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**Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Key Decisions  
Monograph Series**

**DECISIONMAKING IN  
OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM:**

**REMOVING SADDAM HUSSEIN BY FORCE**

**Steven Metz**

**John R. Martin  
Executive Editor**

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This monograph is the first in a series that discusses decisionmaking during the conduct of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

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## FOREWORD

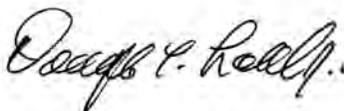
In 1946, General Walter Bedell Smith wrote a series of articles describing six great decisions made in World War II by General Dwight David Eisenhower, for whom General Smith worked as Chief of Staff, Allied Expeditionary Forces.<sup>1</sup> Writing so soon after the war, General Smith could not hope to produce a definitive history, but felt that writing then would document an important viewpoint of one of the major participants in Eisenhower's many significant decisions.

With this initial volume of its Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Key Decisions Monograph Series, the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) also attempts to write about key decisions while they are still fresh in the memories of the participants. As with General Smith's articles, this series will not produce a definitive history; that is still years away. However, the series will make a major contribution to understanding decisions made by senior military and civilian leaders during the several years thus far of the war in Iraq. I am pleased to inaugurate the series, which looks more at the how and why of certain decisions than at the results of those same decisions. This will be particularly useful to senior leaders—both uniformed and civilian—as they reflect on how decisions were made regarding Iraq and how better decisions might be made in future conflicts.

Without taking anything away from Eisenhower's momentous decisions, they seem in some ways to be simpler than those made over the past 8-plus years for the planning and execution of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. As General James Mattis at Joint Forces Command recently said, the challenges of operating in a counterinsurgency can be greater than in large-scale conventional combat, "since the adversary has

more flexibility to determine how, when, where, and whether to fight.”<sup>2</sup> This fact—plus the fact that irregular combat is the more likely challenge of the future operating environment—makes it even more important to examine the key decisions of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM as soon as possible.

I look forward to both the planned monographs and other studies that will be generated by this series. One of the greatest strengths of our Army over the centuries has been its ability to look critically at itself and to devise ways to improve its ability to prosecute the nation’s wars. This series will be a great supplement to that long tradition.



DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, Jr.  
Director  
Strategic Studies Institute

## ENDNOTES - FOREWORD

1. Walter Bedell Smith, *Eisenhower’s Six Great Decisions: Europe, 1944-1945*, New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1956. Originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1946.

2. General James N. Mattis, U.S. Marine Corps, “Vision for a Joint Approach to Operational Design,” Norfolk, VA: U.S. Joint Forces Command, October 6, 2009.

## PREFACE

The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) is pleased to initiate its latest monograph series, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Key Decisions. SSI started this project in an effort to give leaders of the U.S. Armed Forces some important insights into how military advice was provided to the Nation's civilian leadership during the many years—including the months before the invasion—of the war in Iraq. Understanding the ways that military leaders advise those who exercise civilian control over the military is important for the continuing prosecution of that war, but also for the inevitable next time that the United States considers embarking on such an endeavor. A second objective of this series is to provide military and civilian leaders a clearer picture of what they must do to ensure that U.S. Armed Forces are properly prepared—with strategy, doctrine, force structure, equipment, training, and leadership—for future operations.

Literature about the war in Iraq is already extensive, although—as the Foreword states—the definitive history of the war is still undoubtedly years away. However, most of the writing—by policymakers, journalists, scholars, and other students of national security issues—focuses on the *effects* of various decisions, not on the decisions themselves. For example, there is ample writing about how the 2003 decision to “de-Ba’athify” the Iraqi government was executed and what effects it had. How that decision was made, though, has been studied less. With this series, SSI intends to make a valuable addition to the literature on the war in Iraq by addressing *the how and why* of various key strategic decisions that were made over the past 8-plus years of planning and fighting.

Some of the effects will inevitably be discussed as well, but the focus will clearly be on the decisionmaking processes, not the subsequent results.

The facts and data presented and the ensuing analysis will identify the nature of the decisionmaking process involved as either idiosyncratic or systemic. Idiosyncratic decisions can be made based on the circumstances of a particular situation; a unique decision might have been required by the facts on the ground. The sectarian divisions, the long years of repression under Saddam, and the history of American inaction after Operation DESERT STORM in 1991—among other factors—might have combined to create distinctive conditions that led decisionmakers down idiosyncratic paths.

The early years of the Iraq conflict offer several examples of another idiosyncrasy: the personalities of the different people making the key decisions. Different people viewing the same facts of a situation might draw different conclusions and make different decisions. Some key people making decisions about Iraq made dramatically different decisions than would have been expected of other reasonable people. At the very top of the pile is the strong personality of former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, balanced somewhat by equally-forceful Secretary of State Colin Powell. Coordination of the activities of their two Departments, though, was left to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, perhaps hopelessly outweighed—at least in public—by these two long-time players in major national security issues. Whether challenges in decisionmaking were idiosyncratic by personality or situation, though, differentiating them from systemic challenges is clearly important. Some analysts and pundits argue for procedural changes, either by executive fiat or legislative action,

that are not supported by the relevant facts of the particular decision involved. One is the continuing call for a Goldwater-Nichols Act for the entire inter-agency.<sup>1</sup> Attempting to address idiosyncratic issues through systemic changes may not be the right approach; this monograph series should help identify the nature of the factors – processes or personalities – that led to certain decisions and to suggest ways to address any shortcomings.

## SELECTING THE KEY DECISIONS

One of the very first challenges in designing this monograph series was selecting which decisions to analyze. No clear consensus exists on which were the most important decisions from 2002 to today. While SSI remains open to accepting unsolicited manuscripts to add to this series, the following are the decisions that are already planned for research and analysis:<sup>2</sup>

- The decision in 2003 to go to war.
- The decision in 2002 and 2003 to plan for a war of liberation, minimum reconstruction and rapid turnover to an Iraqi government.
- The decision in 2003 to occupy the country rather than quickly returning sovereignty to Iraqis. This analysis will include the accompanying decisions on de-Ba'athification and disbanding the Iraqi Army, both of which had adverse impacts on the ability of the Coalition Provisional Authority to act as the government.
- The decision in 2004 to focus on development of the Iraqi Security Forces.
- The decision in 2004 and beyond to follow a strategy of transitioning the security responsibilities to the Iraqi government.

- The decision in 2007 to “surge” forces into Iraq as part of a strategic shift.

Some of the decisions for analysis are not as discrete as the ones above. Three other monographs will address a variety of decisions that also shaped the war:

- The various decisions that made the fight “more joint.” The traditional definition of joint touches only on how the military forces work together. This monograph, though, will use the broader definition, which includes work with the interagency. Topics to be considered for this analysis may include the publication of joint (embassy and military) campaign plans beginning in 2004, the alignment of the senior military staff with the embassy structure in 2005, and the development of the “joined at the hip” teamwork of the embassy and the military command in 2007. Coalition development could also be a subject for analysis.
- The various decisions that affected the establishment and functioning of the Government of Iraq. Subjects for analysis here would include the 2003 establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council, the transfer of sovereignty in 2004, the 2005 elections, and the 2008 negotiations that resulted in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).
- The various decisions that affect the responsible drawdown of forces in 2009 and beyond. The 2008 SOFA and its implementation may also be considered for this monograph, as would the 2009 decision to move coalition forces out of the cities.

In selecting these particular decisions for analysis, some general criteria were used. The first criterion was that the decisions had to be strategic ones. Distinguishing those decisions from tactical ones—even in an era of “the strategic corporal”—was fairly simple; distinguishing them from operational ones was more challenging. Even within the strategic realm, there was some debate about whether certain decisions were national strategic or theater strategic, getting very close to operational. Suffice it to say that the decisions selected are sufficiently weighty to be analyzed as either strategic decisions or ones made at least at the highest operational levels.

Another criterion was that the decisions be key ones. “Key” may seem redundant with “strategic,” but there were many strategic decisions made that did not rise to the level of key. An example might be the development of the Transitional Administrative Law in 2004.<sup>3</sup> The law was a strategic issue for Iraq, but other options—to include an interim constitution—could have achieved the same purpose. In deciding what was key, a subjective analysis was applied. If a different decision would probably have produced a hugely-different situation in Iraq, that was considered key. For example, sticking with U.S. policy for a rapid transfer of sovereignty in 2004—rather than moving to an occupation—would have fundamentally reshaped the situation in Iraq and is appropriately included as one of the decisions for analysis in this series.

Perhaps a lesser criterion was the amount of uni-formed military involvement in the decision. Since one purpose of the series is to provide military leaders with a better understanding of how they should advise their civilian leaders, selecting decisions with significant

military participation was important. However, in some situations, the national strategic decisions were made with little direct input from uniformed military leaders – as opposed to civilian leaders of the military, who played a larger role. Those decisions – such as the decision to go to war in 2003 – are nonetheless included because of their clear relevance to the military.

Again, there were no formal criteria, but one other informal one was coverage of the various eras of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Each of the various timeframes of the war needed to be covered. The planning phase and the decision to go to war are lumped into one era before the invasion started. Subsequent phases are identified by the military and civilian leadership at the top of the organizations in Iraq. First is the year with Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III in charge of the Coalition Provisional Authority and Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez commanding Combined/Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF-7) in 2003 and 2004. General George Casey commanded the military forces from 2004 to 2007 and was partnered with Ambassadors John Negroponte and Zalmay Khalilzad. General David Petraeus took command from General Casey in early 2007; Ambassador Ryan Crocker took over the embassy in Baghdad a short time later. The final era is now being led by General Raymond Odierno and Ambassador Christopher Hill. Each timeframe is represented by at least one monograph in the series.

## **ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

In the belief that the best publications result when writers are free to organize their own thoughts, SSI seldom gives specific guidance regarding how to write about a particular issue. In the hope of producing a

coherent series, though, it seemed prudent to give some broad guidance so there would be some recognizable similarity between the monographs that will comprise the series. The first bit of guidance has already been discussed: the desire to have each monograph focus on the decision itself, not on the effects of the decision. Those effects will often be described in some limited detail as each author desires, but not so much as to take attention away from the decision analysis.

In added guidance, each author was asked to answer six questions about their analyzed decision:

1. Who were the key decisionmakers?
2. Who shaped or influenced the decision?
3. What was the political and strategic context of the decision?
4. What options were considered?
5. What decisionmaking and analysis process was used?
6. What criteria were used to make the decision?

Authors were also asked to avoid retelling the war. Some basic understanding on the part of the reader is to be assumed; restating the entire operational history did not seem to be required. Individual authors will undoubtedly need to describe some of the events – and there will inevitably be some repetition of these facts in the individual monographs – but a long history does not need to precede each piece of analysis.

As appropriate, authors were also asked to draw conclusions and make relevant policy or other recommendations. The first monograph in this series is a solid example of the type of work expected from other contributors.

## REMOVING SADDAM HUSSEIN BY FORCE

Dr. Steven Metz has done a superb job with the first monograph in the OIF key decisions series with his study of the 2003 decision to go to war. The second monograph in the series, to be published shortly after the first, will also be by Dr. Metz and will cover the strategic shift of 2007—known in the popular vernacular as “the surge.” These two studies act somewhat as bookends for the monograph series. Other monographs in the series will not be published in the chronological sequence in which the decisions occurred, but will generally fill the gaps between the decision to go to war in 2003 and the decision to surge forces in 2007. The one exception will be a monograph on the disengagement decisions after the success of the surge.

Three of Dr. Metz’s major points deserve to be highlighted:

1. **Change in strategic context after September 11, 2001 (9/11).** Some may say that it is blindingly obvious that the strategic context changed after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Others will argue with equal vehemence that the only real change—at least as it would affect calculations to remove Saddam Hussein from power—was in how the administration of President George W. Bush interpreted the new context. As the administration assessed the situation in late 2001 and throughout 2002, Bush’s senior advisors took a maximalist view of the risk of allowing Saddam to remain in power and of the benefits throughout the Middle East of replacing his despotic regime with a democracy. At the same time, the administration viewed through a minimalist lens the costs of removing Saddam and replacing him with a democratic government.

Dr. Metz examines the validity of the administration's conclusions about the strategic context; two of those conclusions were:

- (1) Containment – including sanctions and diplomacy – will not work to remove Saddam or to change his behavior. Only military force will be effective in removing Saddam.
- (2) The United States cannot wait until another terrorist attack is imminent before acting. The power of weapons of mass destruction that terrorists might use forces the United States to act preventively, not just preemptively. The United States must be prepared to act alone if an international coalition cannot be developed.

## **2. Use of crisis processes in making decisions.**

Decisionmaking in the national security arena is always important, but some situations allow time for more deliberation and consideration of options. Dr. Metz argues that the decision to remove Saddam was one of those situations, but that President Bush and his senior advisors used a crisis process instead. Both in 2003 and in 2007 with the surge decision, President Bush saw a window of opportunity that he thought was closing. In 2007, opposition to the war was growing and would eventually force his hand if he did not quickly create better strategic results in Iraq. With the decision to depose Saddam by force, Bush may have believed – in Dr. Metz's words – that “9/11 had provided a political and psychological window of opportunity where the type of bold action needed to address lingering issues was temporarily possible” (p. 47).

