable, these policies did incalculable damage to Iraq's economy and the ability of its state structures to govern. Tareq and Jacqueline Ismael have argued that these policies "resulted in the complete collapse of Iraqi state infrastructure... [and] created a political and social vacuum, and pre-Ba'ath party social institutions (the tribal, religious and communal formations already emergent under sanctions) were the only agencies left to fill the security vacuum precipitated by the loss of administrative control."<sup>104</sup>

More generally, Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority acted as an imperial enclave largely detached from the society around it. Larry Diamond has summed up the disconnect between the Coalition Provisional Authority's view of itself and Iraqi society and the Iraqi view as follows:

The coalition lacked the linguistic and area expertise necessary to understand Iraqi politics and society, and the few long-time experts present were excluded from the inner circle of decision-making in the CPA. Thus the coalition never grasped, for example, the fact that although most Iraqis were grateful for having been liberated from a brutal tyranny, their gratitude was mixed with deep suspicion of the United States' real motives (not to mention those of the United Kingdom, a former colonial ruler of Iraq); humiliation that the Iraqis themselves have proved unable to overthrow Saddam; and unrealistic expectations of the postwar administration, which Iraqis expected to quickly deliver them from their problems. Too many Iraqis viewed the invasion not as an international effort but as an occupation by Western, Christian, essentially Anglo-American powers, and this evoked powerful memories of previous subjugation and of nationalist struggles against Iraq's former overlords.<sup>105</sup>

As with the CPA, Anthony Zinni has argued that the U.S. military's "biggest flaw is that we never take time to understand the culture. Some things we do that make perfect sense to us do not make perfect sense in another culture. As a result, look at the mistakes we've made in Iraq day by day."<sup>106</sup>

A key element of the doctrine applied by the U.S. military in Iraq was the concept of "presence." A carryover from the military's approach to its prior missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, the principle behind this approach was that much of the military's role was to reassure the civilian population by being very visible, patrolling frequently and on foot, and interacting at a personal level with the population. While this approach was crucial to reinforcing the public sense that U.S. forces were capable and intent on keeping peace in Bosnia and Kosovo, however, the public's attitudes were quite different in Iraq and the "presence" mission had a very different effect. As Army civil affairs officer Lt. Christopher Holshek put it, among a civilian population that viewed the United States as an occupying force "the presence of troops... becomes counterproductive." In Thomas Ricks' view, in its application to Iraq the presence doctrine failed "to understand the centrality of Iraqi pride, and the humiliation Iraqi men felt to be occupied by a Western army."<sup>107</sup>

As Holshek put it, "Two o'clock in the morning, your door bursts open. A bunch of infantry guys burst into the private space of the house—in a society where family honor is the most important thing—and you lay the man down, and put the plastic cuffs on? And then we say, 'Oops, wrong home?' In this society, the guy has no other choice but to seek restitution. He will do that by placing a roadside bomb for one hundred dollars, because his family honor has been compromised..."<sup>108</sup>

The attitudes of U.S. officials toward Iraq also were often imperious, dismissive, or overtly paternalistic. On September 16, Bremer told a group of new Iraqi ministers that "like it or not—and it's not pleasant being occupied, or being the occupier, I might add—the Coalition is still the sovereign power here." He told Wolfowitz about the Iraqis that "these people couldn't organize a parade, let alone run a country." On September 8 he had published an editorial in the Washington Post under the title "Iraq's Path to Sovereignty," in which he referred to the U.S. presence in Iraq once again as an "occupation"—which when translated into Arabic was the

word *ihtilal*, an offensive term implying the humiliation of foreign domination and invoking comparisons to the Israeli occupation of Arab territory.<sup>109</sup> References to Iraq a child were common in the discussions between the administration's top officials. Deputy National Security advisor Stephen Hadley frequently referred to Iraq as an "abused child," emotionally scarred and with a continuing need for the parental care of the United States. Rumsfeld argued for a sterner style of parenting, repeating that United States needed to let Iraq stand or fall on its own; he frequently used the comparison to a parent needing to let go of the back of a bicycle as their child learned to ride. Rice took an approach between the other two, at one point saying "let's let them try to pedal on their own, but we better be there to catch them... if you take your hand off the bicycle and it goes over a ravine that's not a very good thing either... How do you judge that they're capable enough?"<sup>110</sup>

