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**Republican Foreign Policy and the War on
Terror**

Diplomová práce

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Anotace

Diplomová práce „Republican Foreign Policy and the War on Terror“ pojednává o procesu tvorby americké zahraniční politiky z pohledu vládnoucí Republikánské strany v letech 2003 až 2007. Sleduje vývoj vnitrostranické diskuze ohledně průběhu a způsobu vedení války v Iráku v reakci na postupně se zhoršující bezpečnostní situaci v zemi. Analyzuje postoje jednotlivých názorových frakcí mezi americkými konzervativními politiky, komentátory a specialisty na zahraniční politiku a všímá si měnící se konfigurace moci na americké politické scéně. Klade si za cíl vysvětlit, proč zůstala politika Bushovy administrativy v Iráku víceméně beze změny až do ledna 2007 navzdory nepříznivému vývoji válečného střetnutí a jaké faktory měly vliv na tento výsledek americké konzervativní debaty o Iráku. Práce nabízí tři odpovědi na tyto výzkumné otázky. První souvisí s Bushovým stylem vedení své administrativy a vnitřním nastavením rozhodovacích procesů uvnitř klíčových politických orgánů. Druhá rozebírá paradigma války proti terorismu konstruované po teroristických útocích z 11. září 2001 a jeho vliv na americký politický diskurs. Třetí se všímá využití zahraniční politiky a otázek národní bezpečnosti jakožto volebního tématu ze strany republikánů.

Annotation

The diploma thesis “Republican Foreign Policy and the War in Iraq” deals with the process of U.S. foreign policymaking from the perspective of the ruling Republican Party between 2003 and 2007. It tracks the development of the intraparty debate on the war in Iraq in reaction to the gradually worsening security situation in the country. It analyzes positions of various schools of thoughts within the American conservative movement and the changing configuration of power in American politics in the studied period. The thesis aims to explain why the Iraq policies of the Bush administration remained virtually intact up until January 2007 despite failing to deliver satisfactory results and what factors shaped this outcome of the conservative debate on Iraq. Three

hypotheses are offered to answer the research questions. The first concerns President Bush's management style and the setup of the policymaking process within his administration. The second deals with the global war on terror narrative constructed in the aftermath of 9/11 and its impact on American political discourse. And the third analyzes the use of foreign policy and national security issues as an electoral wedge issue by the Republican Party.

Klíčová slova

George W. Bush, Republikánská strana, americká zahraniční politika, válka proti terorismu, válka v Iráku, světová bezpečnost, neokonzervatismus, diskursivní analýza

Keywords

George W. Bush, Republican Party, U.S. foreign policy, war on terror, war in Iraq, global security, neoconservatism, discourse analysis

Prohlášení

1. Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracoval/a samostatně a použil/a jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.
2. Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zpřístupněna veřejnosti pro účely výzkumu a studia.

V Praze dne 21. května 2010

Jiří Skoupý

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1. Introduction

1.1 *Presentation of the Thesis*

The most defining feature of American foreign policy in the new millennium is the war on terror, launched in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In its course, the United States launched military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq in an effort to eradicate the terrorist and WMD threat and to promote democratic values abroad. In both cases swift military victories were followed by a protracted period of sustained American military presence in both countries, with the aim to stabilize local security situations and help lay foundations of new democratic institutions. The war on terror proclaimed by the Bush administration assumed a prominent place in American politics and in the foreign policy-making discourse.

This thesis focuses on a somewhat narrowed and more specific, albeit very important, segment of the policy-making processes related to the prosecution of the war on terror. It analyzes the conservative debate on the war in Iraq from March 2003, i.e. the beginning of the war, to January 2007, i.e. President Bush's decision to send in extra troops in an effort to regain initiative in the conflict. This limitation of the scope of the topic reflects three underlying assumptions with regards to American foreign policy under President Bush. First, the thesis studies only conservative participants in the debate since the Republican Party enjoyed the advantage of a unified government throughout the entire studied period and thus was in a position to create and execute war policies. Therefore, the terms "conservative" and "Republican" are used interchangeably in the text, even though they are not necessarily identical. Second, the thesis acknowledges that the American conservative movement does not represent a monolithic opinion block; on the contrary, it highlights the importance of distinguishing various schools of thought, all of which differed in their approach to the war on terror and the war in Iraq in particular. Also, Congressional Republicans are sometimes analyzed as a distinct group in the debate, even though they often adhere to different conservative schools of thought. This approach reflects the importance of Congress as a whole in American politics, despite the ideological differences of its members. And third, the thesis puts great emphasis on the Iraq conflict because the United States

devoted far more resources to it, both in terms of troops and finances, than to the mission in Afghanistan. What is more, the war in Iraq was definitely a more controversial undertaking and was not, unlike the Afghan campaign, almost universally supported in the United States even among conservative policymakers.