In a crisis, the President – even one who normally delegates decisionmaking authority – usually becomes the only decisionmaker that matters. Vice President

Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Powell and National Security Advisor Rice were key advisors, but the broader situation analysis that normally comes with routine decisionmaking was absent. Congressional involvement—whether by executive exclusion or because of congressional willingness to defer taking a politically-risky position—was also minimal. Consideration of international issues was similarly constrained.

**3. Limited involvement of senior military.** This may seem somewhat counterintuitive; decisions to go to war should always be made with the advice of those who will be required to execute the decision. In the American military system, only a very few uniformed officers—for example, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the combatant commanders—have the access to the President to provide direct advice. A confluence of events in 2003 may have diluted the effectiveness even of this limited opportunity to provide advice. First, the military leaders must have a personal relationship with the President that makes him receptive to their advice. That does not appear to have been the case with General Richard Myers (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), General Peter Pace (Vice-Chairman) or General Tommy Franks (Commander of Central Command), the three officers with the most ready access to the President. In addition, none of them may have had any proclivity to provide the strong negative recommendation that might have dissuaded the President from ordering the invasion of Iraq. As is true with the overwhelming majority of senior officers, these three key generals were committed to civilian control of the military and were prepared to execute the orders of the President and Secretary of Defense. Other officers in the same position, though—

while similarly committed to civilian control—might have been more willing to express independent advice about the feasibility—and even the wisdom—of regime change. The challenge of providing such advice was complicated by a third factor: the domineering style of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. Although Secretary Rumsfeld and his supporters may deny it, many senior officers and national security analysts contend that he stifled dissent while leading the Department of Defense. A charitable description of his actions in this regard might say that he wanted to make sure that the positions of the military were coordinated by his office, but the effect was the same. General officers during Rumsfeld’s reign were reluctant—or unable—to voice positions contrary to what Secretary Rumsfeld believed. One key insight that Dr. Metz provides about military advice is that there are two types of advice possible: direct and indirect. While only a few senior officers can provide direct advice, many more have a role when the indirect path is taken. As Dr. Metz writes, the indirect method “entails configuring the military in a way that leads policymakers to opt for certain types of actions and eschew others” (p. 52). The military’s personnel, training, equipment, and force structure—accompanied by its often-stated reputation as the world’s greatest military—led the civilian leaders to believe that the overthrow of Saddam would be a simple affair. When the policymakers expanded their goals to include regime replacement—much harder than regime removal—the military would have advised that the force structure, etc., were inadequate for that task. However, the military’s adaptability—another component of indirect advice—argued that the force could be adapted to that purpose, thus giving the civilian leadership another green light for action.

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Dr. Metz starts this series with an impressive review of the decision to remove Saddam Hussein by force. The Strategic Studies Institute hopes that this and the succeeding monographs will generate debate on just how the United States made decisions – some of them disastrous – about Iraq. The resulting better understanding of the decisions should lead to strengthening of the processes – where appropriate – so that the military and civilian leadership forge better decisions in the future.



JOHN R. MARTIN  
Executive Editor  
OIF Key Decisions Project  
Strategic Studies Institute

## ENDNOTES - PREFACE

1. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 is widely credited with creating truly joint forces in the Department of Defense. “Public Law 99-433, Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986,” Washington, DC: U.S. Congress. Numerous authors have written about a similar act for the interagency. See, for example, the various publications of the “Beyond Goldwater-Nichols Project” of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, available from [csis.org/node/13584/publication](http://csis.org/node/13584/publication).

2. Procedures for submitting unsolicited manuscripts are found at SSI's website, *www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/*. Submissions for this series should be directed to SSI's Director of Research, who will provide them to the series executive editor.

3. The Transitional Administrative Law was the set of laws designed to govern the Iraqi people from the transition of sovereignty in 2004 until a new constitution could be written and a new government elected. Coalition Provisional Authority, "Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period," March 8, 2004, available from *www.cpa-iraq.org/government/TAL.html*.



## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

STEVEN METZ is Chairman of the Regional Strategy Department and Research Professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI). He has been with SSI since 1993, previously serving as Henry L. Stimson Professor of Military Studies and SSI's Director of Research. Dr. Metz has also been on the faculty of the Air War College, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and several universities. He has been an advisor to political campaigns and elements of the intelligence community; served on national security policy task forces; testified in both houses of Congress; and spoken on military and security issues around the world. He is the author of more than 100 publications, including articles in journals such as *Washington Quarterly*, *Joint Force Quarterly*, *The National Interest*, *Defence Studies*, and *Current History*. Dr. Metz's research has taken him to 30 countries, including Iraq immediately after the collapse of the Hussein regime. He currently serves on the RAND Corporation Insurgency Board. He is the author of *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy* and is working on a book entitled *Strategic Shock: Eight Events That Changed American Security*. Dr. Metz holds a Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins University.

JOHN R. MARTIN joined SSI in mid-2009 and is the Institute's specialist in joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational issues. Professor Martin previously served at SSI from 2000 to 2004, serving as the Chairman of the Art of War Department and concurrently as the Institute's Deputy Director. Professor Martin was also a visiting professor at SSI in 2006 and 2007. Professor Martin served in the

U.S. Army for over 31 years, retiring as a colonel. He served extensively in the Republic of Korea, primarily in tactical Aviation, but also with the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission and as commander of a liaison team with the Republic of Korea Army. He also possesses considerable experience in Washington, DC, where he worked on Army force structure, manning the force, the RAH-66 Comanche helicopter program, and providing language training. While in the Army, Professor Martin was operationally deployed to Guam (1975: Operation NEW LIFE), Kosovo (1999: Task Force Falcon), Bosnia (1999-2000: SFOR), Afghanistan (2002: CJTF-180) and Iraq (2003: ORHA/CPA; 2005: MNSTC-I; 2007: MNF-I). Professor Martin was the Executive Editor of *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*. This major government report by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction was published in early 2009 and analyzed the reconstruction of Iraq since 2003. Professor Martin graduated with highest distinction from the College of Naval Command and Staff at the Naval War College, Newport, RI, in 1988. He is a 1996 graduate of the National War College and holds Master's Degrees in National Security Affairs from both institutions. Professor Martin also holds a Master's Degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School and is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School at Patuxent River, MD. He is a 1974 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY.

# DECISIONMAKING IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM:

## REMOVING SADDAM HUSSEIN BY FORCE

### INTRODUCTION

Forcibly removing Saddam Hussein from power was arguably the most momentous act of the Bush administration, its effects profound and far-reaching. For much of the previous decade, the low-level conflict with Iraq had demonstrated how difficult it is for the United States to synchronize force and diplomacy and to apply force in precise, measured doses. It raised questions about whether and when it was necessary or effective to use overwhelming military force—and how to convince the American public and Congress of the need to do this. And it demonstrated the persisting strengths and weaknesses of the American method for strategic decisionmaking, particularly the interplay between crisis and normal decisionmaking, and the role of the uniformed military in the process.

The complex and conflictive U.S. relationship with Iraq emerged from the 1979 revolution in Iran which threatened to destabilize the vital oil-producing Southwest Asia region. In 1980 Saddam Hussein, the brutal dictator of Iraq, decided to invade Iran, his traditional enemy, which was badly weakened by its revolution. After some initial gains, the war turned against Iraq. By 1980, the country teetered on the verge of military defeat, and the Reagan administration offered some assistance.<sup>1</sup> However repugnant, Hussein seemed less threatening than the radical Iranian regime. U.S.-Iraqi relations flipped dramatically after Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Following Iraq's defeat by an American-led coalition, the United States and Hussein

became locked in constant conflict involving low-level military encounters and the potential for escalation. The Iraqi leader kept his region in turmoil by refusing to comply with the conditions he had accepted in 1991 (particularly concerning his ballistic missile and weapons of mass destruction [WMD] programs), constantly testing the resolve of the United States and the world community by challenging the sanctions imposed by the United Nations (UN), and threatening renewed military action against Kuwait.

Both George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton wanted Hussein removed from power, but neither felt this warranted full-scale invasion. Historical analogies always play a powerful role in shaping strategy, and that certainly held in this case. During the Cold War, the United States had become accustomed to containing hostile states. The senior Bush and Clinton applied this logic to the Iraq problem, hoping Saddam Hussein could be contained and perhaps overthrown without major U.S. involvement (as had happened to the Soviet regime). Both feared that aggressive military action against Iraq could benefit Iran and erode American support in the Arab world. This, the two Presidents thought, was a greater risk than allowing a contained Hussein to cling to power. Strategy making often entails selecting the lesser evil from a range of bad options. That was exactly what the senior Bush and Clinton did.

As Hussein clung to power and continued to challenge the United States, frustration grew. By the mid-1990s, mid-level Clinton administration officials and Republicans outside the administration began pushing for more vigorous U.S. action. A January 1998 letter to Clinton from the Project for the New American Century (which would later provide many senior officials to the George W. Bush administration) stated

that American strategy “should aim, above all, at the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime from power.”<sup>2</sup> A few weeks later, 40 prominent former officials including Richard Allen, Frank Carlucci, Robert McFarlane, Donald Rumsfeld, and Caspar Weinberger, sent an open letter to President Clinton, stating, “Only a determined program to change the regime in Baghdad will bring the Iraqi crisis to a satisfactory conclusion.”<sup>3</sup> In October, Congress passed H.R. 4655, the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, which made support for Hussein’s opponents official U.S. policy. It called for assistance to Iraqi opposition organizations, and for the United States to push the UN to create a war crimes tribunal to prosecute Saddam Hussein and other senior Iraqi officials. But the bill also stated, “Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize or otherwise speak to the use of the United States Armed Forces . . . in carrying out this Act” other than providing equipment, education, and training to opposition groups.<sup>4</sup>

The Clinton administration’s support for the removal of Hussein proved mostly rhetorical. In December 1998, for instance, National Security Adviser Samuel Berger stated that the Clinton administration was committed to a “new government” in Baghdad but a few weeks later added that it was “neither the purpose nor the effect” of military strikes against Iraq “to dislodge Saddam from power.”<sup>5</sup> Apparently rejecting regime change through military intervention, Berger said:

The only sure way for us to effect [Saddam Hussein’s] departure now would be to commit hundreds of thousands of American troops to fight on the ground inside Iraq. I do not believe that the costs of such a campaign would be sustainable at home or abroad. And the reward of success would be an American military

occupation of Iraq that could last years. The strategy we can and will pursue is to contain Saddam in the short and medium term, by force if necessary, and to work toward a new government over the long term.<sup>6</sup>

Such vacillation added to criticism of the Clinton policy. In December 1998, a group of influential Republican senators expressed their frustration in a public letter to President Clinton: “Your decision to sign and fully implement the Iraq Liberation Act (P.L.105-338) appeared to be the change of course many of us had urged. . . . Unfortunately, it appears that your commitment to support the political opposition to Saddam Hussein has not trickled down through the Administration.”<sup>7</sup>

Clinton’s challenge was finding a way to get rid of Hussein without a major invasion. The Iraqi dictator had, through the expansion of his security apparatus and brutal repression, virtually “coup proofed” his regime by the mid-1990s.<sup>8</sup> While supporting Iraqi resistance movements had emotional appeal—one analyst likened it to the Reagan Doctrine of the 1980s which helped expel the Soviets from Afghanistan—most Iraq experts were skeptical that it would work.<sup>9</sup> The resistance was weak and divided; Hussein simply was too entrenched to be removed without massive and direct U.S. involvement.<sup>10</sup> This demonstrated a long-standing component of U.S. national security strategy: The United States was willing to undertake major war in response to major aggression, but resisted doing so when facing ambiguous threats below the level of an outright invasion of a neighboring state.

Devoid of other options, the Clinton administration enforced UN sanctions and launched limited air strikes. The thinking behind this seemed to be that continued

pressure would either compel Hussein to change his behavior or inspire the Iraqi military to overthrow him. But as the 1990s wore on, neither seemed likely. Unfortunately, Hussein proved to be a wily opponent. He provoked and challenged the United States but did so in ways that did not justify direct, large-scale military intervention. His sense of the limits of American tolerance was, at the time, accurate.<sup>11</sup> Hussein allowed UN weapons inspectors into Iraq, but kept them from being able to confirm either compliance or noncompliance with UN Security Council resolutions. And he was able to create the impression that the Iraqi people were victimized by the U.S.-enforced sanctions while insulating himself, his family, and his core supporters from the effects. While there is no doubt that the sanctions did hurt lower class Iraqis, Hussein found ways to exacerbate the damage and use this in his anti-sanctions psychological and political campaign. Some Americans bought into this (as did many Europeans and Arabs).<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, though, the Clinton strategy of containment plus regime change—which was based on the idea that the costs and risks of direct intervention outweighed the expected benefits, and that limited military force in small doses could have major strategic effects—did not resolve the conflict. A strategy of containment always requires patience. During the Cold War, American presidents were able to convince the public and Congress that this was necessary. Because Iraq was so much weaker than the Soviet Union, major portions of the public and Congress—particularly Republicans—saw no need for patience. Only Clinton’s lack of resolve, they felt, prevented a satisfactory outcome.<sup>13</sup>

The election of George W. Bush in 2000 and the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks led to a dramatic shift in American strategy toward Iraq. The Bush

administration reassessed the feasibility, costs, and risks of regime change and of leaving Hussein in power. President Bush concluded that Hussein would never comply with the 1991 settlement, that the threat Iraq posed was growing, and that containment and limited force would neither compel compliance nor inspire the Iraqi military to overthrow the dictator. Thus, American security required his removal from power by the only method which assured definitive success: direct military action. In the broadest sense, the Bush strategy altered the calculus of strategic risk and benefit that had been the basis of U.S. policy toward Iraq in the 1990s. The result was Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

## DECISIONMAKERS

In the American system, national security policy may be made by accretion: a number of apparently less significant choices, some crafted by senior leaders other than the President or Congress, combine until the major decision is a foregone conclusion. At other times, there may be a discrete point when a choice is made. The use of force normally falls into this category. Yet unlike the decision by George H.W. Bush to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1990, the decision to use military force to remove Saddam Hussein from power took shape over many months, from the days immediately after 9/11 until the attack was launched in March 2003. Hence it is difficult to identify a precise decision point. Even a Bush administration insider like former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director George Tenet writes, "One of the great mysteries to me is exactly when the war in Iraq became inevitable."<sup>14</sup> One thing is clear, though: The decision was so important that

President Bush himself was the only decisionmaker who mattered. While the president is always the ultimate decisionmaker in American strategy, some presidents delegate extensive authority or rely heavily on advisers. This varies according to the issue at hand and the personal preferences of the president. The more important an issue, the greater the chance that the president will reserve all decisionmaking authority for himself. This is particularly true when considering the use of force.

