

# What Was It All About After All? The Causes of the Iraq War

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The least understood aspect of the ongoing war in Iraq is what caused the United States to invade the country in the first place. Although various observers and analysts have posited a number of explanations, the George W. Bush administration's reasons for going to war are still subject to intense controversy. This article aims to contribute to this debate by systematically analysing the major underlying factors that influenced the decision to go to war with Iraq. These factors are complex and multifaceted. Yet, I argue that they all point towards an overriding rationale: the war on terrorism.

Following September 11, 2001 (henceforth 9/11), key policy-makers in the Bush administration concluded that toppling Saddam Hussein and his regime was necessary to strike a blow to radical Islamic terrorism on multiple fronts. The administration linked such necessity to its war on terrorism in three main ways: military, psychological and ideological. Eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and thus depriving Al Qaeda of a major source of these weapons was the *military rationale*. The *psychological rationale* involved demonstrating American power and resolve and thereby discrediting the widely held belief in the Middle East about US weakness. With regard to the *ideological rationale*, the Iraq war was seen as a major step towards the political and cultural transformation of the Middle East. Establishing a democratic regime in Baghdad would serve as a model of freedom and liberation for other Arab countries and Iran.

As I argue in detail below, in developing each of these rationales, Bush officials relied on certain assumptions. In the case of Iraq's WMD, the assumption was that Saddam not only intended to harm the US, but that he would also act irrationally to this end. Saddam's alleged irrationality has been largely overlooked by scholars who dismiss the WMD argument as a smokescreen created by the Bush administration in order to hide its other, less politically popular, motives to attack Iraq. The underlying assumption of the psychological rationale was that a US invasion of Iraq would deter individuals, groups and regimes from supporting terrorism, by fostering fear and respect for American authority. Finally, the ideological rationale assumed that the

repressive totalitarian/authoritarian political culture in the Middle East is the backbone of Islamic fanaticism and terrorism. Hence, democratization was seen as the best antidote to the dysfunctional political systems and the ills of totalitarianism in the Middle East.

The Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and New York were crucial in the formulation of this policy. The terrorist attacks transformed the Bush administration's sense of danger and underlined the urgency of offensive strategies. The impact of 9/11 on the decision to go to war in Iraq, however, was neither automatic nor due to the influence of a particular group in the administration. As has been the case with most major US foreign policy decisions, the resolution to go to war in Iraq had no single architect.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it was the end result of distinct arguments put forward by a small group of conservative and neo-conservative 'war hawks', who had been advocating (unsuccessfully) for tough action against Iraq prior to 9/11. These arguments ultimately held sway over top US decision-makers who were in search of a strategy to cope with the new security threat that appeared after 9/11.

The single most important factor contributing to the decision to go to war was the change in President Bush's position towards Iraq after 9/11. Prior to 9/11, Bush had resisted the war hawks' pressure to take action against Iraq. The key question then becomes how Bush, as the ultimate decision-maker, became convinced of the need for regime change in Iraq. In this context, particular attention needs to be paid to the role played by Vice President Richard Cheney and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. This is not only because their opinions are highly valued by Bush, but also because, unlike longtime Iraq hawks such as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the group of neo-conservatives led by Deputy Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz, both Cheney and Rice became champions of military action against Iraq only after 9/11.<sup>2</sup>

The article begins with a brief discussion of two common alternative explanations for the Bush administration's decision to go to war with Iraq: oil and achieving American dominance. I argue that these explanations are not only logically flawed, they are not substantiated by available evidence. Second, I analyse each of the three military, psychological and ideological rationales for the Iraq war in depth. I do not claim to have direct access to the deliberations of the key players of the administration or to President Bush himself. This analysis is based instead on insiders' accounts, press reports and analysis. Some aspects of the war decision, such as the relative significance of each of the three rationales in Bush's final judgment and the exact reasons why Condoleezza Rice changed her views on Iraq after 9/11, are extremely difficult to know. While this assessment is necessarily incomplete, the three leading rationales it stresses stand out as fundamental. The final section sets out the

implications of the Iraq war for US foreign policy, stressing the unique combination of outside forces and decision-making predispositions that led to the invasion of Iraq. This unique combination suggests that it is highly unlikely the US will undertake similar action against other foes such as Iran, North Korea or Syria in the foreseeable future.

### **Alternative Explanations for the Iraq War**

#### *War and Oil*

A popular explanation for the Iraq war is that the war was all about oil. In this view, the Bush administration declared war on Saddam in order to enrich American oil companies and/or to seek additional oil from Iraq's vast petroleum reserves. The 'war for oil' argument errs, however, on logical and evidential grounds. As some observers have pointed out, if all the Bush administration cared about was oil, it would have lifted sanctions on Iraq's oil sales and cut deals with Saddam instead of invading the country. Such a policy would have satisfied both the oil companies and America's long-term needs for oil.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there is no evidence that oil companies lobbied the Bush administration to topple the Saddam regime. In fact, prior to 9/11, the oil lobby in Washington generally favoured the relaxation of US restrictions on Iraq, not Saddam's removal. After 9/11, most oil companies were wary about the Iraq war because they were worried that the war could bring instability to the Gulf.<sup>4</sup>

Last but not least, prior to the Iraq war, it already was widely accepted that any post-Saddam Iraqi government would not be able to stay in power should US oil companies control Iraq's oil sector. Iraqis are extremely sensitive about the issue of oil and treat oil as a national asset.<sup>5</sup> In fact, prior to the Iraq war, Iraqi opposition groups cautioned that US companies would not have any inside track.<sup>6</sup> The 1991 Gulf War had demonstrated precisely this point. Ever since the liberation of Kuwait by US-led coalition forces in 1991, no single US oil company had gained a concession from the Kuwaiti government. The cautious stance that the Bush administration has taken towards Iraqi oil shows that it is well aware of these complexities. In the course of events leading up to the war, the prevailing view in the administration was that keeping oil in Iraqi government hands was absolutely necessary in order that Iraq remain intact under a centralized authority after the war.<sup>7</sup>

Iraq's oil was relevant to the decision to go to war, but not, as many argue, in the Bush administration's desire to control it. First, many in the Bush administration, particularly high-level civilian political appointees in the Pentagon, believed that Iraqi oil would be used to finance the country's reconstruction, thus alleviating the financial burden on the American Treasury. Second, from the Bush administration's perspective, oil in the hands of

Saddam was worrisome, for he could again try to achieve dominance over the Gulf, a region that is vital to world economic stability. As Michael Ignatieff argues, 'Oil was an issue in the [Iraq] war precisely because its revenues distinguished Saddam from the run of other malignant dictators. It was the critical factor that would allow him, sooner or later, to acquire the weapons' that would enable him to pursue aggressive policies within Iraq and in the region.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Iraq War as an Imperial Project*