The goal of the thesis is to analyze the internal dynamics of the conservative debate on the war on terror in the face of gradually unsatisfactory results on the ground in Iraq. It aims to identify trends in the changing configuration of power and rhetorical initiative within the conservative wing of American politics. Based on this analysis, the thesis sets forth the following research questions: why did American policies in Iraq and their overall course remain virtually intact until early 2007 despite overwhelming signs that they were not delivering desired results? What were the factors that influenced the outcome of the conservative debate? The thesis offers a set of three hypotheses to explain the resistance to change on part of the Bush administration in spite of mounting criticism from its erstwhile political supporters and allies.

The research questions are important because they discuss an important aspect of American foreign policymaking under its new organizing principle, the war on terror. They analyze the functioning of corrective mechanisms in the American political system and the ability to modify American foreign policy in response to external developments. Finding an answer to the questions is useful not only for understanding the presidency of George W. Bush and the development of his Iraq policies. Since the paradigm of the war on terror transcends Bush's time in office and remains the bottom line of American foreign policy today, it could also serve as a reference tool for analyzing the current foreign policy debate in the United States.

It is also important to clarify what the thesis does not attempt to do. It has no ambition to assess in any way the very decision to start the war in Iraq or the debate that preceded it, nor does it offer an evaluation of the decision to surge in January 2007.

To support its claims, the thesis is organized as follows. First, it puts the Iraq war in the context of the broader paradigm of the war on terror. Next, it presents a chronological discourse analysis covering four distinctive moments in the Iraq debate, namely the first year of the occupation regime with initial signs of internal dissent, the presidential election of 2004, the subsequent two years with increasingly frequent calls for a change of course, and finally the 2006 mid-term elections and their aftermath with

an overhaul of the strategy in Iraq. Ultimately, the thesis concludes by a discussion of three possible answers to the original research questions.

1.2 Discussion of Sources

American foreign policy and the war on terror is a frequent object of study in academic literature, the issue of the war in Iraq also regularly featured in American newspapers, magazines, journals and television shows. As a result, it was not difficult to amass a sufficient number of sources for the thesis. A far greater challenge was to sift through the materials and identify the truly relevant ones, especially since the discourse analysis included in the thesis required a lot of work with primary sources.¹ These are easily available; especially the access to George W. Bush's archival materials is commendable, with the logical exception of classified materials and items subject to executive privilege.

As far as monographs are concerned, this thesis relies upon several key items. For the topic of the Bush revolution in American foreign policy, the most resourceful works turned out to be *America Alone* by Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke,² which traces and dispels myths about the origins of the ascent of neoconservatives, *America Unbound* by Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay,³ which analyzes the development of George W. Bush's foreign policy, and *Power, Terror, Peace and War* by Walter Russel Mead,⁴ who offers his own understanding of sweeping changes in American foreign policy. A broader look on the evolution of American national security policies and institutions is provided by Kent Bolton in *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policymaking after 9/11*,⁵ which deals also with the domestic dimension of the war on

¹ Journal articles, newspaper columns and other pieces written by conservative authors can, in fact, be considered primary sources for the discourse analysis presented in the thesis. However, for the purpose of classifying used sources, they will be listed under secondary literature, as customary.

² HALPER, Stefan and CLARKE, Jonathan (2004): *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ DAALDER, Ivo H. a LINDSAY, James M. (2005). *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

⁴ MEAD, Walter Russel: *Power, Terror, Peace and War* (2004). *America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk*. New York: Knopf Publishing Group.