U.S. Presidents differ in the extent to which they incorporate or defer to advice from career professionals in the military, the intelligence community, the National Security Council (NSC) staff, the State Department, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. On most issues, Clinton gave greater weight to the advice of career professionals than did George W. Bush, and tended to reach deeper into the ranks of professional experts for advice. President Bush, Vice President Richard Cheney, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld believed that career professionals were inherently cautious, tending to oppose bold, radical actions in favor of risk-minimizing steps or the status quo, at least when acting collectively in an institutional framework. President Bush's belief that the 9/11 attacks on the United States demanded bold, radical action—an idea that permeated his speeches—relegated national security professionals to a subsidiary role.

President Bush's decisionmaking style was relatively informal and based on a small group of talented senior advisers. It was more like that of John Kennedy (another supremely confident President) than the formal, staff-focused decision method of Dwight Eisenhower; the delegative method of Ronald Reagan; or the reliance on consultation and consensus-building

used by Clinton and Johnson. This reflected Bush's personal confidence and belief that others instinctively follow bold leaders, and that building consensus among stakeholders before acting leads to lowest common denominator policy. He believed the decisive, action-oriented style of leadership which had served him well throughout his political career would continue to do so, both internationally and domestically. This did allow bold action—it could be a “game changer”—but entailed significant risk, particularly on issues where the President did not have personal expertise. It was the equivalent of a long pass in football—both the potential payoffs and the potential costs were great.

Normally the more protracted a strategic decision, the greater the opportunity for decision shapers—which include an administration's senior appointed officials, government professionals, Congress, and the wider strategic community—to play a role. The decision to remove Saddam Hussein unfolded over an extended period of time (unlike, say, the Kennedy administration's decisionmaking during the Cuban Missile Crisis), but the number of decision shapers was relatively small. Based on the evidence currently available, only Vice-President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had a major effect. This is unusual since normally the longer a decision takes, the greater the number of important participants. President Bush's decision to invade Iraq, then, took the form of crisis decisionmaking—with its limited participation and concentration on a narrow sets of options—rather than normal, non-crisis strategy formulation.<sup>15</sup> This is key to understanding the process.

President Bush's lack of foreign and national security policy experience upon taking office suggested that he

would rely heavily on advisers. He certainly built one of the most experienced national security teams in U.S. history. During the 2000 presidential campaign, Bush's team of foreign and national security policy advisers was led by former NSC staffer Condoleezza Rice. It included former Under Secretary of Defense Paul D. Wolfowitz, former Under Secretary of State Robert B. Zoellick, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard L. Armitage, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle, former diplomat and NSC official Robert Blackwill, former NSC staffer Stephen Hadley, and former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Dov Zakheim.<sup>16</sup> Former Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, former Secretary of State George Shultz, and former National Security Adviser and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell were associated with the campaign but were not members of the core advisory group. Retired military leaders such as former U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commanders General H. Norman Schwarzkopf and General Anthony Zinni endorsed Bush and, presumably, provided advice.<sup>17</sup> Once Bush took office, though, only those in senior administration positions—Cheney, Rice, Powell, Wolfowitz, and Armitage—were directly involved in crafting a post-9/11 strategy and defining Iraq's position within it.

## **DEFINING THE ISSUE**

Most of President Bush's top-level foreign and national security officials had known each other for decades and worked together in previous Republican administrations, some under Nixon and Ford, many under Reagan. During the Clinton administration, they believed that their basic ideas and policy prescriptions

remained valid, but their ability to undertake (and win) political combat had been weakened when the centrist administration of the senior Bush blurred the distinction between liberals and conservatives.<sup>18</sup> People like William Kristol, Robert Kagan, and Gary Schmitt, all of whom had worked in the Reagan administration, led the effort to develop a conservative national security policy framework and methods to promote it. One of the most important steps was the creation of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) to provide a conservative forum on security issues. PNAC's 1997 statement of principles offered an alternative strategic vision, insisting that if the United States revived its military and its confidence, it could recapture the Reagan spirit. The signatories included Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz. Hence the PNAC statement of principles formed part of the conceptual foundation of the Bush strategy.

But while Republicans like Kristol and Kagan, who eventually became known as "neoconservatives," pushed for the active use of American power (particularly military power) to reengineer the post-Cold War world, the administration was initially dominated by the sort of conservative realism seen in the senior Bush's administration.<sup>19</sup> The clearest expression of this thinking was an article for the influential journal, *Foreign Affairs*, written by Condoleezza Rice during the 2000 campaign.<sup>20</sup> Rather than setting clear priorities based on American national interests, Rice argued, Clinton approached every issue serendipitously, never attempting to see them in a larger perspective. To gain the approval of other nations, Clinton pursued multilateral solutions, even when doing so was not in the American interest. Rice advocated a clear focus on the few "big powers" which could disrupt international

peace, stability, and prosperity. In a 1999 speech at the Citadel, presidential candidate Bush attacked President Clinton for “sending our military on vague, aimless, and endless deployments” and pledged to “replace uncertain missions with well-defined objectives.”<sup>21</sup> Rice expanded this idea, supporting “building the military of the 21st century rather than continuing to build on the structure of the Cold War.”<sup>22</sup> U.S. technological advantages, she felt, “should be leveraged to build forces that are lighter and more lethal, more mobile and agile, and capable of firing accurately from long distances.”<sup>23</sup>

Rice did not spell out exactly what the transformed U.S. military was to do. Presumably it would dissuade competitive great powers, especially Russia and China, from challenging the status quo through military means, and deter or defeat “rogue regimes and hostile powers”<sup>24</sup> such as North Korea, Iraq, and Iran (although it was not immediately evident why this required lighter, more lethal, mobile, and agile forces). She was clear, though, on what the U.S. military should *not* do:

The president must remember that the military is a special instrument. It is lethal, and it is meant to be. It is not a civilian police force. It is not a political referee. And it most certainly is not designed to build a civilian society. Military force is best used to support clear political goals, whether limited, such as expelling Saddam from Kuwait, or comprehensive, such as demanding the unconditional surrender of Japan and Germany during World War II. It is one thing to have a limited political goal and to fight decisively for it; it is quite another to apply military force incrementally, hoping to find a political solution somewhere along the way. A president entering these situations must ask whether decisive force is possible and is likely to be effective and must know how and when to get out.<sup>25</sup>

Rice was describing what were often called the Weinberger and Powell “principles” – the idea that military force should only be used when public and congressional support exists for clear and well-defined *military* objectives; when those conditions apply, the force used should be overwhelming.<sup>26</sup> Rice believed that the United States should not use force as the Clinton administration had: for peacekeeping in areas of limited U.S. interests and in ways too limited to have a decisive outcome. But this perspective was not opposed to the use of force in any circumstance. In fact, quite the opposite was true. Rice and Bush’s other top advisers – as well as neoconservatives outside the government who helped shape the administration’s thinking – believed that a confident, active, and powerful United States could and should engineer global security by relying heavily on its overwhelming military power which promised to grow even further through investment in transformative technologies and systems. They placed little stock in international organizations and felt that multilateralism could be as much of a hindrance to effective strategy as a help.

When the Bush administration took office, its immediate concerns were China, reenergizing the transformation of the American military, and stopping or slowing the proliferation of WMD and other advanced technology. Then 9/11 altered not only the Bush strategy, but also the dynamics of decisionmaking. President Bush himself became more directly involved, with Vice-President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld – the most aggressively hawkish advisers – playing major roles.<sup>27</sup> Still, it was not a foregone conclusion that the war on terrorism would target Iraq. That nation had played only a minor

part in the 2000 presidential campaign. It seldom came up in speeches and debates, even ones dealing with international affairs or national security. When the Republican platform mentioned Iraq, it offered no new ideas but only insisted that existing policies be enforced. "A new Republican administration," it stated, "will patiently rebuild an international coalition opposed to Saddam Hussein and committed to joint action."<sup>28</sup> Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, though, President Bush wondered if Saddam Hussein might have played a part, indicating that the Iraq problem was on his mind from the beginning.<sup>29</sup> He asked Richard Clarke, the counterterrorism director on the NSC, to look into it but did not press the issue, instead concentrating on the more immediate problem of Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> During post-9/11 strategy sessions, a cleft emerged in the administration. Secretary of State Powell—ever the cautious realist—advocated a narrow counterterrorism campaign focused primarily on al Qaeda.<sup>31</sup> This, he believed, would maximize international support and follow the guidelines for the use of force which he had developed a decade earlier.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz and I. Lewis Libby, Vice-President Cheney's chief of staff and confidant, proposed a broader effort designed to eliminate not only al Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan but also terrorist bases in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley, Iraq, or elsewhere. They were not, however, able to sell this idea to President Bush, at least initially. In the broadest sense, the administration was torn between simply addressing existing threats and a much more ambitious notion based on altering the architecture of the global security system. This reflected profound strategic and philosophical differences over the utility of military force. Was it, as Powell contended, a tool of

last resort to be used for clear and limited objectives or was it, as Wolfowitz believed, an implement for systemic reengineering? Initially President Bush stuck to the limited notion, indicating that he would deal with Saddam Hussein later. Eventually, though, Bush's thinking about strategy and force shifted, from the limited notion that dominated his father's administration (and was still advocated by Secretary Powell) to the more expansive one associated with the neoconservative movement. This moved Iraq from the periphery of the war on terrorism to its bull's eye, and demonstrated the extent to which broad strategic concepts, even philosophies about the use of force, influence specific decisions.

## DECISION SHAPERS

Outside the administration, many conservative writers, intellectuals, and former policymakers began promoting war against Saddam Hussein. The October 1, 2001, cover of *The Weekly Standard*, which had become the most influential voice of the neoconservative perspective, had a "wanted" poster with side-by-side pictures of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, suggesting their equal importance in transnational terrorism. William Kristol—the former Reagan official who edited *The Weekly Standard*—became one of the most persistent promoters of removing Saddam Hussein by force. Laurie Mylroie, a Harvard Ph.D. who had long contended that Saddam Hussein orchestrated the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and many other attacks, provided additional intellectual fuel (and became a favorite of Vice-President Cheney).<sup>32</sup> Without specifically naming the state, former CIA Director James Woolsey ominously wrote, "There are

substantial and growing indications that a state may, behind the scene, be involved in the attacks [of 9/11].”<sup>33</sup> Richard Perle, who headed Rumsfeld’s Defense Policy Board, opined that “the war against terrorism cannot be won if Saddam Hussein continues to rule Iraq.”<sup>34</sup> Charles Krauthammer, the most consistently brilliant of the conservative policy pundits, first linked 9/11 and WMD, arguing that after the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Syria should be “stage two” and Iraq “stage three” of the war on terrorism.<sup>35</sup> Conservative icon William Buckley, in his obtuse way, also sketched the connection between Hussein and bin Laden.<sup>36</sup>

Writing in Buckley’s *National Review*, the bastion of mainstream conservative thinking, Richard Lowry claimed, “Early indications are that Iraq had a hand in the 9/11 attacks. But firm evidence should be unnecessary for the U.S. to act. It doesn’t take careful detective work to know that Saddam Hussein is a perpetual enemy of the United States.”<sup>37</sup> This phrasing presaged what would become the Bush administration’s key argument: even without evidence of a functional connection between Hussein and al Qaeda, there was enough surface similarity—particularly hatred of the United States and a track record of violence—that America must act as if a connection existed. And even without such a connection, Hussein posed an enduring threat which could be eliminated in the post-9/11 political climate. A political opportunity for resolving a festering problem and, equally importantly, demonstrating America’s resolve to both friends and enemies was created on 9/11.<sup>38</sup>

Two important books added detail to the case against Hussein: William Kristol and Lawrence Kaplan’s *The War Over Iraq* and Kenneth Pollack’s *The Threatening Storm* (which expanded a *Foreign Affairs*

article).<sup>39</sup> Having served in the CIA, on the NSC, and at the National Defense University during the Clinton administration, Pollack's conversion to the war camp was noteworthy. The depth of his knowledge and understanding of Iraq added credibility to his call for action. Pollack's article and book, as Joshua Micah Marshall put it, "played a key role in making a military solution to the Iraq problem respectable within the nation's foreign policy establishment."<sup>40</sup> Outside the Beltway, conservative talk radio hosts—most importantly Rush Limbaugh and the Fox News Network—trumpeted the need to remove Saddam Hussein from power, ridiculing anyone who opposed the idea. In all likelihood, though, the chorus of advocacy for attacking Saddam Hussein had little direct influence on President Bush. There is little indication that he drew ideas from *National Review* or *Weekly Standard*. But the pundits and writers did assist the hard liners inside the administration by preparing the public and hence Congress for military action, making the decision to invade seem feasible and necessary. While the Bush administration placed less stock in public opinion than the Clinton administration, it clearly could not ignore it altogether.