Many scholars and observers see the Iraq war as part of the Bush administration's (hidden) global agenda to attain American hegemony, and even to create an empire. According to this view, the neo-conservatives and Cheney had long been looking to use America's unequalled military power to make sure the US controlled the world. The proponents of this argument point to the Pentagon's 1992 in-house Defense Planning Guideline (DPG) which was prepared for the then Secretary of Defense Cheney under the guidance of Wolfowitz. At the time, the DPG suggested that the US make sure to block the emergence of any military rival and called for aggressively (and unilaterally if necessary) dealing with certain troubling countries, including Iraq and North Korea among others.<sup>9</sup> Almost a decade later, 9/11 gave Cheney and his fellow neo-conservative a window of opportunity to implement their 'imperialistic' agenda. The Iraq war was conceived as part of that agenda.<sup>10</sup>

There are several problems with this explanation. First, it is not clear how the elimination of the Saddam regime would enhance US military pre-eminence vis-à-vis other great powers, such as China. In other words, from a geo-strategic perspective, it is hard to imagine how the Iraq war factors into big power politics, unless one accepts the unconvincing argument about oil as the primary motive for the Bush administration.<sup>11</sup> The pursuit of regime change in a small power such as Iraq can hardly be a central part of a strategy to achieve US hegemony. China and Russia certainly do not see the Iraq war as a major obstacle in their relations with the Bush administration. Moreover, it is misleading to single out Cheney and his neo-conservative allies as the sole advocates of American pre-eminence. The policy recommendations of the DPG were openly accepted by the Clinton administration after 1992. For instance, President Clinton's Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that the overall goal of the US was to create a 'preeminent' military force capable of 'full-spectrum dominance' in the world.<sup>12</sup>

Second, the argument that the Iraq war was part of a grand American imperial policy does not explain why the Bush administration's foreign policy prior to 9/11 was much less aggressive than the neo-conservatives had wanted it to be.<sup>13</sup> Prior to 9/11, Bush embraced the realism espoused by Rice and Powell who advocated giving priority to relations with China

and Russia and staying away from over-commitments to nation-building and mediation, a policy dubbed ABC – Anything But Clinton.<sup>14</sup> In particular, despite great effort, the hawks were unsuccessful in persuading Rice, Cheney and Bush (not to mention Powell) to intervene in Iraq before 9/11. Thus, before 9/11, Bush did not pursue an aggressive policy of regime change in Iraq. Instead, the administration moved to strengthen the containment policy towards the Saddam regime that had been in place since 1991.<sup>15</sup>

### **9/11 as the Transformative Event for the War**

What fundamentally changed the picture and transformed the worldview of the administration was 9/11. The attacks' biggest impact on the Bush administration's policy was to undermine America's sense of security and reinforced the notion that national defence was tied to distant trouble spots abroad, especially Afghanistan and the Middle East. In the words of a prominent historian, 9/11 revealed, 'a homeland security deficit, unlike anything [Americans had] experienced in either of the world wars or the Cold War'.<sup>16</sup>

In this regard, the major consequence of the 9/11 attacks for the Bush administration's foreign policy was the confluence of views between realists and the neo-conservatives. In the 1990s, neo-conservatives argued that the decade of peace and prosperity brought about by the end of the Cold War was an illusion, that the world was a far more dangerous place than most people realized, and that the new challenges to American security would come from dictatorships.<sup>17</sup> Certain policy-makers rebuked this neo-conservative Hobbesian view claiming that it was overly pessimistic and alarmist. While the attacks did not prove the neo-conservatives had been correct in every detail (such as their expectation of an attack on the US from a rogue state), their premise about the dangers of the world came to be accepted. The argument that neo-conservatives were waiting in the wings and used 9/11 to forward their agenda, therefore, does not explain how they were able to influence the views of top officials from their secondary positions. It was 9/11 which caused Bush, Rice and Cheney to move closer to Wolfowitz's view which held that attacking Iraq was an effective strategy in the war against radical Islamic terrorists. As Rice remarked: '9/11 crystallized our vulnerability ... And after 9/11, there is no longer any doubt that today America faces an existential threat to our security'.<sup>18</sup> Below I discuss the motives of the Bush administration in going to war in Iraq in light of its interpretation of 9/11.

### **Military Rationale for the War: Iraq's WMD as a National Security Threat**

The importance of Iraq's WMD capabilities is one of the most controversial issues in the debate over the causes of the war. How did Iraq's alleged

WMD figure in Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq, if at all? Before answering this question several issues need to be clarified.

First, all evidence points to the fact that Bush made his ultimate decision to go to war with Iraq before the end of 2001.<sup>19</sup> This means that in order to understand the degree to which the WMD issue factored in Bush's war decision, one has to look at the few months that followed 9/11. In this regard, the Bush administration's public campaign, which began in earnest in September 2002 and prioritized Iraq's WMD, is largely irrelevant to understanding the weight of the WMD rationale in the war decision.<sup>20</sup> Evidence indicates that the Bush administration chose the WMD issue for its convenience and because it required the least amount of effort to convince the American public of the necessity of the war. For instance, Condoleezza Rice remarked that Iraq's WMD was the only one argument with any 'legs' because at least a dozen resolutions on the issue had already been passed by the UN.<sup>21</sup> Wolfowitz also admitted that among the rationales for the Iraq war, 'For bureaucratic reasons we settled on one issue, weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason everyone could agree on'.<sup>22</sup>

Second, by the time Bush made his war decision, it was clear that everybody in the administration believed Iraq had some WMD or some sort of WMD program. This view was shared by members of the former Clinton administration, UN officials and by the international intelligence community. The general consensus regarding Saddam's WMD was reinforced by his systematic resistance to UN inspections, particularly after he expelled the inspectors from Iraq in 1998. Saddam's behaviour appeared to be incomprehensible unless he had WMD to hide.<sup>23</sup>