⁵ BOLTON, M. Kent (2008). *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policymaking after 9/11: Present at the Re-creation*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.

terror, such as an overhaul of American intelligence agencies. On the actual prosecution of the war in Iraq and the deliberations leading up to the decision to surge, two accounts by prominent journalists focusing on the war developments were used, these being *The Gamble* by Washington Post's Thomas Ricks,⁶ and *Tell Me How This Ends* by Linda Robinson of U.S. News & World Report.⁷ On the conservative debate on Iraq, Gary Rosen compiled a book of pieces written by prominent conservative authors, titled *The Right War?*⁸ As far as monographs are concerned, it is important to keep in mind the ideological and political orientation of its authors. For instance, Halper, a former member of the Reagan administration, along with Clarke demonstrate that neoconservatives represent a departure from conservative policies of the Reagan presidency. Daalder and Lindsay, both veterans of the Clinton administration, view the Bush revolution even less favorably. Both exemplify the disproportionate focus on neoconservatives among all conservative schools of thought in the policy debate, which brings the risk of ascribing too big a role to this group.

In addition to Rosen's compilation, the thesis uses numerous articles, columns and op-ed pieces from an array of conservative writers for its analysis of the debate on Iraq. Among the most frequently used sources in terms of magazines are *The Weekly Standard*, *Commentary*, *National Review* or *The American Conservative*, in terms of individual authors; the thesis tracked several high-profile conservatives such as David Brooks, George Will or Andrew Sullivan. The thesis focuses especially on those who it identifies as influential conservatives, which is an assessment based largely on held positions, on the volume of citations, references and reposts of their works, and on access to policymakers.

The wealth of sources includes also articles from academic journals, which provide especially theoretical background for presented hypotheses. To name only a few, James Pfiffner⁹ and John Burke¹⁰ look at the structure of Bush's White House, Jean Ehlstain¹¹

⁶ RICKS, Thomas E. (2009). *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.

⁷ ROBINSON, Linda (2008). *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way out of Iraq*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.

⁸ ROSEN, Gary (ed.) (2005). *The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ PFIFFNER, James P. (2007). *The First MBA President: George W. Bush as Public Administrator*. *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 67, No. 1, pp. 6-20.

and Joshua Kertzer¹² study the use of a constructed war narrative, and John Petrocik¹³ and Alan Abramowitz along with Kyle Saunders¹⁴ study theoretical electoral issues in America.

2. Initial Phase of the Global war on Terror

2.1 September 11 Terrorist Attacks and the Bush Presidency

It is hard to exaggerate the impact of September 11, 2001 on the United States of America. Concerning foreign policy, the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. brought about a significant shift in the process of its formulation and significantly altered the American foreign policy debate as a whole. Domestically, they helped create bipartisan consensus and, in a unique rally-around-the-flag moment, united American political representatives so that the situation appeared similar to the Cold War period, which was a time when the most fundamental questions about the shape and nature of American foreign policy were generally agreed upon. As early as September 14th the Congress passed a resolution authorizing President Bush to “use all necessary and appropriate force“ against those who “planned, authorized, committed, or aided“ the terrorist attacks.¹⁵ This act *de facto* amounted to a blank-check declaration of war whereby it remained the president’s responsibility to determine against whom and how it was to be waged. As a result, the White House undisputedly became a dominant

¹⁰ BURKE, John P. (2005). The Contemporary Presidency: Condoleezza Rice as NSC Advisor: A Case Study of the Honest Broker Role. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 554-575.

¹¹ ELSHTAIN, Jean B. (2003). Intellectual Dissent and the War on Terror. *Public Interest*, Vol. 151 (Spring 2003), pp. 151-161.

¹² KERTZER, Joshua (2007). Seriousness, Grand Strategy, and Paradigm Shifts in the “War on Terror”. *International Journal*, Autumn 2007, pp. 961-980.

¹³ PETROCIK, John R. (1996). Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 40, Issue 3, pp. 825-850.

¹⁴ ABRAMOWITZ, Alan and SAUNDERS, Kyle (2005). Why Can’t We Just All Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America. *The Forum*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, pp. 1-24.