Ironically, much of the initial resistance to attacking Iraq came not from the Democratic party or the political left, but from conservatives of the realist school. L. Paul Bremer, who had been President Reagan's ambassador at large for counterterrorism and an assistant to Henry Kissinger, argued that other potential targets were more integral to al Qaeda and hence should have priority.<sup>41</sup> Brent Scowcroft—the dean of conservative realists who had served as National Security Adviser to Presidents Ford and George H. W. Bush—warned that the war on terrorism would require a broad and

effective coalition.<sup>42</sup> Military action against Iraq could endanger international cooperation, he felt, and thus was a bad idea. This particular debate eventually became central. Those opposing military action against Saddam Hussein stressed the likely strategic costs and adverse second order effects of invasion. Those supporting it downplayed this, arguing that the intervention would be relatively easy and cheap.

Career security professionals within the government seemed to play only a minor role in President Bush's decision to remove Saddam Hussein by force. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did express some reservations about the costs and risks of intervention.<sup>43</sup> But none of this was made public. The only exception came from Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki in February 2003 (a few weeks before the invasion). While Bush administration officials had been downplaying the potential costs and risks of war with Iraq, Shinseki, when pressed during congressional testimony, said that, in his professional judgment, occupation duty in Iraq would require "several hundred thousand" troops.<sup>44</sup> While General Shinseki did not intend this as an act of public dissent, the Bush administration fired back. Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz disputed Shinseki's assessment, telling Congress that other nations would provide money and forces for the reconstruction of Iraq. And, he continued, "I am reasonably certain that [the Iraqi people] will greet us as liberators, and that will help us to keep requirements down . . . we can say with reasonable confidence that the notion of hundreds of thousands of American troops is way off the mark."<sup>45</sup> Secretary Rumsfeld piled on, stating in a press conference that "the idea that it would take several hundred thousand U.S. forces I think is far from the mark. The reality is that we already have a number of countries that have offered to participate

with their forces in stabilization activities, in the event force has to be used."<sup>46</sup> Vice-President Cheney echoed these comments: "I really do believe that we will be greeted as liberators . . . to suggest that we need several hundred thousand troops there after military operations cease, after the conflict ends, I don't think is accurate. I think that's an overstatement."<sup>47</sup> Other senior military leaders understood that this rebuke meant that the administration had made its decision and was not interested in contrary positions. There is, for instance, no available evidence to suggest that CENTCOM Commander General Tommy Franks opposed or influenced the decision for military intervention.<sup>48</sup> The Bush administration clearly excluded its uniformed military advisers from decisions involving national security policy or grand strategy.

Professionals in the State Department were also peripheral to the decisionmaking. The Bush administration was convinced that the Foreign Service's experts were inherently hostile to any use of force. Moreover, the administration believed the State Department's regional experts too often adopted the attitudes and perspectives of Arab governments, most of whom opposed military action either out of fear that it would leave Saddam Hussein even more dangerous or popular, or simply because they could not tolerate the idea of another defeat of an Arab military by a Western one. It seemed, then, that the administration's policymakers did not fully consult with Foreign Service experts because they knew that the advice they would get would not be what they wanted.<sup>49</sup> Senior officials preferred to consult Iraqi émigrés who did advocate removing Hussein by any means necessary.

Intelligence professionals also had little influence. Senior administration officials believed that the failure

to prevent the 9/11 attacks demonstrated the inherent flaws and weaknesses of the intelligence community.<sup>50</sup> Like the uniformed military, the intelligence community was seen as too slow, cautious, uncreative, and hidebound for the new security environment. Just as Rumsfeld filled the perceived vacuum in military creativity with his own strategic ideas, he used the Office of the Secretary of Defense, particularly Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, to make a case for military intervention in Iraq by connecting the dots in ways that the intelligence community could not or would not.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Congress was seen as a body that needed to be convinced once the decision to remove Hussein by force was made, not as a participant in the decision itself. There is no evidence that any member of Congress substantially influenced the decision process.

## **POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

Framing an issue—deciding what it is part of or related to—sets decisionmaking on a specific trajectory and helps define the range of options which are considered (or not considered). In the eyes of President Bush and his key advisers, particularly Vice-President Cheney, 9/11 shattered America's traditional strategic concepts. The initial task for the administration was creating a replacement conceptual framework which reflected the new threat. Traditional political realism—the conceptual framework and philosophy of the George H. W. Bush administration—emphasized nation states and power balances and thus offered no solution to the threat from transnational terrorism. The Clinton approach, with its focus on multilateralism and tendency to treat terrorism

as a judicial or law enforcement problem, had not worked. As the Bush administration searched for new ideas, the neoconservatives (or, more accurately, “conservative idealists”) offered an appealing and coherent alternative. This had several components. First was the notion that the United States must not simply destroy al Qaeda, but must alter the political, economic, strategic, social, and psychological system that gave rise to it. Ironically, this reflected the Kennedy revolution in American strategy during the Cold War. Rather than simply countering Soviet power and enforcing stability, Kennedy believed the United States should help address the frustration, discontent, and anger in the Third World which Moscow exploited. Democratization, economic development, and support for decolonization became as important to American strategy as military strength.

The Bush administration and its supporters believed that Ronald Reagan’s promotion of democracy and market-based economic reforms had destroyed communism, thus transforming the global political, economic, and strategic system. But the “Reagan revolution” was incomplete. Not applying it to the Islamic world had allowed a new militant ideology – violent anti-Western extremism – to emerge. While the threat was different, the solution was the same: The Bush administration was much inclined to attempt to replicate Reagan’s methods, seeing the Reagan administration as its model and conceptual forebear. Hence, promoting democratization and market-based economic reform in the Islamic world became a key component of the Bush strategy for the war on terrorism. The challenge was finding a way to do this without unleashing disastrous regional instability. What was needed was a laboratory, a test case, and a catalyst to demonstrate the advantages of democracy

and market-based economics in an Islamic context. According to the Bush administration's strategic theorists like Paul Wolfowitz and key thinkers outside the administration, Iraq, with its abundant natural resources and extensive middle class (which was widely perceived as secular and nationalistic), was the logical candidate.<sup>52</sup>

Altering the system which gave rise to violent Islamic extremism, according to the Bush administration, required leadership which only the United States could provide. Democratic reformers within the Islamic world were stifled by authoritarian regimes, whether Saddam Hussein's parasitic and pathological one; the stultifying, traditional, and conservative Saudi royal family; or the bureaucratic dictatorship of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. Thus there was little likelihood for reform and democratization – for system-changing action – without an outside injection of energy. President Bush believed that if the United States developed an effective plan for dealing with transnational terrorism and the conditions which gave rise to it, the world “will rally to our side.”<sup>53</sup> This led the administration to conclude that it must not allow disapproval or even outright opposition from America's traditional allies to constrain the actions necessary to crush violent extremism and transnational terrorism.

As the new Bush strategy developed, it became clear that military power would play a central role in the war on terrorism. In a sense, this was a strange notion. The most important tasks of the systemic redesign – democratization, economic reform, and the destruction of small, clandestine terrorist networks – were not things the U.S. military (or any conventional military) was designed to do. The Bush administration squared this circle by stressing the importance of state

sponsorship for transnational terrorists. Because the Taliban regime in Afghanistan had provided sanctuary to al Qaeda as it planned the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration concluded that without such sanctuary, al Qaeda would be less effective or ineffective. The war on terrorism was less a war because of similarity to past wars than because approaching it as war signaled determination and seriousness—and justified reliance on military power. The success of the 2001-02 campaign in Afghanistan reinforced this notion and was thought to validate the “Rumsfeld revolution” in military strategy which stressed jointness, maximum operational speed, the integration of cutting-edge technology (particularly information technology), and a minimum force for the task at hand.<sup>54</sup>

One of the most crucial—and revolutionary—concepts of the new Bush strategy was the notion that unaddressed threats would worsen. During the Cold War, Americans concluded that if the Soviet Union was contained and deterred, it would collapse. Victory for the West was inevitable. Following 9/11, the Bush administration—especially Vice President Cheney—jettisoned the idea that threats could be contained or deterred. This reflected a fundamentally different perception of the enemy. During the Cold War, Americans believed that the Soviets wanted to control or dominate the world, not destroy it. Hence Moscow was not suicidally bent on harming the United States or its allies. Conflict between East and West was inevitable, but could be controlled. The two blocs could co-exist for an extended, indeterminate period. In the war on terrorism, the perception was that al Qaeda and, importantly, states or organizations which appeared to share its hatred of the West (such as Iraq), were, in fact, suicidally bent on harming the

United States and could not be deterred. They were “irrational.”<sup>55</sup> Hussein had demonstrated an eagerness to obtain WMD, the administration argued, and might give them to terrorists who would use them against the United States.<sup>56</sup> Hence he had to be removed from power regardless of the cost.

While the 9/11 attacks relied on thoroughly conventional technology (albeit used in a new way), the President and his advisers considered the potential combination of terrorism and WMD, particularly nuclear or biological ones, the most important threat. This was inspired by a series of intelligence warnings in September and October 2001 which suggested that al Qaeda was planning another spectacular attack using even more powerful weapons, and by information collected in Afghanistan which showed al Qaeda’s interest in WMD.<sup>57</sup> But groups like al Qaeda, the administration concluded, could not obtain WMD without help. This probably meant a state. Before 9/11, both terrorism experts and popular culture treated criminal organizations from the former Soviet Union as the most likely source of WMD for terrorists. The most common image was of a corrupt and renegade former KGB official, perhaps from one of Russia’s restive ethnic minorities, selling old Soviet nuclear or biological weapons. Now attention turned to hostile states acting not for money but as a policy decision.

Just as the Soviet Union had sponsored Third World insurgents during the Cold War, Bush assumed that America’s enemies would use transnational terrorists as proxies to balance U.S. military strength. This was a frightening prospect. American power—and the American engineered world order—relied on deployable military strength. If the United States could be deterred by WMD, whether in the hands of hostile dictators or terrorists, the strategy unraveled. American

power could be rendered irrelevant. Reflecting this concern, President Bush stated that he would make no distinction between terrorists and states which “knowingly harbor or provide aid to them.”<sup>58</sup> The administration never explained why Hussein might do something so risky as to provide WMD to terrorists (whom he could not control), but in the post-9/11 climate of fear, the American public (or Congress) never demanded such an explanation. Eventually this idea that threats must be addressed before they mature developed into what became known as the “Bush doctrine.”<sup>59</sup>

## AN ITERATIVE DECISION

While the military operation in Afghanistan was in its early stages, the administration seemed content to keep discussion of Iraq simmering but not boiling. In mid-October 2001, National Security Adviser Rice told an Arab satellite television network that “we worry about Saddam Hussein. We worry about his weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>60</sup> A few weeks later she added, “The world would clearly be better and the Iraqi people would be better off if Saddam Hussein were not in power.” But she also cautioned, “I think it’s a little early to start talking about the next phases of this war.”<sup>61</sup> As usual, Rice was the best gauge of the President’s own thinking. In the months after 9/11, Bush remained convinced that the Hussein problem had to be resolved, but had not yet decided how to do so.

While most attention was on Afghanistan, Cheney and Wolfowitz continued to push the Iraq issue. Wolfowitz was convinced that removing Hussein could inspire democratic change in the Islamic world; Cheney

was consumed with the possible linkage between transnational terrorism, state supporters of terrorism, and WMD.<sup>62</sup> Given the Vice-President's influence in the administration, this shifted the overall balance of power. Cheney was, in journalist Bob Woodward's words, "a powerful, steamrolling force."<sup>63</sup> George Tenet and others have suggested that while Powell, Rice, Rumsfeld, and Zinni (the administration's special envoy to the Middle East) had not decided whether the invasion of Iraq was necessary at this point, Cheney, Wolfowitz, Libby, and Feith composed an informal lobby for war with Hussein.<sup>64</sup> Their effect was not long in coming as President Bush also began taking a harder line. In a November 26, 2001, press conference, he stated, "Mr. Saddam Hussein, he needs to let inspectors back in his country, to show us that he is not developing weapons of mass destruction." When asked what the consequences would be if Hussein did not readmit weapons inspectors, Bush said, "He'll find out."<sup>65</sup>

By the spring of 2002, President Bush and other senior officials stopped indicating that *if* Hussein did not take certain actions, he would be removed from power and began stating he *would* be removed from power. At least half of the strategic decision had been made. The central question is why? Why, after a decade of containment, had Saddam Hussein become intolerable? Everyone knew that Hussein did not have operational nuclear weapons. Nearly everyone believed that he had stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, or at least the ability to make them. But policymakers, strategists, and defense experts understood the limited utility of such devices. Properly trained and equipped military forces can overcome chemical and biological attacks. As the Japanese experience with Aum

Shinriko showed, chemical and biological weapons are of marginal use in terms of attaining political objectives. They can cause fear and turmoil, but cannot bring strategic success. It was not, then, that Saddam Hussein stepped across some discernible threshold which demanded his removal, but that President Bush was convinced that trends were adverse; the window of opportunity for resolving the problem would soon close as the sanctions crumbled, the emotions of 9/11 faded, and Hussein revived his WMD program.