Third and finally, everyone in the Bush administration believed that Al Qaeda had the resolve to use WMD against the US, if it were capable of obtaining them. Unquestionably, Al Qaeda was aggressively searching for WMD for this purpose and was likely to obtain these weapons from a rogue state.<sup>24</sup> In the months that followed 9/11 and particularly after the Afghan war in the fall and winter of 2001, it became clear that Al Qaeda was interested in WMD and even experimented with some crude forms of chemical weapons. Cheney became consumed with the possibility of a second terrorist attack against the US using WMD, particularly after the anthrax attacks soon after 9/11.<sup>25</sup> Bush also took these reports seriously. According to White House insider sources, the knowledge that Al Qaeda was aggressively searching for WMD and wooing outside support 'transformed the president's thinking about America's enemies, and the horrors that could unfold if any of them made such weapons available to terrorists'.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the main puzzle concerning the link between the Iraq war and WMD is not about the existence of Iraq's WMD or Al Qaeda's active search of these weapons. Rather, it is about how the Bush administration linked these two

issues to each other. As has been previously reported, the administration announced that a major reason for going to war was the possibility that Iraq could pass WMD to Al Qaeda at some future date. It is this factor that is crucial to understanding the role played by Iraq's WMD in the war decision. I argue that many Bush administration officials (particularly Vice-President Cheney) were concerned about such a possibility, even though it is difficult to say how serious that concern was. One can plausibly argue that while Iraq's alleged possession of WMD was not a primary cause for the Iraq war, it was an important factor. Iraq's WMD was important enough to cause top officials to question Saddam's intentions and rationality after 9/11.

Before 9/11, the prevailing view inside the Bush administration was that Saddam was a threat to US allies and troops in the Middle East, but that he was capable to calculate risk when it came to WMD. This assumption was based on the premise that even if Saddam were building WMD, he would not use them against the US or its allies because he knew that this would trigger a massive US military response. In January 2000, Condoleezza Rice wrote an article (widely viewed as the Bush campaign's foreign policy platform) in which she claimed that Iraq's WMD would be 'unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration'. In the same article, Rice predicted that the Saddam regime would collapse on itself because it was 'living on borrowed time'. Rice concluded 'there need be no sense of panic about [Iraq]'.<sup>27</sup> In other words, Saddam was rational enough to be deterred and contained. Military action against Iraq in order to instigate regime change did not seem attractive. In particular, an invasion of Iraq, in which tens of thousands of American soldiers would participate, was unthinkable given the politically difficult task of convincing the Congress and American public about the necessity of such an action.

During the first eight months of the Bush administration, Rice's view was more or less shared by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Richard Cheney, as well as President Bush himself. The Iraq hawks, including Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his neo-conservative allies at the Pentagon (first and foremost Rumsfeld's Deputy Paul Wolfowitz), were on the defensive. These hawks vigorously defended the necessity of military action against Iraq (if not outright invasion), but their argument was ultimately unpersuasive because they defined Saddam's threat in regional terms (i.e., towards Israel and American forces in the Gulf) and had no clear answer about what Saddam would do with his WMD beyond the Middle East.<sup>28</sup>

Thus Powell's argument that the containment of Iraq should become more effective through 'smart sanctions' prevailed before 9/11.<sup>29</sup> For the majority of key foreign policy-makers in the Bush administration, pursuing regime change through overt military action was not seen as a viable alternative

to the policy containment, which relied on the assumption of Saddam's rationality.

The 9/11 attacks caused a dramatic shift within the Bush administration regarding prevailing assumptions about Saddam's intentions and risk assessment capability. A new argument that emphasized Saddam's irrationality gained currency among officials who had hitherto been sceptical of taking action against Iraq. Formulated by the neo-conservatives, this argument assumed that Saddam posed an intolerable threat against the US, not only because he displayed extreme hostility towards the US, but also because he was irrational enough to pass WMD to Al Qaeda. Drawing attention to Saddam's hostility was not new, of course, but it was necessary to emphasize it after 9/11 in order to discredit the arguments that Saddam's secularity and Al Qaeda's religious fundamentalism could not co-exist. According to the neo-conservatives, Saddam's hostility against America superseded all his other concerns, so much so that he could easily cooperate with Al Qaeda against the US. For instance, Richard Perle, a prominent neo-conservative then serving as a Pentagon advisor, argued with regard to Saddam: 'The theory [before 9/11] was that secular and religious terrorists were hostile to one another and would not work with each other. That theory, like all such theories, needed to be reexamined'.<sup>30</sup>

More importantly, after 9/11, the neo-conservatives started emphasizing Saddam's irrationality by referring to his tendency to engage in massive miscalculations of power and his reckless propensity to take exceedingly huge risks. Saddam's 'irrational' acts ranged from his invasion of Kuwait in 1990 to the assassination attempt of Bush senior in 1993. This was a dictator, after all, who had invaded Kuwait before completing his development of nuclear weapons. For the neo-conservatives, Saddam had made these miscalculations because he was uninformed about America and frequently misjudged American reactions. Since reason and dialogue did not apply to him, deterrence or containment could not work against him.

In their book, which is considered the neo-conservative manifesto for waging war against Iraq, William Kristol and Lawrence Kaplan stressed Saddam's 'lack of credible information about U.S. intentions, his track record of heedless risk-taking, and most of all, his supreme irrationality'. According to Kristol and Kaplan, 'Sanity, prudence and self-control, needless to say, are not the first qualities that leap to mind when you think of Saddam Hussein'.<sup>31</sup> In short, Saddam was uniquely dangerous. He was not only a vicious despot and a monster, but also a serial miscalculator. For both of these reasons, Saddam's possession of WMD could not be tolerated since he could easily miscalculate again, this time by passing weapons to terrorists. The assumption about Saddam's uniqueness, which combined his enmity toward the US and his irrationality, did not require evidence. Any proven



links between Saddam and Al Qaeda were deemed to be unnecessary. For instance, Rumsfeld admitted that there was no new evidence to implicate the Saddam regime after 9/11, but only new assumptions: 'The U.S. did not act in Iraq because we had discovered dramatic new evidence of Iraq's pursuit of weapons of mass murder. We acted because we saw the existing evidence in a new light, through the prism of our experience on September 11'.<sup>32</sup>

After 9/11, it seems that Bush, Rice and Cheney adopted the neo-conservative argument that America could not afford to tolerate Saddam's irrationality in combination with his vicious hostility to the US. Insider accounts indicate that Cheney's views about the need to get rid of Saddam were transformed by 9/11, leading him to emphasize the danger posed by the connection between terrorists and WMD.<sup>33</sup> The most fundamental attitudinal change regarding the Saddam threat, however, seems to have occurred in the thinking of Condoleezza Rice and Bush. Rice began to argue that Saddam could pass WMD to Al Qaeda due to his recklessness. Rice claimed: 'It's not because you have some chain of evidence saying Iraq may have given a weapon to al Qaeda. But it is because Iraq is one of those places that is both *hostile to us*, and, frankly, *irresponsible and cruel* enough to make this available'.<sup>34</sup> A top adviser to the administration at the time summarized the emerging view in the White House by saying that deterring Saddam was no longer enough because he was 'too capable of making a massive miscalculation'.<sup>35</sup> According to insider sources, Bush also became increasingly worried about Saddam's irrationality. In the weeks after 9/11, an adviser to the president revealed that Bush believed Saddam to be 'insane'.<sup>36</sup> Bush himself confessed to journalist Bob Woodward that he changed his views on Saddam after 9/11, when 'all [Saddam's] terrible features became much more threatening'. Bush's view was that 'the containment game' was no longer applicable to Iraq because Saddam was a 'madman'.<sup>37</sup> Echoing the neo-conservative claim, Bush later stated publicly: 'Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option'.<sup>38</sup>