Political ideology and constructions of identity formed the basis for policy in the case of the Iraq war, but it is important to note that the effects of the intervening organizational and bureaucratic contexts are also necessary to understanding the particular ways in which these ideas shaped policy in this instance. The small group of policymakers around President Bush seems to have been marked by unusual intellectual coherence and unusual isolation from alternative perspectives. A clear ideational consensus about the role of the United States in the world appears to have been firmly entrenched at the highest levels of the Bush administration in the years after 9/11, imposing a rigid orthodoxy within this small group. Policy debates were constrained within this ideological framework, becoming arguments over tactics rather than critical considerations of strategy or underlying assumptions. It is striking to note that among the president's top foreign policy advisers—Rice, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Tenet, and Powell—only Powell seems to have expressed any serious reservations about the administration's rationale for war with Iraq and assumptions about its likely outcome to the president. Given what appear in retrospect to be glaring flaws in the administration's logic about these issues, this level of agreement seems astonishing. Had any other member of this group counseled strongly against the war, and certainly if one or more had publicly advocated against it, it seems possible if not likely that the administration would have been forced to choose another course.

Bush seems to have sought to model his presidency on that of Ronald Reagan, emphasizing once again the moral purposes of American power rather than the pragmatism lacking in passion that characterized his father's administration. But the trait that allowed Reagan's administration to cement its place in history was not simply the strength of its moral and ideological convictions. It was Reagan's ability to look beyond his and his administration's dominant assumptions, to understand that under Mikhail Gorbachev something legitimately new was happening in the Soviet Union and embrace and encourage that change rather than persisting in the hidebound hostility of the cold war. Bush and his advisors reflected Reagan's millennialism, his emphasis on the moral duty of America to change the world. But they demonstrated none of the Reagan administration's capacity to reconsider its own assumptions and adapt.

One indicator of Bush's unwillingness or inability to question the ideological orthodoxy of his administration in the face of contradictory evidence came during an interview he gave on Meet the Press on February 8, 2004, nearly two years after the initial invasion of Iraq: "First of all, I expected to find weapons," Bush said. "There's theories as to where the weapons went. They could have been destroyed during the war. Saddam and his henchmen could have destroyed

them as we entered into Iraq. They could be hidden. They could have been transported to another country, and we'll find that out... Saddam Hussein was dangerous with weapons. Saddam Hussein was dangerous with the ability to make weapons..."<sup>111</sup> Similarly, chief U.S. weapons inspector David Kay reported frequently getting bits and piece of intelligence directed to him from the vice president's office—snippets of information which he was asked if he had seen, indicating in one case that Iraqi WMDs might have been smuggled to Syria, in another Lebanon's Bekaa valley. At one point he asked Kay to interview an Iranian informant who Kay knew the CIA had already labeled a "talented fabricator." "Cheney had a stock of interpretations and facts that he thought proved a case and he wanted to be sure that you examined them," Kay said. Cheney seems to have been aggressively asserting his own understanding of the answer to the Iraqi WMD puzzle, seeking pieces of information that seemed to fit within the administration's shared cognitive framework and relaying those to Kay in an apparent attempt to spur Kay's team to a wider discovery that would confirm the administration's view in its completeness.<sup>112</sup>