Why would that matter? According to the Bush administration, it would allow Saddam Hussein to deter the United States and thus free him to renew the conventional aggression he had undertaken in 1980 and 1990. This is a peculiar argument. Hussein had missiles and chemical and biological weapons in 1991 and that had not deterred the U.S. military. Certainly nuclear weapons would have been a greater concern, but no Bush administration official explained why a threat to retaliate in kind for any use of nuclear weapons would not suffice as it had with other hostile nuclear powers like the Soviet Union and China, or why air strikes, which thwarted the Iraqi nuclear program in the 1980s, would not work. Ultimately the administration's case was built on potential and intent rather than capability. President Bush insisted that Hussein with WMD *could* "dominate the Middle East and intimidate the civilized world."<sup>66</sup> Yet history suggests that possession of nuclear weapons does not automatically give a nation the ability to dominate a region or intimidate the world. Neither President Bush nor his advisers explained why an Iraq with such weapons could do so. As so often during the build up to war with Iraq, the administration's position was based on an assumption of historical discontinuity – that what held in the past would not in the future.

According to the Bush administration, Hussein's WMD programs also mattered because he *could* give them to terrorists. But, again, policymakers never explained why Hussein would do something so potentially suicidal. He had WMD for more than 2 decades and had not offered them to terrorists. What would lead him to do so in the future? Nothing in his background suggested that he would act in a way that endangered his grip on power or control over the implements of power that he had accumulated. Again, the administration claimed a historical discontinuity: Hussein's behavior would be markedly (and dangerously) different in the future than in the past. It did this without evidence or explanation. In the post-9/11 climate of fear and anger, none was demanded.

While the notion of the "gathering storm" may have been the Bush administration's primary motive as it moved toward war with Iraq, the idea of opportunity also mattered. Saddam Hussein was so despicable, administration policymakers believed, that most of the world would accept his removal even if not openly welcoming it. With the memory of 9/11 still fresh, Saddam Hussein's ties to terrorism had great emotional impact with the American public. Administration officials hammered them relentlessly. During his September 2002 address to the UN General Assembly, Bush said that "Iraq continues to shelter and support terrorist organizations that direct violence against Iran, Israel, and Western governments."<sup>67</sup> He did not identify these groups. President Bush later stated that Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda "work in concert." "The danger," he said, "is that al Qaeda becomes an extension of Saddam's madness and his hatred and his capacity to extend weapons of mass destruction around the world."<sup>68</sup> The President did not explain or substantiate this point.

Vice President Cheney was the most persistent and rhetorically skilled at linking Hussein and al Qaeda. In a September 2002 interview, he first stated, "I'm not here today to make a specific allegation that Iraq was somehow responsible for 9/11," but then went on to list purported ties between Iraq and al Qaeda.<sup>69</sup> These included the claim (later disproved) that Mohamed Atta, the lead 9/11 hijacker, met senior Iraqi intelligence officials in Prague. Iraq and al Qaeda, the Vice President added, had "a pattern of relationships going back many years . . . we've seen al-Qaeda members operating physically in Iraq and off the territory of Iraq."<sup>70</sup> National Security Advisor Rice followed along: "no one is trying to make an argument at this point that Saddam Hussein somehow had operational control of what happened on 9/11," but al Qaeda personnel "found refuge in Baghdad" after they were expelled from Afghanistan.<sup>71</sup>

As military action became more likely, the administration continued to escalate its rhetoric. In a February 2003 radio address, President Bush said:

Saddam Hussein has longstanding, direct and continuing ties to terrorist networks. Senior members of Iraqi intelligence and al Qaeda have met at least eight times since the early 1990s. Iraq has sent bomb-making and document forgery experts to work with al Qaeda. Iraq has also provided al Qaeda with chemical and biological weapons training. And an al Qaeda operative was sent to Iraq several times in the late 1990s for help in acquiring poisons and gases.<sup>72</sup>

A month later President Bush added that Saddam Hussein "provides funding and training, and safe haven to terrorists who would willingly deliver weapons of mass destruction against America and other peace-loving countries."<sup>73</sup> Saddam Hussein,

Bush said, “has trained and financed al Qaeda-type organizations before, and al Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations.”<sup>74</sup> In his speech to the UN a few weeks before the onset of war, Powell described a “sinister nexus” between Iraq and al Qaeda, mentioning the presence of the terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (whose ties with al Qaeda were not clear at that time) and the al Qaeda affiliated organization Ansar al-Islam in Iraq (even though it was in a part of the country which Saddam Hussein did not control), meetings between al Qaeda and Iraqi intelligence agents (some supposedly including Osama bin Laden himself), and reports that Iraq had sent trainers to al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan.<sup>75</sup> While admitting that Saddam Hussein was not responsible for the 9/11 attacks, administration officials structured speech after speech so that the two were linked. Often this was done simply by discussing 9/11 and Saddam Hussein in sequence. To take one example, in an October 7, 2002, speech by President Bush in Cincinnati, the second paragraph discusses Iraq’s violations of UN resolutions, the third paragraph is an emotional reminder of 9/11, and the fourth paragraph returns to a discussion of Saddam Hussein.<sup>76</sup> While no explicit connection was made, an implicit one was.

Given the Bush administration’s extraordinary discipline at staying on message, all of its members hammered the connection between Saddam Hussein, terrorism, and WMD. For instance, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld told Congress that hostile states “have discovered a new means of delivering” WMD—terrorist networks. They “*might* transfer WMD to terrorist groups . . .”<sup>77</sup> (Emphasis added.) No one demanded that Rumsfeld offer evidence that Iraq had “discovered” the utility of giving WMD to terrorists

after 9/11. If anything, the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan should have demonstrated the *disutility* of supporting terrorists. But in the political climate of the time, simply linking a threat to 9/11 was enough to persuade. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had, in a very real sense, dulled critical inclinations on the part of Congress and much of the American public.<sup>78</sup> No elected official was willing to seem soft in the war on terrorism. So the Bush administration skillfully used a false syllogism: al Qaeda's leaders were Arabs who hated the United States and would do anything to harm it; Saddam Hussein was an Arab who hated the United States, therefore he would do anything to harm America.

Still, it was hard to convince most of the public and Congress outside the far right fringe that a few meetings or the provision of sanctuary to old, retired terrorists like Abu Nidal justified war. This led the administration to place the greatest emphasis on Saddam Hussein's WMD programs as it made the case for invasion. To President Bush, Hussein's failure to demonstrate compliance with the UN resolutions demanding the dissolution of his WMD program suggested that he had not done so. Claims that Iraq sought additional fissile material and had purchased high grade aluminum tubes added to the point. In early 2003, CIA Director Tenet told Congress, "Iraq has established a pattern of clandestine procurements designed to constitute its nuclear weapons program. These procurements include—but also go well beyond—the aluminum tubes that you have heard so much about."<sup>79</sup> As usual, Vice-President Cheney pushed the point the furthest, stating, "Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon."<sup>80</sup> In a February 2003 address to the UN Security Council, Powell said, "We know that Saddam Hussein is determined to keep

his weapons of mass destruction; he's determined to make more."<sup>81</sup> Powell's personal credibility convinced many skeptics that the administration's picture of the threat from Hussein was accurate.

Why did the administration push so hard on Hussein's WMD capabilities? In part, this reflected an enduring tension in the American strategic culture. In the United States, the public and its elected leaders in Congress have a say in national security policy but often lack a sophisticated understanding of the strategic environment. This means that strategy must be marketed. Once President Bush opted for war against Iraq, he had to convince Congress and the public. But his case was not self-evident to those not schooled in national security affairs. It was based on conjecture and potential – what Saddam Hussein *could* do rather than what he *was* doing. To convince the public and Congress with an inherently weak body of evidence, the Bush administration approached it like a courtroom lawyer, never lying but carefully promoting information which bolstered its position and ignoring information which weakened it. Rather than developing an explanation which best fit the information, it used information to support a speculative explanation.

While this might not have been possible in normal times, it was in the post-9/11 political climate. Fear and anger can be liberating, making the impossible or implausible suddenly seem feasible, even necessary. The United States was experiencing a collective and sustained adrenalin rush. Aggressive action against anyone vaguely sympathetic to al Qaeda was an easy sell to the public and Congress. Doubters – mostly on the political left – remained mute or ineffective. The administration convinced Congress and the public that 9/11 delegitimized deterrence. And they skillfully

and selectively used intelligence to further their case, discounting that which did not support their preconceptions. The thinking was that the failure to prevent the 9/11 attacks demonstrated the inherent flaws and weaknesses of the intelligence community, particularly at “connecting the dots” without clear information.

Ultimately, then, the Bush administration’s case combined both facts and assumptions.

### **Facts.**

- Hussein had stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, and ballistic missiles in the 1990s;
- Hussein had a program to acquire nuclear weapons which was within a few years of fruition by 1990;
- Iraq retained the expertise to develop nuclear weapons;
- Hussein had, for a decade, failed to demonstrate that he had complied with resolutions demanding that he destroy his WMD stockpiles, ballistic missiles of a certain range, and programs to develop additional WMD or ballistic missiles;
- Hussein had, for a decade, obstructed UN efforts to verify his compliance with resolutions;
- Hussein had an extensive track record of aggression against and coercion of neighboring states. He wanted to dominate his region.

### **Assumptions.**

- Hussein’s refusal to verify compliance with UN resolutions and obstruction of weapons

inspectors attempting to verify his compliance indicated that he had not complied;

- Hussein would not comply until forced to do so;
- The sanctions against Iraq would soon collapse. Russia and France sought economic opportunities in Iraq and debt repayment; the Arab world was duped by Hussein's propaganda about the human costs of sanctions (costs which he intentionally created and manipulated);
- If the sanctions were lifted, Hussein would resuscitate his WMD and missile programs. Given that Iraq still had the expertise to produce nuclear weapons, it would, according to an October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate, be able to build one "within several months to a year" if it acquired sufficient fissile material from abroad;<sup>82</sup>
- If the sanctions were lifted, Hussein would rebuild his conventional military;
- Once Hussein rebuilt his military and had a nuclear weapon to deter American involvement, he would return to his longstanding pattern of aggression against his neighbors. This might take the form of invasion or simply coercion.

The only assured resolution was removal of Hussein.

## OPTIONS

Having decided that Saddam Hussein had to go, the Bush administration initially hoped this could be done covertly—the same idea that had appealed to Clinton. President Bush signed a new intelligence order which expanded CIA operations in Iraq and links

to Iraqi opposition groups, allocating \$100 million to the plan.<sup>83</sup> There was little indication, though, that this would have any greater effect in 2002 than it had in the 1990s. According to former CIA Director Tenet, “Our analysis concluded that Saddam was too deeply entrenched and had too many layers of security around him for there to be an easy way to remove him.”<sup>84</sup>

As the Afghan campaign moved toward an apparently successful conclusion in early 2002, administration officials gave greater attention to Iraq. While the decision that Saddam Hussein must be removed seemed to have generated little debate or disagreement within the administration, exactly how to go about it was more contentious. In the broadest sense, the options were:

- Exhaust diplomatic alternatives, then use armed force in conjunction with allies and with UN approval if possible, but unilaterally and without explicit UN approval if necessary;
- Exhaust diplomatic alternatives, then use armed force but only with a robust coalition and UN approval;
- Forego extensive diplomatic efforts and move rapidly to the use of force, with allies and with UN approval if possible but unilaterally and without explicit UN approval if necessary.

Congressional Democrats and former Republican officials like Brent Scowcroft and James Baker stressed the importance of collective action. Secretary Powell agreed. Rumsfeld and Cheney, though, remained skeptical of diplomacy and the need for a coalition. Diplomacy would only work if Saddam Hussein genuinely desired a resolution amenable to both sides, and he gave no indication that he did. If military action

became necessary, coalition partners which had not transformed could be more a hindrance than a help. Still, Bush opted to pursue diplomacy as far as possible. No President wants to put American troops in danger if it can be avoided and exhausting diplomacy before military action would increase the chances of support from the American people, Congress, and, hopefully, other nations. But at the same time, President Bush had to make Saddam Hussein believe that the United States would use force even if other nations opposed it.<sup>85</sup> Eventually President Bush opted for the first strategic alternative: he would exhaust diplomatic alternatives, then use armed force in conjunction with allies and with UN approval if possible but unilaterally and without explicit UN approval if necessary.