Seeing hostile dictatorships as irrational and devoid of objective truth is not new in the history of American foreign policy. Rightly or wrongly, real or imagined, many US administrations before Bush perceived totalitarian adversaries not only as evil, but also incapable of making proper cost-benefit analysis. Such a perception, for instance, emerged within the Truman administration towards the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union after the end of the Second World War. George Kennan, the architect of America's containment policy during the Cold War, argued in his Long Telegram in 1946 that the US could not confront that 'implacable force of evil' on logical terms because Soviet policy 'is seemingly inaccessible to considerations of reality in its basic reactions'. Like Bush officials would argue about Saddam half a century later, Kennan contended that Stalin was 'impervious to logic or

reason' because he did not receive 'anything like an objective picture of the outside world'.<sup>39</sup>

Eliminating a major potential source of WMD for Al Qaeda by overthrowing the Saddam regime was only one reason, and likely not the most important one, for going to war with Iraq. The reasons for the Bush administration's war decision went beyond Iraq. As an aid to Cheney admits, 'The imminence of the threat from Iraq's WMD was never the real issue [for us]. WMD were on our minds, but they weren't the key thing. What was really driving us was our overall view of terrorism, and the strategic conditions of the Middle East'.<sup>40</sup>

### **Psychological Rationale for the War: Demonstration of America's Resolve**

A major rationale of the administration for the Iraq war was psychological, in the implied sense that following 9/11, the war on Islamic terror could not be won militarily unless the US changed the 'psyche' of its adversaries. This meant that the US had to reassert itself dramatically in a forceful and audacious manner by demonstrating vigorously American will, strength and resolve. The demonstration of US power in Iraq was seen as necessary in order to change the widespread perception in the Middle East about America's weakness – a perception that had presumably emboldened America's adversaries in the Muslim world.

In a general sense, changing an adversary's psyche is closely associated with credibility. In power politics, a country's credibility is related to its reputation for military capability combined with the political resolve to use that capability in order to promote that country's goals. Enhancing credibility serves two purposes: changing the calculations of adversaries and assuring allies. The former is usually more important than the latter. The concern of decision-makers for the credibility of their respective states is an old one. For instance, credibility was a central concern of the US during the Cold War. The US sought to deter the Soviet Union and, at the same time, reassure America's allies that it would come to their rescue in case of Soviet aggression. A major reason for the escalation of the Vietnam War during the administration of Lyndon Johnson was explained in terms of US credibility. The logic was that if the US were perceived to be lacking military capacity, political resolve or both, the Soviet Union, China or their proxies would act more aggressively.<sup>41</sup>

US credibility was a particularly important factor for decision-makers within the Bush administration, most prominently for Rumsfeld and Cheney. Having developed their careers during the Cold War, both men had long lamented the weakening of American power and resolve in the years following Vietnam. They argued that after the end of the Cold War, the US had put itself at risk

because it had failed to demonstrate its will and determination to confront its adversaries. In other words, the US had a credibility problem towards its adversaries. Shortly after he was named Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld told the then President-elect Bush that the 'word was out' around the world that the US had gone soft, that America had become an easy target.<sup>42</sup>

The 9/11 attacks only strengthened the conviction of Rumsfeld and Cheney that the US urgently needed to demonstrate American strength and resolve in its fight against terrorism. As reported by insiders within the Bush administration, in the view of Rumsfeld and Cheney 'the threat to America posed by terrorism signaled...that this was the time to reassert American will in the world. According to aides to both men, Cheney and Rumsfeld talked often in the days and months after 9/11 about the need to be bold'.<sup>43</sup> For both men, the best solution to reduce the terrorist threat was to go on the offensive. For instance, Cheney argued: 'We need a strategy that puts us on offense ... a strategy that allows us to destroy the terrorists before they launch another attack on the United States'.<sup>44</sup>

Iraq was an ideal place for several reasons: First, the Afghan war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the winter of 2001 was not seen as a sufficient enough show of American strength. This view was best exemplified by one of Rumsfeld's confidants just before the Afghan war: 'It will be very tough to get bin Laden in the rocky and mountainous terrain of Afghanistan. How do you send the message of strength as Ronald Reagan sent it, that we don't allow these things – you inflict damage'.<sup>45</sup> Mainly for logistical reasons, the Bush administration could send only a limited number of US servicemen and women (mostly Special Forces and Central Intelligence Agency operatives) to Afghanistan. A top official remarks: 'I remember the day that we put the map on the table, and the color drained from everybody's face. Afghanistan is not the place you would choose to fight'.<sup>46</sup> As a result, the US intervention relied primarily on air power and left the groundwork to the Northern Alliance.

Second, and more importantly, the widespread perception of US weakness was not in Afghanistan, but in the Middle East. In the view of Rumsfeld and Cheney (as well as neo-conservatives), the root cause of such a perception lay in the weak and irresolute American responses to terrorist attacks, primarily in the Middle East, since the 1980s. The examples included:

- Hezbollah's suicide attacks on US Marine headquarters in Lebanon in October 1983;
- The death of US Army rangers in Somalia in October 1993 at the hands of a mob organized by Al Qaeda;
- The attack on the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in June 1996 that killed 19 American soldiers;

- Al Qaeda's bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998;
- The attack of a group of Al Qaeda suicide bombers on the USS *Cole* in Aden, Yemen, in October 2000.