¹⁵ H. J Res. 64 Authorizing Use Of United States Armed Forces Against Those Responsible for Recent Attacks Against the United States. Full text of the resolution is available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/useofforce.htm> [last accessed March 16, 2010].

actor in formulation of foreign policy and the president's judgment became the main criterion to determine American national interests and how to pursue them.¹⁶

For President Bush, the terrorist attacks did not change, but rather reinforced, his perception of the outside world. In his opinion, it was an essentially hostile place, where America needed to rely on its own strength and armed forces rather than on international institutions and agreements. What is more, the quick sympathetic reaction from other world leaders represented in Bush's view, a confirmation and acceptance of America's exceptional position in the free world, which would unite under American leadership.¹⁷

Even though the attacks did not change his fundamental views about the outside world, they provoked a change in his political agenda. Foreign policy shed its second-tier status and, instead, became a top priority of the administration. The shift was quite ironic, because the president himself had little experience with international politics and demonstrated little interest in it prior to this point.¹⁸ As Walter Russel Mead argues, President Bush and his team turned the fight against terrorism into an organizing principle according to which American foreign, and to a large extent also domestic, policy would be pursued. The ever looming perceived terror threat would play a similar role in U.S. policy to that of the communist threat in the second half of the 20th century.¹⁹

¹⁶ TUCKER, Robert W.: The End of Contradiction? In: TUCKER, Robert W. et al. (2002): One Year On: Power, Purpose and Strategy in American Foreign Policy, National Interest, Issue 69 (Fall 2002), p. 6.

¹⁷ Regarding the American leadership of the free world, it is possible to mention here a UN resolution from September 12 condemning the terrorist attacks or the fact that NATO invoked article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty for the first time in history. Also, in support of this conclusion, Charles Krauthammer points out that other countries abandoned their efforts to balance American power and clearly joined the American side of the fight against terrorism. KRAUTHAMMER, Charles (2002): *The Unipolar Moment Revisited*, National Interest, Issue 70 (Winter 2002/2003), p. 8.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the scope and the topic of this thesis do not allow for a more detailed elaboration of President Bush's foreign policy agenda prior to 9/11. For more on this, see for example Chapter 5 (First Eight Months) of DAALDER, Ivo H. a LINDSAY, James M. (2005). *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 61-76.

¹⁹ MEAD, Walter Russel (2004). *Power, Terror, Peace and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk*. New York: Knopf Publishing Group, p. 112.

2.2 National Security Strategy 2002 and the Decision to Invade Iraq

Changes in American foreign policy that had occurred in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks were officially introduced and summarized in the National Security Strategy of September 2002. The document, reflecting the Bush administration's approach to the recently launched war on terror, formulated three key goals as follows:

- 1) defend peace against the threat from terrorists and tyrants
- 2) preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers
- 3) extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent²⁰

To achieve these goals, the strategy called for maintaining a robust military that would “dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”²¹ Determination to improve American armed forces, their capabilities and readiness was an understandable and widely approved reaction to an unprecedented attack on American continental soil, along with an overhaul of domestic counterterrorism efforts. However, the question under what circumstances to use American military was the most controversial aspect of the strategy as it introduced two new ideological premises, both of which were crucial for subsequently launching the war against Saddam Hussein.

First, pointing out the existence of adversaries who are deterred neither by American military might nor by the prospect of American retaliation, the document concluded that the concept of deterrence might not always be functional. Therefore, the United States has to reserve the right to act preemptively to destroy any potential threats even before they fully materialize. The reason why the United States could not afford to wait while

²⁰ THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, September 2002, p. 1. Available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss.pdf> [last accessed March 16, 2010].

²¹ NSS 2002, p. 30.

risks gathered was that, as explained by President Bush in his 2002 State of the Union Address, “time is not on our [U.S.] side.”²²

The other innovative but controversial mechanism included in the strategy was linking together perpetrators of acts of terrorism and the so-called *rogue states*. The document promised to “make no distinction between terrorists and those who knowingly harbor or provide aid to them,”²³ which was a position reflecting a conviction that the security problem the United States was facing were not only terrorist groups but also regimes that enabled them to operate. John Lewis Gaddis finds this to be the most significant conclusion of the whole strategy: it meant that it was no longer sufficient to let various unsavory and authoritarian regimes alone. On the contrary, 9/11 painfully demonstrated that, in connection with religious radicalism, they can represent a serious threat for the United States through their complicity with terrorist networks. Therefore, America should actively move to reform or replace them.²⁴ In other words, democracy promotion was again becoming a vital American interest.