Another example of the depth of the intellectual intransigence within the Bush administration was its steady refusal to acknowledge that the Iraqi insurgency was growing and that the country was descending into civil war. Classified reports in November 2003 showed that there had been about 1000 enemy-initiated attacks in Iraq in the previous month. When Bush met with the National Security Council on November 11, CIA Near East Division head Rob Richer stated that "we are seeing the establishment of an insurgency." "I may have to disagree with you," Rumsfeld responded. "I need more data," Bush said. "I don't think we are there yet." Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said later that sitting in the meeting he concluded that Bush was in denial about the realities of Iraq.<sup>113</sup> Both Powell and Armitage suggested that the tone of certainty, the complete absence of doubt expressed in the president and vice-presidents public statements was repeated in private. "They cannot have any doubts about the correctness of the policy because it opens too many questions in their minds."<sup>114</sup> Armitage came to believe that in the Bush White House, any expression of doubt in a policy, any questioning of accepted assumptions, any reservations or critical thinking, was regarded as an indication of disloyalty, evidence that the doubter was not "on the team." Powell generally met with Bush for roughly 20 minutes per week, but vice-president Cheney was often there and Powell became convinced that Cheney would later suggest to Bush that Powell's doubts indicated that he was not a team player. Powell and Armitage came to believe that that dominant mindset at the highest levels of the Bush administration was one in which diplomacy was seen as indicative of weakness and appeasement.<sup>115</sup>

Bush confirmed as much himself when he told Bob Woodward about Afghanistan in late 2001 that "I know it is hard for you to believe, but I have not doubted what we're doing. I have not doubted what we're doing... There is no doubt in my mind we're doing the right thing." In August 2002 he argued that an unwavering, undoubting commitment to principles and policy choices was a critical element of his presidency and something he expected of those around him. "A president has got to be the calcium in the backbone. If I weaken, the whole team weakens. If I'm doubtful, I can assure you there will be a lot of doubt. If my confidence level in our ability declines, it will send ripples throughout t the whole organization... it's essential that we be confident and determined and united... I don't need people around me who are not steady... And if there's kind of a hand-wringing attitude going on when times are tough, I don't like it."<sup>116</sup>

Jay Garner, the first head of the U.S. civilian occupation and reconstruction effort in Iraq, returned to the United States in the late spring of 2003. He met on June 8, 2003, first individually with Rumsfeld, and then with Rumsfeld together with Bush, Cheney, and Rice. In his one-on-one meeting with Rumsfeld he said that he felt the CPA had made three profound mistakes—the extent of de-Baathification, disbanding the military, and marginalizing the Iraqi leadership group. But there was “still time to rectify this” Garner told Rumsfeld.” “They’re all reversible.” Rumsfeld’s response was a flat rejection of Garner’s concerns: “I don’t think there is anything we can do,” he said, “because of where we are... we’re not going to go back.” In his meeting with Bush, Cheney, and Rice, Garner told stories of Iraqi clerics who appealed to him to make Iraq the 51<sup>st</sup> U.S. state, of the many people who told him “God bless Mr. George Bush.,” of progress and the triumphs of newfound freedom he had seen in Iraq. He did not mention the deep concerns he had expressed to Rumsfeld. “Once again,” Bob Woodward has written in his description of this encounter, “the aura of the presidency had shut out the most important news—the bad news... It was only one example of a visitor to the Oval Office not telling the president the whole story or the truth. Likewise, in these moments where Bush had someone from the field there in the chair beside him, he did not press, did not try to open the door himself and ask what the visitor had seen and thought.” For his part, Garner argued afterward that there would have been no point in his expressing his deeper concerns about the progress of the occupation, simply because it would not have made a dent in the cognitive orthodoxy around the president. “The door’s closed,” Garner said about this meeting. “And I think if I had said that to the president in front of Cheney and Condoleezza Rice and Rumsfeld in there, the president would have looked at them and they would have rolled their eyes back and he would have thought, ‘Boy, I wonder why we didn’t get rid of this guy sooner?’” “They didn’t see it coming,” Garner said. “As the troops said, they drank the Kool-Aid.”<sup>117</sup>