On September 12, 2002, President Bush addressed the UN General Assembly. Even his critics called this “the best speech of his presidency.”<sup>86</sup> Arguing that Saddam Hussein posed a collective threat to the world community, Bush said, “our principles and our security are challenged by outlaw groups and regimes that accept no law of morality and have no limit on their violent ambitions.”<sup>87</sup> This phrasing reflected the growing chasm between the American position and that of much of the rest of the world. While President Bush insisted that there was no distinction between transnational terrorists and states that supported them, and that war was the appropriate response, other nations did not share this view. But President Bush and his advisers decided to push their position rather than attempting to find a compromise with allied states or the UN. Bush later stated that “if the United Nations Security Council won’t deal with the problem, the United States and some of our friends will.”<sup>88</sup> Powell stressed that “Saddam Hussein is not

just offending the United States. Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime, by their inaction, by their violation of these resolutions of these many years, is affronting the international community, is violating the will of the international community, violating the will of a multilateral United Nations.”<sup>89</sup>

The combination of Bush’s UN address, the release of a new U.S. National Security Strategy which integrated “proactive counter proliferation efforts,” and a public announcement that CENTCOM had finalized its war plan for Iraq got Saddam Hussein’s attention.<sup>90</sup> Iraq’s Foreign Minister, Naji Sabri, advised UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that the weapons inspectors could return “without conditions.”<sup>91</sup> The Bush administration was unenthusiastic, believing that Hussein was up to his old trick of making minimal and grudging political concessions to ameliorate mounting pressure. “Iraqis did not suddenly see the error of their ways,” Secretary Powell told Congress. “They were responding to the heat and pressure generated by the international community after President Bush’s speech at the UN.” In the Secretary’s words, it was “a familiar, tactical ploy.”<sup>92</sup>

Bush’s decision to reengage the UN had little effect abroad. The governments of Russia, France, China, and the Arab nations considered the return of the weapons inspectors adequate, at least for the time being. In Germany, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder won a narrow reelection victory, in part by declaring his opposition to what he portrayed as Bush’s insistence on war with Iraq. This was a shocking development in one of the world’s most steadfast international partnerships. Public opposition in the Arab world was even more strident. Within the United States, though, the administration’s sales pitch took root. Polls showed

significant public support for military action against Iraq, at least within a multinational context. A CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll on September 20-21, 2002, indicated that 79 percent of Americans would back an invasion of Iraq if the UN approved. Some 67 percent favored removing Saddam Hussein from power by military force in an October 3-5, 2002, CBS News/*New York Times* poll. America and the world were barreling in different directions.

Following a congressional resolution authorizing the President to use force against Saddam Hussein, the Bush administration again turned to the UN.<sup>93</sup> The goal was a Security Council resolution explicitly stating that Iraq was violating past resolutions and, hopefully, authorizing the use of force. The world body, stung by Bush's accusation of impending irrelevance, accepted an aggressive new inspections program suggested by the United States and the United Kingdom. The Bush administration itself seemed divided. Cheney and Rumsfeld scoffed at the idea that the UN could force Hussein to disarm while Powell and, to an extent, Bush himself appeared modestly optimistic. On November 8, 2002, the Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1441 which declared that Iraq "has been and remains in material breach of its obligations under relevant resolutions."<sup>94</sup> It demanded that Saddam Hussein provide "immediate, unimpeded, unconditional, and unrestricted access" to weapons inspectors.<sup>95</sup> It also reminded Iraq that "it will face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations."<sup>96</sup> This was strong language but even Russia and Syria went along. Along with other Security Council members, these long-time friends of Saddam Hussein believed that the United States would attack Iraq if they failed to approve the measure. The

resolution seemed a lesser evil to them. At the same time, China, France, and Russia indicated that they did not consider the resolution an authorization for the use of force without a second, explicit resolution. UN weapons inspectors soon returned to Baghdad after a 5-year absence. The diplomatic track appeared to be moving slowly ahead.

Even so, the Bush administration continued to expound the case for invasion. Policymakers, particularly Wolfowitz and Feith, tirelessly reiterated key points to the press and placated lingering congressional reservations. Ultimately, the administration succeeded in building and sustaining support among the American public, Congress, and some foreign leaders, but not the public (or the leadership) in major traditional allies. This had less to do with Hussein's venality than with what Iraq had come to symbolize. In 1991, Iraq represented the illegitimacy of cross-border aggression. It demonstrated that a concert of nations could enforce the rules of the international system as intended by UN architects. By 2003, President Bush had decided that Iraq symbolized what he considered the major threat to global security: the combination of WMD and terrorism. Other nations saw it differently. To many, the rising threat was a United States unconstrained by the opinion of others or the procedures of statecraft. "For a growing number of observers outside the United States," journalists Tyler Marshall and David Lamb noted, "the central issue in the crisis is no longer Iraq or Hussein. It is America and how to deal with its disproportionate strength as a world power."<sup>97</sup> Polls found that attitudes toward the United States had soured around the world. A negative view of the United States was held by 84 percent of Turks, 71 percent of Germans, 68 percent of Russians, 67 percent

of the French, 87 percent of Egyptians, and 94 percent of Jordanians and Moroccans.<sup>98</sup> In mid-February 2003, 1.5 million Europeans demonstrated against the impending war.<sup>99</sup> For most of them, the question was not whether Saddam Hussein should be removed from power, but whether the United States, or more specifically George Bush, had the right to decide if or when it should happen. The Iraq issue had become a global mandate on the new American strategy.

It was hard to tell whether this truly represented fundamental disagreement over the way the global security system should function or simply dislike of George Bush. Bush's bluntness, his tendency to cast political decisions in religious terms, his belief that boldness rather than consensus-building defined strong leadership, his awkward phrasing, and even his Texas accent grated on many Europeans. Bush's unflagging support for Israel's Likud party made him unpopular in the Arab world. Even Powell's smooth style and diplomatic skills could not compensate for the loathing of President Bush and of his acerbically blunt Secretary of Defense. While this melding of personality and strategy did not fully explain foreign hostility toward the removal of Saddam Hussein, it certainly added to it.

In the United States, opinion remained divided. Figures like General Zinni and leading Democrats like Senator John Kerry (D-MA) accepted the idea that Saddam Hussein might need to be removed by force, but felt that the time was not yet right.<sup>100</sup> Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) wrote in the *Washington Post* that President Bush had not made a case for immediate military action.<sup>101</sup> The administration's argument always included two ideas: Saddam Hussein must go, and there is a rapidly-closing window of opportunity

to make this happen. Bradley and others accepted the first but not the second. He and other Democrats took issue more with treating the issue as a crisis than with the strategic objectives.

At the beginning of 2003, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard, both widely respected realist scholars of world affairs, offered a powerful argument that war with Iraq was unnecessary. They based this on the belief that Hussein was “eminently deterrable.”<sup>102</sup> By this point, though, not even the best logic could revive that idea. Most of the public and the policy-shaping elite had accepted the administration’s repeated assertions that Hussein was irrational and hence undeterrable. Attitudes were set—Mearsheimer’s and Walt’s essay came a year too late. In fact, almost nothing could have altered the course of policy by 2003. Major studies from the influential Council on Foreign Relations and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) advising that post-conflict preparation was inadequate had little effect.<sup>103</sup> Anthony Cordesman of the CSIS, one of the most experienced and astute observers of security in the Middle East, warned that because of its overly optimistic assumptions, the administration was “planning for a self-inflicted wound.”<sup>104</sup> Again, there is no sign that this influenced administration policymakers.

There was, however, an emerging public antiwar movement. In October 2002, 100,000 marched in Washington. It was the capital’s largest demonstration since the Vietnam era.<sup>105</sup> In February 2003—the same time as the mass demonstrations in Europe—200,000 rallied in San Francisco.<sup>106</sup> In early March, tens of thousands demonstrated in Washington, San Francisco, Portland, Oregon, and Los Angeles.<sup>107</sup> Iraq had

become a symbolic battleground in the growing polarization of the American public. It was the galvanizing issue for everyone opposed to George Bush and less a question of national security than a mandate for (or against) him. Opposition was most intense in so-called “blue” areas—strongly Democratic urban centers on the two coasts—but muted in the Republican “red” areas of the south, mid-west, and Rocky Mountains. Both sides exploited the “new” media, especially cable television, talk radio, and the Internet. For those advocating the use of force, conservative talk radio and the increasingly popular Fox News Network were powerful tools. War opponents relied more heavily on the Internet. Email lists, online discussion boards, and blogs provided methods unavailable to earlier generations of activists. But despite the public cacophony, Congress and the foreign policy elite remained divided or mute. With war looming, the Senate focused on confirmation of a federal judge while the House fought over a tax bill and passed a resolution mourning the death of Fred Rogers, the children’s entertainer.<sup>108</sup> At most, public protests may have reinforced President Bush’s conviction that his window of opportunity for overthrowing Hussein was limited. Certainly the administration hoped that war, if it became necessary, would be over before the 2004 presidential election lest its conduct limit President Bush’s campaigning.

While CENTCOM finished its final preparations for war in early 2003, President Bush and Secretary Powell sought UN approval for the use of force. Since Hussein was convinced that Washington would not act without UN approval, the thinking went, a Security Council resolution explicitly authorizing the use of force might convince him to comply. President

Bush believed that Security Council Resolutions 1441 and 678 already authorized the use of force.<sup>109</sup> But the French and Russians, when they voted in favor of 1441, had explicitly stated that it *did not* authorize the use of force. Bush's inclination may have been to abandon diplomacy, but British Prime Minister Tony Blair warned that without a second resolution (or, at least, a serious effort to obtain one), his government could fall.<sup>110</sup> Secretary of State Powell also advocated pursuit of a second resolution while Vice President Cheney opposed the idea, scoffing that Saddam Hussein would not change his behavior at that late date. To help Blair, Bush grudgingly went along. But Saddam Hussein had complied with the UN weapons inspections just enough to spark a tiny glimmer of optimism from Hans Blix, the lead inspector.<sup>111</sup> For France, Germany, Russia, China, and officials of the European Union, this was enough to postpone armed action. Rather than allow the resolution to be defeated in a Security Council vote, the Bush administration withdrew it. Bush later told Irish Prime Minister Bernie Ahern that by opposing the second resolution and giving Saddam Hussein the impression that he was off the hook, France and Germany made war the only viable option.<sup>112</sup> Bush understood that diplomacy is most effective—or only effective—when backed by the credible threat that its failure will result in the use of force. Diplomacy and force were integral elements of a contest of wills between states, not a way of reconciling misunderstandings between parties of basically good intent. But Hussein's friends encouraged him to believe that there were no teeth behind American threats, leaving him convinced that there was no reason to fully comply with past UN resolutions and U.S. demands. It had been, as Steven Weisman of the *New York Times* put it, "a long,

winding road to a diplomatic dead end.”<sup>113</sup> With no explicit UN authorization and only a handful of allies (most importantly the United Kingdom) committed to military action, President Bush elected to rely on American armed force to remove Saddam Hussein.

## THE DECISIONMAKING PROCESS

The decision to remove Saddam Hussein by force had components or sub-decisions, some complex and controversial enough to cause debate within the Bush administration and outside it. But there was also broad agreement on some points. Everyone involved felt that Hussein had to comply with UN resolutions concerning his weapons programs and that he should be removed from power. After all, his removal had been official U.S. policy since 1998. This was why the more hawkish members of the Bush administration—like Vice-President Cheney—remained unenthusiastic about diplomatic efforts, including attempts to restart and strengthen UN weapons inspections of Iraq. Their fear was that Hussein would, in fact, comply enough to remain in power, leaving the United States with an incomplete victory, much like that in 1991. Even so, there is no indication that President Bush was disingenuous in his pursuit of a diplomatic solution. Had Hussein fully complied with UN resolutions, it is not clear whether the administration would have continued to insist on his removal or bowed to pressure from allies and left him in control of Iraq. The point of contention within the administration was whether to use force without UN approval and a broad coalition.

Strategic decisionmaking entails a projection of the expected benefits, risks, and costs of a course of action. This is shaped by the world views and inclinations

of policymakers, and by recent events. The world view and inclination of policymakers within the Bush administration, in combination with the 9/11 attacks, led them to use a maximalist assessment of the risks and costs of inaction – of leaving Hussein in power – and a minimalist assessment of the costs and risks of military intervention. Professionals within the government and experts outside it with a different perspective – those who stressed the costs and risks of military intervention and the feasibility of containment – had no influence. Administration policymakers only gave credence to professionals and experts who stressed the great risk and costs of leaving Hussein in power and the low risk and cost of removing him. This decision dynamic was the result of 9/11. A recent attack or defeat always skews assessments of acceptable risk downward. Decisionmakers have a lower tolerance for risk when the memory of an attack or defeat is fresh. This suggests that if not for 9/11, the dynamics of decisionmaking on Iraq within the Bush administration would have been dramatically different, fueled by a different assessment of the risks and costs of leaving Hussein in power.

Historical analogies play an important role in strategic decisionmaking, particularly for a nation like the United States which often confronts new types of threats and challenges in regions of the world where it has little experience. The analogies which decisionmakers select and the strategic lessons they draw from them have an immense impact on decisions. For the decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power by military intervention, the Bush administration seemed to rely on five analogies (but only made explicit mention of three of them). First was the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. To many Americans, this showed that since all people desire freedom, democracy is the “natural” state of politics.

When an authoritarian regime falls or is removed, open governance blossoms. This led the Bush administration to underestimate the extent to which Iraq depended on the Hussein regime, and to downplay the potential risks and costs of removing him. Phrased differently, the administration underestimated how badly Iraqi society had been damaged by Hussein's pathologically brutal and parasitic rule. It also overlooked the fact that while all people may desire freedom (as President Bush often stated), this alone is not enough to sustain democracy. It requires that people also be willing to tolerate the freedom of others. This proved to be the problem: while every Iraqi wanted freedom for himself or herself, many were unwilling to tolerate the freedom of others. Hence democracy was harder and costlier to build than the Bush administration expected. But because it was determined to remove Hussein by any means necessary, it never discussed this (at least not in public).