The responses of past US administrations to these terrorist attacks had been either withdrawal or police action, or firing a few cruise missiles against terrorist targets.<sup>47</sup> For instance, James Woolsey, who was the CIA chief during the Clinton administration, retrospectively describes President Clinton's overall approach to terrorism as follows: 'Do something to show you're concerned. Launch a few missiles in the desert, bop them on the head, and arrest a few people. But just keep kicking the ball down field'.<sup>48</sup>

After 9/11, Cheney and Rumsfeld came to the conclusion that the weak responses of past US administrations had reinforced Al Qaeda's conviction that the US could be defeated by a resurgence of Islamic militancy. Osama bin Laden's various statements in the 1990s, in which he described the US as a 'paper tiger' and a 'weak horse' gave credence to such belief. The perceived US weakness in the Middle East, however, was not restricted to bin Laden. Many radical Islamist groups in the Middle East, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, thought similarly.<sup>49</sup> In the view of Cheney and Rumsfeld, Arabs who hated America were joining terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda with the conviction that they could defeat the US. In the post-9/11 world, a less than forceful response by the US would reinforce this perception and hasten the unravelling of the region. If the US did not act boldly, Al Qaeda's depiction of it as an essentially weak power would be emphatically confirmed.<sup>50</sup>

Third and finally, Iraq itself had contributed to the perception of the US as a weak power. Simply by staying in power after the Gulf War, Saddam had defied the US and thus contributed to the perception of US weakness in the region. For many individuals in the Arab world, Saddam Hussein was a success story, living proof that one could challenge American power and get away with it. By pursuing a war in Iraq, the hawks aimed to reverse the perception within the Middle East world that the US is a militarily ineffective power. In turn, they believed that such a reversal in perceptions would lessen the appeal of radical Islamic terrorists and rogue regimes by tempering their dreams of destroying America with the fear of US military reprisal.

Bush did not state publicly the psychological rationale before the Iraq war, but there are strong signs that this rationale resonated powerfully in his thinking after 9/11. It seems that he genuinely believed that 9/11 was an ultimate product of past administrations' weak responses to terrorism. Woodward writes: 'President Bush, like many members of his national security team, believed the Clinton administration's response to Osama bin Laden and

international terrorism, especially since the embassy bombings in 1998, had been so weak as to be provocative, a virtual invitation to hit the United States again'.<sup>51</sup> As a consequence, Bush claimed that the US had to fight back to change the perception of US weakness. Bush told Woodward that the perception of US weakness was quite problematic for him: 'I do believe that there is the image of America out there that we are so materialistic, that we're almost hedonistic, that we don't have values, and that when struck, we wouldn't fight back. It was clear that bin Laden felt emboldened and didn't feel threatened by the United States'.<sup>52</sup> After the Iraq war, Bush explicitly brought this point home as a major reason for the invasion of Iraq: 'We have learned that terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness. And the surest way to avoid attacks on our own people is to engage the enemy where he lives and plans'.<sup>53</sup>

The psychological rationale explains why the second Bush administration did not attempt to overthrow Saddam Hussein by a method other than outright American military invasion. For instance, no evidence exists that the Bush administration seriously contemplated a proxy war in which armed Iraqi exiles would be supported by a limited involvement of American forces, even though in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Paul Wolfowitz made such a proposal. What Wolfowitz suggested was a limited war plan against Iraq based on 'an enclave strategy' in which the US military would seize the oil fields in Shiite-dominated southern Iraq and then try to topple Saddam from that enclave.<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, an American invasion of Iraq stood out as the most viable military option, not only because it was most likely to lead to regime change in Iraq, but also because it would create the maximum psychological effect associated with America's demonstration of strength in the Arab/Muslim world.

### **Ideological Rationale for the War: Democratization of the Middle East**

In going to war in Iraq, the Bush administration's decision was not limited to the goals of eliminating Iraq's WMD and to achieving psychological objectives. The most important rationale for the Iraq war was arguably ideological. This rationale, which was formulated by the neo-conservatives and championed by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, entailed spreading democracy throughout the Middle East by establishing a model Arab government in Iraq. Underlying this rationale was the assumption that the war against terror could not be won without defeating the ideas of fanaticism and totalitarianism in the Middle East that fuelled suicidal terrorism in the first place. Freedom and democracy were the best antidotes to totalitarian ideology whether in its religious or secular form. As democratic freedoms

flourished in the Arab countries and Iran, suicidal terror would lose its appeal. In other words, this was idealism not for its own sake, but was closely linked to a strategic imperative of reducing terrorist impulses associated with radical ideas.<sup>55</sup> The neo-conservatives believed that replacing the Saddam regime with a democratically elected government was central to a political transformation of the entire Middle East, particularly in Iran, Syria and the Palestinian Authority.

According to this 'reverse domino theory', the democratization of Middle Eastern regimes and the subsequent institutionalization of freedom and human rights will result in two developments that would enhance the security of the US. First, regimes would cease their support for terrorism because of the assumption that democracies are usually US-friendly.<sup>56</sup> Second, in a free and democratic polity, radical political ideas and *jihadist* calls would lose their appeal. Free elections, dialogue and compromise would gain the upper hand. This, in turn, would lead to a decline of terrorism because current frustrations in the Middle East are the outgrowth of the absence of representative institutions within Arab societies. Put differently, by turning the Middle East into a conglomeration of Western-oriented societies in which Al Qaeda-style terror would have no breeding ground, global terror would be neutralized. The goal of spreading democracy and freedom was then a strategic US interest, not only a moralistic policy.

The neo-conservative project of eliminating totalitarian ideologies via an invasion of Iraq appears to have struck a deep cord in Bush's thinking. A senior official who watched Bush and Wolfowitz interact says that they reinforced each other's faith in 'a strategic transformation of the whole region'.<sup>57</sup> Although many critics scoffed at the ideological rationale, believing it to be a smokescreen created by Bush in order to camouflage other secret goals in Iraq, there are strong indications that Bush did, in fact, embrace it.<sup>58</sup> Bush truly believed that a democratic Iraq would open a new vista for other countries in the region, particularly in Iran and Syria, and that winning the war of ideas was the long-term solution to winning the war against terrorism. Bush put this most clearly in an interview when he stated that: 'I think a free Iraq is going to influence Iran . . . I think [war on terrorism] is a long-lasting ideological struggle'.<sup>59</sup> People close to Bush also confirm that he developed an abiding faith after 9/11 that a new Iraq would change the Middle East, even though he rarely stated this view before the Iraq war started.<sup>60</sup>

A crucial remaining question is why Bush adopted the idealistic position of fostering democracy in the Middle East in the aftermath of 9/11. One can list three main reasons as an explanation. The *first* reason is related to Bush's lack of entrenched beliefs in foreign policy when he assumed office in January 2001. Mainly because he was elected with no experience and

apparently little interest in international affairs, neither realism nor idealism coloured his foreign policy. During his first eight months in office, Bush's conduct of foreign policy, aside from the rhetoric, was within the confines of traditional conservative policies: a combination of realism and isolationism, but largely pragmatic and without any moralism. In other words, prior to 9/11, Bush did not acquire firm and unshakable beliefs in foreign policy and did not have a strong predisposition towards either realism or idealism.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, his journey to moralist foreign policy after 9/11 was largely unproblematic and painless. This is in contrast to Bush Senior whose long experience in the Foreign Service and the CIA played a role in turning him into a traditional realist. Not surprisingly, former President George Bush Senior showed little penchant to add moralism to his foreign policy during his presidency from 1988 to 1992.<sup>62</sup>