### **Conclusion: Ideology and Identity in the “War on Terror”**

In its emphasis on the roles of ideology and identity in shaping state policy, constructivism offers a necessary framework for understanding both the motivations that led the Bush administration to pursue the policies it did after 9/11, and the process by which the administration’s beliefs and assumptions about the world were translated into a national socio-political context in which this agenda could be pursued. In its foreign policy statements in these years the Bush administration presented a clear, consistent vision of the identity of the United States, the enemies that confronted it, and the global environment in which they interacted. Among these assumptions was a Wilsonian conception of the moral superiority and universal viability of democratic political systems, and an understanding that the promotion of democracy had been and should continue to be the centerpiece of American diplomacy. The Bush administration argued frequently and forcefully that democratic governments were more just and humane and thus less likely to create the conditions leading to political instability and terrorism than non-democratic regimes, and that democratic states were less warlike and more likely to be friendly toward the United States.

With regard to the identities of the United States and other actors in the international system the administration consistently depicted a global environment in which terrorism was a profound and

immediate threat the America, not only internationally but domestically as well. In his speeches, Bush alluded often to threat of terrorism on American soil, frequently referring to unspecified numbers (“thousands” or “tens of thousands”) of terrorists, invisible but at large somewhere in the world. These terrorists were often depicted as part of a larger, loosely-defined anti-civilization movement in the world. Along with the states of the “axis of evil,” these groups represented to threat to America and its allies in a new bipolar global system—the forces of tyranny and barbarity allied against the forces of “freedom.” 9/11 represented, in Bush’s view, the latest battle in a war between “freedom and fear,” which had been fought from time immemorial. And in this war, he argued, “God is not neutral.”

Individuals and groups within this camp, both terrorist leaders and the leaders of states, were frequently described in terms suggesting that they were something other than fully human. Having rejected the norms of civilization, they “hid in shadows and caves”—but also, unseen, in cities around the world. They were depicted as “irrational,” “mad,” driven by “ideologies of murder” to kill without compunction or restraint. They were “evil men,” “parasites,” who aggressively sought to destroy freedom in every part of the world. Their sanity could not be trusted, and bent on global domination, they could not be negotiated with or deterred.

If this was the enemy, the United States was, in Bush’s view, an altruistic state that had no material interests of its own to serve, no desire for empire or gain, but which did acknowledge a moral obligation to defend human freedom when it was threatened. Bush frequently framed his description of American identity in historical terms—the United States was the nation that had defeated fascism and communism, and had been a beacon of democracy for generations. Today’s Americans, he often reminded his audiences, were the caretakers of that legacy, paid for with sacrifices of their parents and grandparents, just as al Qaeda and the “axis of evil” were the inheritors of the legacy of 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianism.

If the lines of division in this bipolar world were clear to the Bush administration, it was acknowledged that others who had a similar responsibility to defend freedom might not be willing to do so. Thus the Bush administration found itself making the paradoxical argument that in order to defend international law and norms, it might be necessary to disregard the role of international institutions like the United Nations in policymaking. This was not, Bush suggested, because the U.S. was contemptuous of the international community, but exactly the opposite—the United States honored the obligations of the U.N. Charter and international law so highly that it was willing to act alone if necessary to defend them, when other, more narrowly self-interested states chose to hinder the cause of multilateral action because they sought the path of cost to themselves. In any case, the administration argued, the United States was a powerful, independent state that would not accept limits on its own freedom of action simply because others were weak-willed.

Bush elaborated this conception of the world for the immediate purpose of orienting and mobilizing public opinion, but these assumptions were to a large extent responsible for creating erroneous expectations in the minds of political elites within the administration as well. That Saddam Hussein was concealing weapons of mass destruction; that the Iraqi regime had links with al Qaeda; that American forces would be greeted as liberators by grateful Iraqis—are

conclusions that follow logically and coherently from the set of beliefs and assumptions that the administration described as it constructed its vision of the world after September 11.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Hopf, Social Construction, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Jutta Weldes, Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Hopf, Social Construction, 290.