The second historical analogy that shaped the Iraq decision was the multinational intervention in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. The lesson of this was that even when allied states oppose military action, once the United States acts, allies will contribute to stabilization and reconstruction. Ultimately, instability is a greater threat than American power (which, most Americans believe, others view as benign). This probably led the Bush administration to conclude that once it brushed aside political opposition to the invasion of Iraq and did it, other nations would chip in, thus lowering the costs of stabilization and reconstruction for the United States.

The third analogy—and one used explicitly as the administration explained its Iraq policy—was Afghanistan. The lesson here was that the U.S. military

could sweep aside tyrannical regimes quickly and easily. This, of course, proved true. But as Afghanistan is now demonstrating, building a stable system is much harder than removing a repressive one.

The fourth analogy was a time-tested one: Nazi Germany. This suggested that threats left unaddressed worsen. While the Nazi analogy always had a powerful emotional impact, the Bush administration did not explain why Saddam Hussein was like Adolf Hitler rather than the dozens of other tyrants who did not evolve into a major threat. Why was Iraq like Nazi Germany and not the Soviet Union which was contained and eventually collapsed?

The final and most powerful analogy was, of course, 9/11. From this, the Bush administration drew the lesson that America's enemies (at least in the Islamic world) would use terrorism against the United States. Again, it did not explain why Saddam Hussein would act like al Qaeda since, while he sometimes made monumental strategic miscalculations (such as the invasions of Iran and Kuwait), he had shown no evidence of being suicidally bent on harming the United States. Since Hussein *could have* supported al Qaeda or groups like it, the administration elected to act as if he *would*. Ironically, the administration did *not* use the Iranian revolution of 1979 as an analogy even though it seems relevant to the Iraqi case since it might have suggested that removing a secular dictator in an Islamic state can unleash revolutionary religious forces.

Ultimately the decision to remove Saddam Hussein by force was not made deductively, by arriving at a course of action after collecting all available information and assessing the expected benefits, costs, and risks of various options. Rather, the administration

appeared to have begun with an outcome—Hussein’s removal—and then constructed arguments to mobilize support (both domestic and international). It is not clear whether this was because President Bush and his key advisers were, in fact, convinced that Saddam Hussein posed an intolerable and growing threat to the United States or because they believed that 9/11 had provided a political and psychological window of opportunity where the type of bold action needed to address lingering issues was temporarily possible. In all likelihood, both ideas affected the decisionmaking process.

The primary criterion for the decision was an adverse projection of the future. If Hussein was not removed from power, the Bush administration expected the sanctions to crumble and Hussein to rebuild his military and his WMD and ballistic missile programs and eventually obtain a nuclear, biological, or chemical deterrent capability; he would then renew aggression against his neighbors, and actively support transnational terrorist movements. If Hussein was removed, administration officials expected Iraq to use its oil wealth and human resources to develop into a democracy, thus serving as a model and a catalyst for wider change in the Islamic world and lowering the chances of armed conflict in Southwest Asia. Hence the risks of inaction were greater than the risks of action.

## **ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS**

One of the defining characteristics of strategy making in the Bush administration was the treatment of any decision involving transnational terrorism as a crisis with a limited slate of participants and a minimal role for professional expertise except on operational and technical considerations. When the administration

broke from its predecessors and chose to approach the Iraq issue as part of the war on terrorism rather than as simply an element of regional stability, it shifted to a crisis decision mode. This was unusual since the Iraq conflict did not meet the usual requirements for a crisis—a very high threat and limited decision time. As a result, the role of anyone outside the administration’s inner circle, including Congress and, perhaps more importantly, professionals and experts in the military and other government agencies, was limited. It is impossible to tell whether this was simply a peculiarity of the Bush administration, a result of the psychological trauma of 9/11, or something ingrained in the American system for strategy formulation which might happen again. If the latter is true, the U.S. military must understand that when issues which might not seem to entail crises are redefined as crises, its influence will be constrained or minimized, at least at the actual point of decision. Even the fact that the military had a refined system for crisis action planning did not change this. Because the issue was not actually a crisis, but was treated as if it was, the result was a strange polyglot in which the military used its deliberate planning process to implement a policy which was itself formed in a crisis mode.

Because the Bush administration was determined to remove Saddam Hussein by whatever means necessary and because it understood the limits of support for invasion from the American people, Congress, and other nations, it kept debate tightly focused. Specifically, it resisted discussion of the monetary or second order strategic costs of intervention. As a result, the two major adverse unintended consequences—the insurgency and sectarian war in Iraq, and a renewed urgency to acquire nuclear weapons by Iran and North

Korea's desire to expand its nuclear arsenal, which President Bush had included with Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the "axis of evil" – were seldom mentioned and, based on available information, not seriously analyzed. This is an important point: how top policymakers draw the parameters of debate on a strategic issue plays a major role in determining the outcome. "Bounding an issue," in other words, is a vital component of decisionmaking. Such parameters can be vertical or horizontal. Vertical parameters deal with time—how far into the future to assess the repercussions of an action. Horizontal ones deal with the extent to which second- or third-order effects shape a decision. Not considering the effect that removing Saddam Hussein from power had on nuclear proliferation among other nations hostile to the United States is an example of a horizontal parameter of decisionmaking.

In any case, the way the decision to invade Iraq was made suggests a number of lessons for the U.S. military. For starters, uniformed military leaders have two methods of influence over strategy making: *direct* and *indirect*. The *direct* method is when military leaders advise policymakers on specific issues. Generally, only the most senior officers in the Pentagon, the combatant commands, or the White House staff have an opportunity for this. Lower ranking and retired officers may help shape thinking on an issue by writing and through public statements, but only in rare cases do they have direct access to policymakers.<sup>114</sup> There is little evidence that lower ranking and retired military officers directly influenced the decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Even for senior serving officers, the direct method of influence depends on the receptivity of policymakers. The Bush administration became receptive to military advice during the course

of the conflict in Iraq but was unreceptive while making the decision to remove Saddam Hussein. There was little military leaders could have done about this. Receptivity to professional advice always reflects the personality of the president and other top policymakers as well as the prevailing political climate. The greater the confidence and determination of the president, the less his receptivity to professional advice. Thus, receptivity has little to do with intellectual content of the advice. Had senior military leaders advised against removing Saddam Hussein because of the risk that it would result in insurgency, it would have made little difference even if they were insurgency experts. Resistance to military advice comes not from an assessment of the adviser's credentials or even the logic of the advice, but from a deeper perception of the value of career professionals in the making of policy and strategy. Hence greater education in strategy during an officer's professional development does not automatically mean that advice offered will have greater weight in policy and strategic decisions. A well-educated officer may give better advice than a less-educated one, but this does not mean the president or the secretary of defense will listen.

If the Commander in Chief rejects or ignores senior military leaders, officers have few options. They can opt for open dissent—the “fall on your sword” approach. Acts of rebellion against policy seldom—if ever—work. Even a military leader as influential as General Douglas MacArthur discovered that opposing a determined president is a losing proposition. Officers can opt for subterfuge—leaking information to the press or providing a contrarian assessment off the record. In addition to the questionable ethics of this behavior, there is also little evidence that it can

derail a determined president. The third option is to express dissent to policymakers privately and then support whatever decision is made. Given the nature of American civil-military relations, this has been and will continue to be the most common approach. While there is no public information to suggest that senior military leaders privately opposed the decision to remove Saddam Hussein by force, only time will tell if they did.

Expressing dissent with official positions has inherent dilemmas. If a senior officer does so publicly (or even privately), he or she may simply be replaced by someone more compliant. President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld had no qualms about this and were perfectly right in doing so. Policymakers have an obligation to listen to military advice, but they also have a right, perhaps even an obligation, to assure that senior military leaders are willing to implement their decisions. Probably the best that senior military leaders can do when they believe that a determined president is pursuing a bad option is to mitigate the risks and costs. Had military leaders believed that removing Saddam Hussein by force would lead to protracted instability and conflict in Iraq, they might have begun preparing for this earlier than they did. But even this would have been difficult—perhaps even impossible—under the forceful leadership of Secretary Rumsfeld. The Secretary was convinced that the military's tendency to assume and prepare for the worst outcome was an impediment to action. The administration deliberately did little to prepare for extensive stabilization and reconstruction activities, precisely because its political opponents would have used this to derail the intervention. It was the equivalent of refusing to stock up on caskets before a major battle lest the public grow

to oppose the war. Certainly administration policy-makers bear the greatest responsibility for failing to prepare adequately for post-conflict operations, but senior military leaders, particularly the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CENTCOM commander, should have pressed for it. The military's tendency to "worst case" a policy or strategy is an essential contribution to American strategy making yet, from what is known, was missing in this case.

The *indirect* method of influence is less precise but can be powerful. It entails configuring the military in a way that leads policymakers to opt for certain types of actions and eschew others. For instance, after Vietnam, the military devoted limited resources to preparing for counterinsurgency or other forms of what became known as "low intensity conflict," instead focusing on large-scale conventional warfighting. The Army was also redesigned so that any major deployment required the mobilization of the reserve forces. As a result of these actions, when President Reagan committed the United States to counterinsurgency in El Salvador, he did so with only a small military deployment, relying heavily on advice and assistance rather than direct U.S. action. In this case, the indirect method of influence did what was intended but a determined President can overcome it. President Clinton committed the U.S. military to multinational peacekeeping in the Balkans despite the fact that the armed forces had not prepared extensively for such an activity. In part because the military adapted quickly to multinational peacekeeping without extensive preparation, the Bush administration concluded that it could adapt equally well to stabilization and counterinsurgency in Iraq (as it eventually did). Ironically the military's ingrained adaptability limits its ability to shape policy or strategy by *not* preparing for an activity.

The decision to remove Saddam Hussein by force showed that policymakers may use the prestige and authority of the military to mobilize support for a decision that the military had a small role in making. That senior leaders like the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the commander of U.S. CENTCOM did not publicly oppose armed intervention in Iraq led the American public and Congress to conclude that the military supported the decision. Silence was seen as concurrence. Since the military is seen as objective and beyond partisan politics, this helped make the administration's case for intervention. Had senior military leaders publicly admitted that they were not asked whether intervention was a good idea or not, it would have given the appearance of dissent and, in all likelihood, they would have been replaced (and the intervention would have gone forward with new military leaders). This is an enduring dilemma in the American system of policymaking and civil-military relations.

Ultimately, there was little that senior military leaders could have done differently on the invasion of Iraq. The 9/11 attacks distorted the political climate in ways that paved the way for bold action with limited professional input. That was precisely what the Bush administration wanted. But as the United States returns to a more normal political climate without the fear and anger of the immediate post-9/11 period, the indirect method of influence may again come more into play. One of the most crucial strategic debates under way today is whether the United States should undertake Iraq-like large scale stabilization operations in the future. Much of the military, particularly the Army, agrees with analysts like Thomas Donnelly and Frederick Kagan who believe that the United States

may be forced to do so, and thus should further expand the land forces and hone their capability for protracted stabilization operations.<sup>115</sup> This will make it easier for a future president to commit the United States to such actions. By stressing what it *can* do rather than what it (or the U.S. Government in general) *cannot* do, the military diminishes its ability to shape future strategy.

That said, the military is and should be a secondary player in the making of strategy and policy. Its greatest contribution remains its willingness to think about and prepare for the worst possible outcomes. Its failure to do this during the decision to remove Saddam Hussein by force is something that future military leaders must avoid. In the American system of policy and strategy making, the military is Cassandra. Even when not heeded, it serves the nation (and policymakers) by warning of danger, not by unbridled optimism.

## ENDNOTES

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2. Open Letter to the President, January 26, 1998, available from [theindyvoice.com/politics/pvac](http://theindyvoice.com/politics/pvac).

3. Open Letter to the President, February 19, 1998, available from [theindyvoice.com/politics/pvac](http://theindyvoice.com/politics/pvac).

4. Public Law 105-338, codified in a note to 22 USCS § 2151.

5. National Security Adviser Samuel R. Berger, Remarks on Iraq at Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, December 8, 1998.

6. National Security Adviser Samuel R. Berger, Remarks at the National Press Club, Washington, DC, December 23, 1998.

7. Trent Lott, Jesse Helms, Richard Shelby, John Kyl, Richard Lugar, and Sam Brownback, public letter to President Clinton, December 16, 1998.

8. Daniel Byman, "After the Storm: U.S. Policy Toward Iraq Since 1991," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 115, No. 4, Winter 2000/2001, p. 514.

9. Joshua Muravchik, *Apply the Reagan Doctrine to Iraq*, Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1999.

10. See Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack, and Gideon Rose, "The Rollback Fantasy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 1, January/February 1999, pp. 24-41; Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, New York: Random House, 2002, pp. 117-118; and Daniel Byman, "Proceed With Caution: U.S. Support for the Iraqi Opposition," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Summer 1999, pp. 23-38.

11. Hussein's fatal mistake was not understanding the extent to which the terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed the limits of American tolerance.