The *second* reason why Bush embraced the idea of democratizing the Middle East is related to the impact that 9/11 had on him. Insider reports indicate that 9/11 was a transformative event for Bush. Before 9/11, Bush seemed to have difficulty in defining the mission of his presidency. As his attention shifted substantially from domestic issues to foreign policy after 9/11, the fight against terrorism became a mission for Bush.<sup>63</sup> Given his zeal to defeat the terrorist threat, Bush became receptive to the 'big idea' of democratizing the Middle East.<sup>64</sup> There is no reason to doubt the conclusion that Bush wanted to establish his legacy 'as the president who brought democracy to the Middle East in his fight against terrorism'.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, no other grand project that addressed the root cause of terrorism was posited by traditional Republican realists after 9/11. Arguably, here the old rule of politics was at play: 'You can't fight something with nothing'. Hence, the neo-conservative idea that effectively linked morality (democratization) to a strategic purpose (defeat of terrorism) looked extremely appealing to Bush.

*Third* and finally, Bush's religious faith and his tendency to see the world in dichotomous terms may have played a role in his embracing of the neo-conservative idea. Neo-conservative thinking appealed to Bush because its stark distinction between democracy and dictatorship in the world matched Bush's interpretation of the world as a struggle between good and evil. As two observers note:

For both Bush and the neocons, there emerged recognition of a hitherto unappreciated affinity. In important ways, Bush's religious worldview coincided neatly with the neocons secular worldview . . . Thus, in the aftermath of 9/11, President Bush, determined as he was to rid the world of evil, tilted decisively in favor of neocons, determined as they were to make the world free.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has argued that the Bush administration went to war with Iraq based on several rationales, all of which were directly related to fighting the war on Islamist terror after 9/11. Taken together, these rationales constitute a comprehensive, even sophisticated, reasoning for going to war in Iraq. That being said, to argue that the Bush administration's reasoning for going to war in Iraq was sophisticated is not to say that its assumptions underlying the different rationales are valid. For instance, it is debatable that Saddam was as irrational as the war hawks claimed. It is also disputable that a demonstration of US power and resolve in Iraq will deter suicidal inclined terrorists and/or the regimes that sponsor them.

Some of the war rationales, the ideological one in particular, make the Iraq war unique in US history. For the first time in its history, the US went to war with the aim of transforming the politics of an entire region and, thus, of reducing the terrorist threat. In this regard, the Iraq war was both an end and a means in the war against terror. It was an end because the US wanted to eliminate a long-time hostile regime and its WMD. It was a means because toppling the Saddam regime by an invasion presented a number of opportunities for the US to win the war on terror against the shadowy enemy in the medium to long run.

Scholars have debated endlessly whether American foreign policy is driven by realism based on power politics or idealism associated with American values and principles. Yet, as one prominent historian notes, the tension we sense in US foreign policy 'is not one between idealism and realism at all, but between competing conceptions of what is both moral *and* realistic'.<sup>67</sup> In its war on terror, the Bush administration combined elements of realism (demonstration of American power and resolve) and idealism (spread of democracy) in the formulation of its foreign policy. In sum, the Bush administration's decision to go to war in Iraq was due to a unique set of concerns and goals.

Many observers have overlooked this uniqueness of circumstances and goals in the war decision against Iraq and instead have interpreted the Iraq war as an attempt by the Bush administration to refashion US foreign policy. According to this view, the Iraq war indicates that a fundamental reassessment of America's role in the world has occurred. This reassessment has precipitated a new strategic emphasis based on unilateralism and preemption. In other words, the Bush administration is 'in search of monsters' to unilaterally and preemptively apply its power against in order to attain global dominance, or even an empire.

This view, however, is inherently misleading as the Bush administration defines pre-emption quite narrowly and reserves unilateralism to special



circumstances. For instance, the National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2002, arguably the most important of the Bush administration's foreign policy documents, suggests pre-emption has no role to play with regard to other great powers, such as China, but rather is aimed primarily against terrorist threats and some rogue states. Even for rogue states, pre-emption is seen as a last resort means to thwart these threats. One should also point out that the NSS names only Iraq and North Korea as rogue states that could possibly be the targets of pre-emption. The NSS makes no mention at all of Iran.<sup>68</sup> Since pre-emption against Iraq and North Korea had been a policy option of the Clinton administration (albeit unofficially), it should not be regarded as the invention of the Bush administration. The major difference is that the Bush administration has made the policy overt.

One can go one step further and argue that the Bush administration elevated pre-emption and unilateralism to an official strategy in US foreign policy solely in order to justify the impending war against Iraq. As Iraq became the main (arguably even exclusive) focus of the Bush administration following 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan, administration officials felt it necessary to situate the attack on Iraq in a much larger and better thought-out strategy. In fact, the reading of official statements leads one to conclude that the concepts of pre-emption and unilateralism have been used only within the context of attacking Iraq. For instance, the inclusion of Iran and North Korea in the 'axis of evil' alongside Iraq in early 2002 appears to have been an attempt to avoid unwanted public scrutiny about singling out Iraq at the time. The Pentagon was then at the initial stage of its war plans against Iraq. Moreover, although Bush had probably not made his final decision about whether or not to go to war, he needed an opening salvo to prepare the American public for a potential military confrontation with Iraq. If only Iran and Iraq were mentioned, it would be interpreted as America targeting Islam. North Korea was ideal in this regard because it was non-Muslim and an adversary of the US.

The Bush administration is aware that each crisis, including confrontations with Iran and North Korea, demands a different approach as it is extremely difficult to apply the unique circumstances and rationales that made the Iraq war possible to other cases. In short, one should not overemphasize the importance of the Iraq war as a radical change in US foreign policy. The need to fight terrorism, the primary national security concern, has been at the core of America's foreign policy strategy since 9/11. Imperialistic ambitions and/or a desire to enhance American power vis-à-vis a rising China, Russia or the European Union, have not.