<sup>4</sup> Hopf, Social Construction, 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of Wilsonian liberalism and the foreign policy of the Bush administration see: Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush: Historical Comparisons of Ends and Means in Their Foreign Policies," Diplomatic History, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2006), 509–543; Max Boot, "George Wilson Bush," Wall Street Journal, July 1, 2002, Editorial Page; Robert Cooper, "Imperial Liberalism," The National Interest, No. 79 (2005), 25–34; David M. Kennedy, "What 'W' Owes to 'WW,'" The Atlantic, No. 295 (March 2005); Melvyn P. Leffler, "9/11 and American Foreign Policy," Diplomatic History, No. 29 (June 2005), 395–96; John B. Judis, The Folly of Empire: What George W. Bush Could Learn from Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson (Oxford University Press, 2004); and John Lewis Gaddis, Surprise, Security, and the American Experience (Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Jervis, American Foreign Policy in a New Era, (Routledge, 2005), 80-83.

<sup>7</sup> Snyder, 54.

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Ricks, Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq, (Penguin, 2006), 8.

<sup>10</sup> David L. Altheide, Jennifer N. Grimes, "War Programming: The Propaganda Project and the Iraq War," The Sociological Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 4 (2005), 617–643. On the history and substance of "neoconservatism," see: Same Tanenhaus, "Bush's Brain Trust," Vanity Fair, no 515 (July 2003); Gary Dorrien, Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana (Routledge, 2004); James Atlas, "What it Takes to Be a Neo-Neoconservative," New York Times, 19 October 2003, Sec. 4, p. 12; Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order (Cambridge, 2004); G. John Ikenberry, "The End of the Neo-Conservative Moment," Survival, 46, No. 1 (Spring 2004), 7-22; Irwin Stelzer, ed., The Neocon Reader (Grove Press, 2004); Irving Kristol, Neoconservatism: the Autobiography of an Idea (Free Press, 1995); Anne Norton, Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire, (Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Colin Dueck, "Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy, 2000-2004," Review of International Studies, 30 (2004), 511-535; Paul Lyons, "George W. Bush's City on a Hill," The Journal of the Historical Society, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 2006), 119–131; Sandra Silberstein, War of Words: Language, Politics, and 9/11 (Routledge, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Stanley A. Renshon and Peter Suedfeld, eds., Understanding the Bush Doctrine: Psychology and Strategy in an Age of Terrorism (Routledge, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States, The White House, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson Diehl, "Rice Produces a Brilliant Synthesis," The Washington Post, 1 October 2002, B3.

<sup>16</sup> Condoleezza Rice, "The Promise of Democratic Peace: Why Promoting Freedom Is the Only Realistic Path to Security," The Washington Post, 11 December 2005, B7.

---

<sup>17</sup> G. John Ikenberry, "Are Bush and Rice the New Liberal Internationalists?" TPM Café, <http://www.tpmcafe.com/story/2006/1/22/204815/880> (accessed 20 January 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Rice, B7.

<sup>19</sup> "The State of the Union: President Bush's State of the Union Address to Congress and the Nation," The New York Times, 30 January 2002, A22.

<sup>20</sup> "State of the Union," New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.

<sup>21</sup> State of the Union," New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.

<sup>22</sup> "State of the Union: President's State of the Union Message to Congress and the Nation," The New York Times, 29 January 2003, A12.

<sup>23</sup> "State of the Union," New York Times, 21 January 2004, A18.