12. For example, Noam Chomsky, *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, Boston, MA: South End Press, 2000; David Cortright, "A Hard Look at Iraq Sanctions," *The Nation*, November 15, 2001; Peace Action Education Fund, "End Sanctions on Iraq," n.d.; John Mueller and Karl Mueller, "Sanctions of Mass Destruction," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 3, May/June 1999, pp. 43-53; F. Gregory Gause III, "Getting It Backwards on Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 3, May/June 1999, pp. 54-65; Congressman Cynthia McKinney (D-GA), "Must Children Die For Hussein's Defeat?" *Detroit Free Press*, September 20, 1999; George Capaccio, "Sanctions Harm Ordinary Iraqis," *Baltimore Sun*, November 23, 1997; Stephen Kinzer, "Smart Bombs, Dumb Sanctions," *New York Times*, January 3, 1999; Sam Hussein, "Twisted Policy on Iraq," *Washington Post*, January 26, 1999; Denis Halliday, "End the Catastrophe of Sanctions Against Iraq," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 12, 1999; Charley Reese, "Embargo Makes Deathbeds of Hospital Beds For Children," *Orlando Sentinel*, March 2, 1999; Mary K. Meyer, "In Iraq, Children Carry the Burden of Sanctions," *Kansas City Star*, September 16, 1999; "A Morally Unsustainable Iraq Policy," *Chicago Tribune*, September 17, 1999; Steve Chapman,

"Persisting in Futility on the Iraq Sanctions," *Chicago Tribune*, March 2, 2000; and Lewis W. Diuguid, "Punish Hussein, Not Iraqis," *Kansas City Star*, June 8, 2000.

13. The notion persists among Americans that a strategy of containment or threat management should be a last resort used only when rapid, decisive victory is impossible.

14. George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, New York: HarperCollins, 2007, p. 301.

15. The classic assessment of crisis decisionmaking as used during the Cuban missile crisis is provided by Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2d Ed., New York: Addison-Wesley, 1999.

16. Elaine Sciolino, "Bush's Foreign Policy Tutor: An Academic in the Public Eye," *New York Times*, June 16, 2000. For a comprehensive analysis, see James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*, New York: Penguin, 2004.

17. Steven Lee Myers, "Military Backs Ex-Guard Pilot over Private Gore," *New York Times*, September 21, 2000.

18. For instance, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 4, July/August 1996, pp. 18-32.

19. The word "neoconservatives" initially referred to a group of mostly New York-based intellectuals and policy experts who had been leftists of one sort or the other when younger, but had become more conservative and anti-Soviet in the 1970s. Most of those labeled neoconservatives or, derisively, "neocons" during the Bush administration had never been part of the political left, so the term is inappropriate. They can more accurately be called "conservative idealists" since they stressed the idea of using American power to promote democracy—a theme they derived from Ronald Reagan. For critical assessments of this group and its ideas about security and foreign policy, see Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Fred Kaplan, *Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2008; Ivo H. Daalder and James

M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003; and, Jeffrey Record, *Wanting War: Why the Bush Administration Invaded Iraq*, Washington, DC: Potomac, 2009. For an assessment by a scholar often considered a “neo-conservative,” see Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.

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21. Governor George H. Bush, “A Period of Consequences,” speech at the Citadel, Charleston, SC, September 23, 1999.

22. Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” p. 53.

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25. *Ibid.*

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28. 2000 Republican Party Platform, available from [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25849](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25849)

29. Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, July 24, 2004, p. 334.

30. Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror*, New York: Free Press, 2004, p. 32.

31. Robin Wright and Doyle McManus, "After the Attack, Military Options," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 2001; Patrick E. Tyler and Elaine Sciolino, "Bush's Advisers Split on Scope of Retaliation," *New York Times*, September 20, 2001; Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p. 81; and Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004, p. 25.

32. For instance, Laurie Mylroie, *Study of Revenge: Saddam Hussein's Unfinished War Against America*, Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press, 2000.

33. R. James Woolsey, "The Iraq Connection," *Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2001.

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36. William F. Buckley, Jr., "Evidence Against Iraq?" *National Review*, November 19, 2001, p. 62.

37. Richard Lowry, "End Iraq," *National Review*, October 15, 2001, p. 33.

38. Barton Gelman describes the importance of the "demonstration effect" in the Bush administration's thinking (*Angler*, pp. 215-254.)

39. Lawrence F. Kaplan and William Kristol, *The War Over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission*, San Francisco, CA: Encounter, 2003; Kenneth M. Pollack, "Next Stop Baghdad?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 2, March/April 2002, pp. 32-47, and *idem.*, *The Threatening Storm*.

40. Joshua Micah Marshall, "The Reluctant Hawk: The Skeptical Case for Regime Change in Iraq," *Washington Monthly*, November 2002, p. 43.

41. L. Paul Bremer, "Iraq Shouldn't Be the Next Stop in War on Terror," *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2001.

42. Brent Scowcroft, "Build a Coalition," *Washington Post*, October 16, 2001.

43. Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, New York: Penguin, 2006, p. 42; Thomas E. Ricks, "Military Bids to Postpone Iraq Invasion," *Washington Post*, May 24, 2002; Christopher Marquis, "Bush Officials Differ on Way to Force Out Iraqi Leader," *New York Times*, June 19, 2002; Thomas E. Ricks, "Some Top Military Brass Favor Status Quo in Iraq," *Washington Post*, July 28, 2002; and Thomas E. Ricks, "Timing, Tactics on Iraq War Disputed," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2002.

44. General Eric K. Shinseki, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 25, 2003. The specific exchange was:

Carl Levin (D-MI): General Shinseki, could you give us some idea as to the magnitude of the Army's force requirement for an occupation of Iraq following a successful completion of the war?

Shinseki: In specific numbers, I would have to rely on combatant commanders' exact requirements. But I think —

Levin: How about a range?

Shinseki: I would say that what's been mobilized to this point — something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers are probably, you know, a figure that would be required. We're talking about posthostilities control over a piece of geography that's fairly significant, with the kinds of ethnic tensions that could lead to other problems. And so it takes a significant ground-force presence.

45. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, response to questions in Department of Defense Budget Priorities for Fiscal Year 2004, hearing before the Committee on the Budget, House of Representatives, 108th Cong., 1st Sess., February 27, 2003. There is a myth that Shinseki was “fired” after this, spread by people like Congressman Nancy Pelosi and Senator John Kerry (Pelosi on Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show*, November 30, 2005; Kerry, Press Conference, Tipton, IA, October 5, 2004). In reality, General Shinseki had already set a retirement date well before his testimony, in large part because of tensions with Rumsfeld. Secretary of the Army Thomas White was fired after agreeing with Shinseki’s assessment for Iraq, but this, too, was simply the straw that broke the camel’s back. The bigger issue was Rumsfeld’s contention that the Army leadership was hidebound and resistant to change.

46. “Secretary Rumsfeld Media Availability with Afghan President Karzai,” Washington, DC: The Pentagon, February 27, 2003.

47. Cheney interviewed by Tim Russert on NBC News, “Meet the Press,” March 16, 2003.

48. See Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, New York: Regan, 2004.

49. For instance, the administration never released a March 2003 report by the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research which was skeptical of the prospects for democracy in Iraq, and said that attempting to build a democracy in Iraq would not promote reform elsewhere in the Islamic world. Greg Miller, “A State Department Report Disputes Bush’s Claim That Ousting Hussein Will Spur Reform in the Mideast, Intelligence Officials Say,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 2003.

50. This is a contentious point. Experts contend that both the Clinton and Bush administrations were, in fact, warned of the al Qaeda threat (but not the specifics of the 9/11 attacks). See Clarke, *Against All Enemies*; and Paul Pillar, “Intelligence, Policy, and the War in Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2, March/April 2006, pp. 15-27.

51. In a 2007 report, the Pentagon's Inspector General found that Feith's organization "developed, produced, and then disseminated alternative intelligence assessments on the Iraq and al-Qaida relationship, which included some conclusions that were inconsistent with the consensus of the Intelligence Community, to senior decision-makers." This was, in the Inspector General's assessment, "inappropriate." See Inspector General, United States Department of Defense, Deputy Inspector General for Intelligence, *Review of the Pre-Iraqi War Activities of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy*, Report No. 07-INTEL-04, February 9, 2007, p. 4. Feith rebuts this in his memoir, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, New York: Harper, 2008.

52. Policymakers seemed unaware that by that point the Iraqi middle class had been demolished by decades of war and economic sanctions.

53. Quoted in Woodward, *Bush At War*, p. 42.

54. See Steven Metz, "America's Defense Transformation: A Conceptual and Political History," *Defence Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2006, pp. 8-16; and Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy*, New York: Encounter, 2006, pp. 287-359.

55. A case can be made that this perception was racially based: Soviet communists armed with nuclear weapons were still Europeans, and hence "rational"; Arabs (or Persians for that matter) with nuclear weapons might be "irrational."

56. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, for instance, President Bush said that hostile regimes in the "axis of evil" (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea) *could* provide WMD to terrorists. In the 2003 State of the Union Address, he repeated that "the gravest danger facing America and the world is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. These regimes *could* use such weapons for blackmail, terror, and mass murder. They *could* also give or sell those weapons to terrorist allies, who would use them without the least hesitation." In his 2002 graduation speech at West Point, President Bush stated, ". . . unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction *can* deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies." Vice President Cheney made similar assertions

with even fewer qualifications. In a 2002 speech at the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention, he treated transnational terrorists and hostile states as identical, saying, "In the days of the Cold War, we were able to manage the threat with strategies of deterrence and containment. But it's a lot tougher to deter enemies who have no country to defend. And containment is not possible when dictators obtain weapons of mass destruction, and *are prepared* to share them with terrorists who intend to inflict catastrophic casualties on the United States." [Emphasis added in all quotations.] A year later, he commented, "There is no containing a terror state that secretly passes along deadly weapons to a terrorist network." Remarks by the Vice President at the Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, October 10, 2003.

57. Carla Anne Robbins and Jeanne Cummings, "New Doctrine: How Bush Decided That Iraq's Hussein Must Be Ousted," *Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2002.

58. *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington, DC: The White House, 2002, p. 5.

59. See Robert G. Kaufman, *In Defense of the Bush Doctrine*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007.

60. Quoted in Karen DeYoung and Rick Weiss, "U.S. Seems to Ease Rhetoric on Iraq," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2001.

61. Quoted in Ronald Brownstein, "Hawks Urge Bush to Extend Military Campaign to Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 2001.

62. On Cheney's views, see Gellman, *Angler*; and Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.

63. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 4.

64. Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, pp. 341-356.

65. "President Welcomes Aid Workers Rescued from Afghanistan," remarks at the White House, Washington, DC, November 26, 2001.

66. "President Discusses the Future of Iraq," remarks to the American Enterprise Institute, Washington Hilton, Washington, DC, February 23, 2003.

67. Remarks by the President in Address to the UN General Assembly, New York, September 12, 2002.

68. "President Bush, Colombia President Uribe Discuss Terrorism," Washington, DC: The White House, September 25, 2002.

69. Vice President Dick Cheney, interviewed by Tim Russert on NBC News, "Meet the Press," September 8, 2002.

70. *Ibid.*

71. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice interviewed by Margaret Warner on *PBS NewsHour*, September 25, 2002.

72. President's Radio Address, February 8, 2003.

73. President's Radio Address, March 8, 2003.

74. President George Bush Discusses Iraq in National Press Conference, March 6, 2003.

75. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell Addresses the UN Security Council, February 5, 2003.

76. President George Bush's speech on Iraq, Cincinnati, OH, October 7, 2002.

77. Rumsfeld, written testimony for the Senate Armed Services Committee Hearings on Iraq, September 19, 2002.

78. There were a few bold exceptions, such as Jeffrey Record, *Bounding the Global War on Terrorism*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2003. Secretary Rumsfeld scoffed at this scholarly analysis in a press conference.

79. Testimony of Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet before Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on The Worldwide Threat 2003, "Evolving Dangers in a Complex World" (as prepared for delivery), February 11, 2003.

80. Remarks by the Vice President to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, 103rd National Convention, August 26, 2002; and Vice President Dick Cheney interviewed by Tim Russert on NBC News "Meet the Press," March 16, 2003.

81. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell Addresses UN Security Council, February 5, 2003.

82. Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction & National Intelligence Estimate, October 2002, p. 5.

83. Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 329; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 108-109.

84. Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, p. 304.

85. Ultimately, this was unsuccessful. Hussein believed that the United States would not launch an invasion without the explicit approval of the UN Security Council, and France and Russia would block this.

86. Peter W. Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006, pp. 76-77.

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107. Eric Lichtblau, "Tens of Thousands March Against Iraq War," *New York Times*, March 16, 2003.

108. Janet Hook, "On Iraq, Congress Cedes All the Authority to Bush," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 2003.

109. SC Res 678 (November 29, 1990) authorized UN members to use "all necessary means to uphold and implement" UN Security Council Resolution 660 which demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait. SC Res 1441 (November 8, 2002) stated Iraq was in material breach of SC Res 687 (April 3, 1991) which required Iraq to destroy its chemical, nuclear and biological weapons, and its ballistic missiles with range greater than 150 km.

110. John Keegan, *The Iraq War*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004, p. 119; and Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 292.

111. *Report of the Executive Chairman of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC)*,

February 28, 2003. Blix briefed the Security Council on his findings on February 14, 2003.

112. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 346. The nations which thwarted the passage of a resolution which might have convinced Hussein to comply have never admitted this was a mistake.

113. Steven R. Weisman, "A Long, Winding Road to a Diplomatic Dead End," *New York Times*, March 17, 2003.

114. A major exception was the influential role played by General (Ret) John Keane in the strategic shift of 2007. This is assessed elsewhere in this monograph series.

115. See Thomas Donnelly and Frederick W. Kagan, *Ground Truth: The Future of U.S. Land Power*, Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press, 2008.

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