The Iraq war does constitute a significant change in US foreign policy towards the Middle East, a region that has come to be seen as the most problematic since 9/11. Key Bush officials interpreted 9/11 as the result of the failure

of past US policies that put modernization ahead of democratization, stressed a peaceful solution to the Israeli–Palestinian problem and supported authoritarian regimes as a means to reduce the threat of radical Islam. After 9/11, top officials of the Bush administration concluded that such status quo-oriented policy and the emphasis on stability in the Middle East for the sake of oil and Israel had not worked. 9/11 was seen as a kind of foam thrown up by a larger wave of problems in the Middle East – suicidal terrorism associated with religious fanaticism, a conviction that America could be defeated, autocratic regimes that either supported or condoned rampant anti-Americanism, lack of freedoms and democracy and, equally important, a Saddam regime that stood alone as a problem case, but meanwhile seemed to characterize most of the ills in the Middle East.

Hence the new policy of the Bush administration towards the Middle East aims to overturn the traditional US approach by giving priority to democratization instead of to modernization and the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The Iraq war should mainly be interpreted in the context of this policy change towards the Middle East. No strategy could guarantee success, but in the view of the Bush administration, inaction following 9/11 would lead to a further deterioration of the security situation in the Middle East.

The Bush administration thus believed that regime change in Iraq offered an exceptional opportunity to correct the problems that were plaguing the region and, simultaneously, threatening US security. This is why Iraq is central to US foreign policy. Failure in Iraq *à la* Vietnam – that is, an embarrassing US withdrawal from Iraq in the face of increasing American casualties and an unbeatable insurgency – would mean not only ‘losing Iraq’ but also abandoning all possibilities and opportunities that the US has in the region. Given the uniqueness of the Iraq war, it is highly unlikely that the US military would undertake similar action against other foes such as Iran and Syria, in the foreseeable future. Therefore, one should expect the Bush administration to adopt a wait-and-see attitude toward these countries and resort to means other than military

#### NOTES

1. For a discussion of the role played by different actors and worldviews in the American foreign policy tradition, see Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). Mead notes: ‘American foreign policy rests on a balance of contrasting, competing voices and values – it is a symphony, or tries to be, rather than a solo’ (p.54).
2. For Cheney’s importance as a policy player in the Bush administration, see Paul Kengor, ‘Cheney and Vice Presidential Power’, in Gary L. Gregg, II and Mark J. Rozell (eds), *Considering the Bush Presidency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). For an early assessment of Cheney’s importance for Bush, see Nicholas Lemann, ‘The Quiet Man: Dick Cheney’s

- Discreet Rise to Unprecedented Power', *New Yorker*, 7 May 2001. Glenn Kessler and Peter Slevin, 'Cheney Is Fulcrum of Foreign Policy', *Washington Post*, 13 Oct. 2002.
3. See, for instance, John B. Judis, 'Why Iraq?', *The American Prospect*, March 2003; David Ignatius, 'War and Oil,' *Washington Post*, 18 Oct. 2002.
  4. Peter Grier, 'Is It All About Oil?', *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 Oct. 2002.
  5. Trudy Rubin, 'Talk About Oil and Iraq is Just That: A Lot of Talk', *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 12 Jan. 2003.
  6. Ignatius, 'War and Oil'.
  7. Before the Iraq war, an administration report had warned that 'the U.S. and its partners should make it clear that there are no hidden agendas regarding control of Iraqi oil'. Cited in John B. Judis, 'Over a Barrel', *New Republic*, 20 Jan. 2003.
  8. Micheal Ignatieff, 'The Year of Living Dangerously', *New York Times* (Magazine), 14 March 2004.
  9. When the original draft of the DPG was leaked to the press, it created a public controversy such that the draft's language and substance was later softened. See 'Pentagon's New World View', *Washington Post*, 24 May 1992.
  10. This is the main theme in a recent book edited by Sut Jhally and Jeremy Earp, *Hijacking Catastrophe: 9/11, Fear & the Selling of American Empire* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2004).
  11. For a similar point, see Robert S. Snyder, 'The Myth of Preemption: More Than a War Against Iraq', *Orbis* (Fall 2003), p.660.
  12. See Melvyn P. Leffler, 'Bush's Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy* (Sept./Oct. 2004). Also see Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), Chap. 5.
  13. For the frustrations of the neo-conservatives with the Bush administration's foreign policy before 9/11, see Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.141–50.
  14. See Michael Hirsh, 'Bush and the World', *Foreign Affairs* (Sept./Oct. 2002).
  15. See Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), Chap. 5.
  16. John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.73.
  17. William Kristol and Robert Kagan (eds), *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2000).
  18. Condoleezza Rice, Speech to the Manhattan Institute, 1 Oct. 2002, <[www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021001-6.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021001-6.html)>, accessed 11 Dec. 2004.
  19. Daniel Eisenberg, 'We're Taking Him Out', *Time*, 13 May 2002. Also see Glenn Kessler, 'U.S. Decision on Iraq Has Puzzling Past; Opponents of War Wonder When, How Policy Was Set', *Washington Post*, 12 Jan. 2003.
  20. A great deal of attention has been paid to how the Bush administration used the available information about Iraq's WMD in order to justify the war to the US public. The list of articles and books written on the Bush administration's public campaign about Iraq's WMD is long. Among others, see Thomas Powers, 'The Vanishing Case for War', *New York Review of Books*, 4 Dec. 2003; Spencer Ackerman and John B. Judis, 'The First Casualty: The Selling of the Iraq War', *New Republic*, 30 June 2003.
  21. See Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster), p.220.
  22. Sam Tannenhaus, 'Bush's Brain Trust', *Vanity Fair*, July 2003.
  23. Kenneth Pollack, 'Spies, Lies, and Weapons: What Went Wrong', *Atlantic Monthly*, (Jan./Feb. 2004).
  24. See David Albright, Kathryn Buehler and Holly Higgins, 'Bin Laden and the Bomb', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Jan–Feb. 2002), p.23.
  25. Cited in Glenn Kessler and Peter Slevin, 'Cheney is Fulcrum of Foreign Policy', *Washington Post*, 13 Oct. 2002.
  26. Carla Anne Robbins and Jeanne Cummings, 'How Bush Decided That Hussein Must Be Ousted From Atop Iraq', *Wall Street Journal*, 14 June 2002.