<sup>24</sup> "State of the Union," New York Times, 21 January 2004, A18.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Croft, Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror (Cambridge, 2006); Susan Willis, Portents of the Real: A Primer for Post-9/11 America (Verson, 2005). François Debrix has described an institutional structure of ideology formation including not only the administration but also intellectuals in think tanks and academia who help to shape and reinforce the administration's consensus worldview and convey it to the wider public. The works of authors such as Robert Kaplan, Victor Davis Hanson and Michael Ledeen in Debrix' view "encourage the USA's political and military leadership to embrace terror and violence and to be continuously at war against alleged American enemies... require[ing] their readers to be one with hatred and destruction, and to violently reject anything that appears to be un-American." While such works are "immensely influential in post-9/11 American national security circles," Debrix suggests, they also address a wider audience, seeking to "prepare and condition American citizens for years of ongoing violence, war and possibly terror." François Debrix, "Discourses of War, Geographies of Abjection: Reading Contemporary American Ideologies of Terror," Third World Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 7 (October 2005), 1157 – 1172.

<sup>26</sup> "A Day of Terror: Bush's Remarks to the Nation on the Terrorist Attacks," The New York Times, 12 September 2001, A4.

<sup>27</sup> "A Nation Challenged: President Bush's Address on Terrorism Before a Joint Meeting of Congress," The New York Times, 21 September 2001, B4.

<sup>28</sup> "A Nation Challenged," New York Times, 21 September 2001, B4.

<sup>29</sup> "A Nation Challenged," New York Times, 21 September 2001, B4.

<sup>30</sup> "A Nation Challenged," New York Times, 21 September 2001, B4.

<sup>31</sup> "A Nation Challenged," New York Times, 21 September 2001, B4.

<sup>32</sup> "State of the Union," New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.

<sup>33</sup> "State of the Union," New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.

<sup>34</sup> "State of the Union," New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.

<sup>35</sup> "State of the Union," New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.

- 
- <sup>36</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.
- <sup>37</sup> Michael Sherry, “Dead or Alive: American Vengeance Goes Global,” Review of International Studies, 31 (2005), 245-263.
- <sup>38</sup> Wyn Rees and Richard J. Aldrich, “Contending Cultures of Counterterrorism: Transatlantic Divergence or Convergence?,” International Affairs, Vol. 81, No. 5, 905–923.
- <sup>39</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.
- <sup>40</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.
- <sup>41</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 30 January 2002, A2.
- <sup>42</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 29 January 2003, A12.
- <sup>43</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 29 January 2003, A12.
- <sup>44</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 29 January 2003, A12.
- <sup>45</sup> Regarding the Bush administration’s construction of Iran in particular, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam has outlined the “invented narratives, institutions, norms and other ideational factors” that have defined Iran in particular in the “neo-conservative imagination,” driving post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy toward Iran. ArshinAdib-Moghaddam, “Manufacturing War: Iran in the Neo-conservative Imagination,” Third World Quarterly, Vol. 28, No. 3 (April 2007), 635 – 653.
- <sup>46</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 29 January 2003, A12.
- <sup>47</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 29 January 2003, A12.
- <sup>48</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 29 January 2003, A12.
- <sup>49</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 21 January 2004, A18.
- <sup>50</sup> Michael V. Bhatia, “Fighting Words: Naming Terrorists, Bandits, Rebels and Other Violent Actors,” Third World Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 1 (February 2005), 5-22.
- <sup>51</sup> Robert L. Ivie, “Savagery in Democracy's Empire,” Third World Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 1 (February 2005), 55–65.
- <sup>52</sup> Ikechi Mgbeoji, “The Civilised Self and the Barbaric Other: Imperial Delusions of Order and the Challenges of Human Security,” Third World Quarterly, Vol. 27, No. 5 (July 2006), 855–869.
- <sup>53</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 21 January 2004, A18.
- <sup>54</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 21 January 2004, A18.
- <sup>55</sup> “State of the Union: We Must Pass Reforms That Solve the Financial Problems of Social Security,” The New York Times, 3 February 2005, A22.
- <sup>56</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 3 February 2005, A22.
- <sup>57</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 3 February 2005, A22.

- 
- <sup>58</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 3 February 2005, A22.
- <sup>59</sup> “State of the Union: We Strive to Be a Compassionate, Decent, Hopeful Society,” The New York Times, 1 February 2006, A18.
- <sup>60</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 1 February 2006, A18.
- <sup>61</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 1 February 2006, A18.
- <sup>62</sup> “State of the Union,” New York Times, 1 February 2006, A18..
- <sup>63</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati Museum Center - Cincinnati Union Terminal Cincinnati, Ohio, October 7, 2002. Accessed July 10, 2007; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>
- <sup>64</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>65</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>66</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>67</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>68</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>69</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>70</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>71</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>72</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>73</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>74</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, October 7, 2002.
- <sup>75</sup> Andrew Flibbert, “The Road to Baghdad: Ideas and Intellectuals in Explanations of the Iraq War,” Security Studies, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April-June 2006), 345.
- <sup>76</sup> Flibbert, 311-312, 351.
- <sup>77</sup> Moises Naim, “Bush's Willing Enablers,” Foreign Policy, No. 143 (Jul/Aug 2004), 96-95.
- <sup>78</sup> Flibbert, 312.
- <sup>79</sup> David Hastings Dunn, “Myths, Motivations, and ‘Misunderestimations’: The Bush Administration and Iraq,” International Affairs, Vol. 79, No. 2 (2003), 279-297.
- <sup>80</sup> Woodward, Bush at War, 99; Clarke, Against All Enemies, 30-33; Flibbert, 338
- <sup>81</sup> Jervis, Perception and Misperception, 319-42
- <sup>82</sup> Dick Cheney, “Vice President Honors Veterans of the Korean War,” August 29, 2002.
- <sup>83</sup> Woodward, State of Denial: Bush at War Part III, (Simon and Schuster, 2006), 151.

- 
- <sup>84</sup> Ricks, 96
- <sup>85</sup> Ricks, 4-5.
- <sup>86</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 279.
- <sup>87</sup> Ricks, 13.
- <sup>88</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 122.
- <sup>89</sup> Ricks, 34-38.
- <sup>90</sup> Woodward, Bush at War, 339-40.
- <sup>91</sup> Flibbert, 343-344.
- <sup>92</sup> Reuel Marc Gerech, "Crushing al Qaeda is Only a Start," Wall Street Journal, December 19, 2001.
- <sup>93</sup> Flibbert, 332.
- <sup>94</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 370-71, 381-82.
- <sup>95</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 376, 447.
- <sup>96</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 247-248
- <sup>97</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 247-248
- <sup>98</sup> Gareth Stansfield, "Divide and Heal," Prospect Magazine, 122, (May 2006).
- <sup>99</sup> See Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, "Whither Iraq? Beyond Saddam, Sanctions and Occupation," Third World Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 4-5 (2005), 609-629.
- <sup>100</sup> Feisal Amin Rasoul Al-Istrabadi, "Rebuilding a Nation: Myths, Realities, and Solutions in Iraq," Harvard International Review, (Spring 2007), 14-19.
- <sup>101</sup> Nimrod Raphaeli, "Culture in Post-Saddam Iraq," Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer 2007).
- <sup>102</sup> Raphaeli.
- <sup>103</sup> Ricks, 158-64
- <sup>104</sup> Ismael and Ismael.
- <sup>105</sup> Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq?" Foreign Affairs, Vol. 83 (2004), 43.
- <sup>106</sup> Anthony Zinni, "Making Vietnam's Mistakes All Over Again," New Perspectives Quarterly, (Summer 2004), 24-28.
- <sup>107</sup> Ricks, 192.
- <sup>108</sup> Ricks, 251.
- <sup>109</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 248-249.

---

<sup>110</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 393, 415, 418.

<sup>111</sup> Ricks, 375-376

<sup>112</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 235-238, 259-260.

<sup>113</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 266-67

<sup>114</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 325.

<sup>115</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 328-329.

<sup>116</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 325-326.

<sup>117</sup> Woodward, State of Denial, 219-226