27. Condoleezza Rice, 'Promoting the National Interest', *Foreign Affairs* (Jan./Feb. 2000).
28. For instance, see 'Saddam Must Go', *Weekly Standard* (Editorial), 17 Nov. 1997.
29. Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm, The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002), pp.104–8.
30. Interview with Richard Perle, 'Truth, War & Consequences', *Frontline*, PBS, 9 Oct. 2003.
31. William Kristol and Lawrence Kaplan, *The War Over Iraq* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2002), p.82.
32. Testimony of US Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld before the House Armed Services Committee Regarding Iraq. Washington, DC (18 Sept. 2002), <[www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2002/s20020918-secdef2.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2002/s20020918-secdef2.html)>, accessed 20 Dec. 2004.
33. See Michael Elliott and James Carney, 'First Stop, Iraq: How did the U.S. End Up Taking on Saddam?', *Time*, 31 March 2003. Also see Glenn Kessler and Peter Slevin, 'Cheney is Fulcrum of Foreign Policy', *Washington Post*, 13 Oct. 2002.
34. Cited in Carla Anne Robbins and Jeanne Cummings, 'How Bush Decided That Hussein Must Be Ousted From Atop Iraq', *Wall Street Journal*, 14 June 2002. Emphasis added.
35. Evan Thomas, 'Bush Has Saddam in His Sights', *Newsweek*, 4 March 2002. Emphasis added.
36. Michael Elliott and James Carney, 'First Stop, Iraq: How did the U.S. End Up Taking on Saddam?' *Time*, 31 March 2003.
37. Cited in Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p.27
38. George W. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', 28 Jan. 2003, <[www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html)>, accessed 15 Dec. 2004.
39. Cited in Martin Walker, *The Cold War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), p.40.
40. Cited in 'The Path To War', *Vanity Fair*, May 2004.
41. See William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perception During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).
42. Evan Thomas, 'Rumsfeld's War' *Newsweek*, 16 Sept. 2002.
43. Evan Thomas, 'The 12 Year Itch', *Newsweek*, 31 March 2003. According to an aide's notes, on 9/11 Rumsfeld said, 'hit S.H. @ same time – not only UBL'. Cited in Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p.25. SH denotes Saddam Hussein and UBL Usama bin Laden. These words of Rumsfeld should be interpreted as a knee-jerk reaction to 9/11, rather than a well thought-out rationale at the time.
44. Cited in 'Dick Cheney: The Man Behind the Curtain', *U.S. News & World Report*, 12 Oct. 2003.
45. Cited in Michael Hirsh, *At War With Ourselves: Why America Is Squandering Its Chances to Build a Better World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.51.
46. Cited in Glenn Kessler, 'U.S. Decision On Iraq Has Puzzling Past; Opponents of War Wonder When, How Policy Was Set', *Washington Post*, 12 Jan. 2003.
47. See Jean Bethke Elstain, *Just War Against Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), pp.155–7.
48. Cited in Norman Podhoretz, 'How to Win World War IV', *Commentary* (Feb. 2002).
49. For examples of perceived US weakness in the Middle East, see Barry Rubin, *The Tragedy of the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p.254.
50. This was also the argument of Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, two pre-eminent scholars of the Middle East with close ties to some administration members, particularly Cheney. See David Frum, *The Right Man* (New York: Random House, 2003), p.170.
51. Woodward, *Bush At War*, p.38
52. Cited in Woodward, *Bush At War*, pp.38–9.
53. 'President Bush's Address to the Nation', (Text), *New York Times*, 9 Sept. 2003.
54. For instance, Wolfowitz defended such a limited war plan during the meeting of principals in Camp David on 15 Sept. 2001. See Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p.22. Also see interview with Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz at the New Yorker Festival, 21 Sept. 2003, New York, at <[www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil)> (Pentagon's website).
55. For details of the neo-conservatives' thinking about the democratic tsunami created by the Iraqi model for the rest of the Middle East, see Lawrence F. Kaplan and William Kristol,

- The War over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2003), Chap. 7; Robert Dreyfuss, 'Just the Beginning: Is Iraq the Opening Salvo in a War to Remake the World?', *American Prospect*, April 2003; Nicholas Lemann, 'After Iraq: The Plan to Remake the Middle East', *New Yorker*, 17 Feb. 2003; Joshua Micah Marshall, 'Practice to Deceive: Chaos in the Middle East Isn't the Bush-hawks' Nightmare Scenario – It's Their Plan', *Washington Monthly*, April 2003; 'Bush's Domino Theory', *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 Jan. 2003; David Ignatius, 'The Read on Wolfowitz', *Washington Post*, 17 Jan. 2003; Trudy Rubin, 'Toppling Hussein: A Chance to Rethink Mideast Politics', *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 Aug. 2002; John B. Judis, *The Folly of Empire* (New York: Scribner's, 2004).
56. See Charles Krauthammer, 'Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World', Speech at the American Enterprise Institute, 27 Feb. 2004. Also see, David Wurmser, *Tyranny's Ally: America's Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 1999), p.61.
57. See Bill Keller, 'The Sunshine Warrior', *New York Times* (Magazine), 22 Sept. 2002.
58. For instance, Maureen Dowd, a *New York Times* columnist and a fierce critic of the Bush administration, writes: 'The goal of ending tyranny is available as a retroactive rationale for the war in Iraq, where Americans were originally told that weapons stocks were the primary justification for war'. Dowd, 'A Bunch of Krabby Patties', *New York Times*, 23 Jan. 2005.
59. Interview with *Time*, 6 Sept 2004.
60. For the emerging importance of transforming the Middle East in Bush's thinking after 9/11, see David Frum, *The Right Man*. Before the Iraq war, however, Bush emphasized this rationale on only two occasions, once in a speech at West Point in June 2002 and a second time in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute on 26 Feb. 2003, a few weeks before the beginning of the Iraq war. See, 'President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point, June 1, 2002' and 'President Discusses the Future of Iraq, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C., February 26, 2003', <www.whitehouse.gov>. Following the toppling of the Saddam regime, Bush frequently stated the link between the Iraq war and democratization of the Middle East. For instance, he told Woodward: 'I truly believe out of this [Iraq war] will come peace'. Cited in Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p.260.
61. For Bush's idealism, see Michael J. Mazarr, 'George W. Bush, Idealist', *International Affairs*, Vol.79, No.3 (2003).
62. For a glimpse into the minds of Bush Senior and his administration, see George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998).
63. 'In One Month, A Presidency Is Transformed', *The New York Times*, 11 Oct. 2001.
64. Woodward writes: 'Bush was . . . baffled about the countries that produced ideologies and people with the goal of killing Americans in terrorist attacks. He wondered how the U.S. could reform such societies, and wanted to advocate the promotion of democracy and women's rights in the Muslim world. . . It was part of change in the president's thinking. . . since the 9/11 attacks'. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p.89.
65. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., 'Eyeless in Iraq', *New York Review of Books*, 23 Oct. 2003.
66. Andrew J. Bacvich and Elizabeth H. Prodromou, 'God Is Not Neutral: Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy after 9/11', *Orbis*, Vol.48, No.1 (Winter 2004), pp.52–3
67. Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston, MA and New York: Mariner Books, 1997), p.9. Emphasis original.
68. See the National Security Strategy of the United States, Sept. 2002, <www.whitehouse.gov>.