NSS 2002 and the above described reasoning also provided a key conceptual basis for the decision to invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power. Iraq reappeared high on the national security agenda immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks when regime change became one of the priorities of the war on terror.²⁵ The argumentation in favor of attacking Iraq consisted of two main arguments, the security threat represented by Saddam Hussein’s regime, and the U.S. interest in promoting democracy in the Middle East. September 11th showed that weapons of mass destruction in connection with terrorism are the most urgent threat for America and Iraq was widely assumed to possess them, or at least to be actively pursuing them. Overthrowing

²² 2002 State of the Union Address. Available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> [last accessed March 16, 2010]. Curiously, this is in sharp contrast with Bush’s presidential campaign when Condoleezza Rice argued that time plays against hostile regimes. RICE, Condoleezza (2000): *Promoting the National Interest*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 79, No. 1 (January/February 2000), p. 61.

²³ NSS 2002, p. 5.

²⁴ GADDIS, John L. (2002). A Grand Strategy of Transformation. *Foreign Policy*, Issue 133 (Nov/Oct 2002), p. 53.

²⁵ Prior to the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration relied mostly on the existing sanctions regime, which I deemed fairly successful. Colin Powell expressed his opinion on the regime in February 2001: “... to some extent, I think we ought to declare this a success. We have kept him [Saddam] contained, kept him in his box.” ELLIOTT, Michael and CARNEY, James (2003): First Stop, Iraq. CNN.com, March 24, 2003. Available at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/03/24/timep.saddam.tm/> [last accessed March 18, 2010].

Saddam and subsequently helping build a democratic Iraq was supposed to bring stability to the region. Supporters of the attack further claimed that it would put an end to numerous human rights violations in the country and, what is more, any eventual success of a newly-born Iraqi democracy would send a strong signal throughout the region.²⁶

2.3 Neoconservative Victory in the Conservative Foreign Policy Debate after 9/11

The way in which the Bush administration reacted to the 9/11 attacks along with the principles set forth for the prosecution of the war on terror and for the execution of American foreign policy point at the fact that the neoconservative school of thought emerged victorious in the foreign policy debate within the American conservative movement in the beginning of the new millennium. Neoconservatives,²⁷ who significantly rose in prominence when George W. Bush assumed the presidency, were remarkably successful in making some of their core beliefs the basic tenets of President Bush's foreign policy with both NSS 2002 and the war in Iraq reflecting key neoconservative positions. These were based on a conviction that, in the pursuit of an optimal foreign policy, the United States should play an important role in foreign affairs and avoid isolationist tendencies. Similar to Wilsonians, neoconservatives think that spreading American values and ideals belongs to key American interests since it would benefit not only the rest of the world but also America itself thanks to lowered security risks. However, in a sharp departure from their more idealistic colleagues, neoconservatives trust that American military might is more likely to accomplish this

²⁶ All these motives appeared in, among other public pronouncements, for example in the 2002 State of the Union Address. On WMDs, Bush declared that "Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade." On democracy and human rights, Bush promised that "...America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity... America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment." *State of the Union Address*, January 29, 2002.

²⁷ For the origins of neoconservatism see for example KRISTOL, Irving (1999): *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (Ivan R. Dee, Chicago).

goal than international cooperation or institutions.²⁸ Putting the neoconservative doctrine into practice, the United States, especially in a position of the only superpower, should never relinquish unilateral use of force, nor the option to act unilaterally as a way of conducting its foreign policy.²⁹

Importantly, it would be a mistake to label President Bush as a neoconservative. Quite on the contrary, on his campaign trail in 2000 Governor Bush called for a “humble foreign policy”³⁰ guided by a narrow definition of national interests, suggesting he was more likely to embrace a more traditional realist stance. Similarly, pronouncements of other members of candidate Bush’s foreign policy team, such as Condoleezza Rice, suggested that in case of a Republican victory in November 2000 the United States would stay away from ambitious projects and expensive undertakings abroad.³¹ Indeed, during his first eight months in office, the president largely kept his campaign pledges and did not engage America in projects in which he saw little national interest, as evidenced, for instance, by his decisions not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol or the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court. Not surprisingly, *The Economist* labeled the new president’s diplomacy as “Realpolitik” assessing his achievements in the beginning of his first term.³² Neoconservatives approved of President Bush’s attitude towards intentional agreements, which they viewed more as a limiting factor to American power rather than an avenue for its enhancement. Nevertheless, they were highly critical of what they perceived as too moderate a stance in international affairs. Their influence on the foreign-policy making process was rather small during the first eight months of Bush’s presidency.³³

²⁸ This is why Walter Russel Mead calls neoconservatives “revived Wilsonians”. MEAD, Russel W. (2004), p. 89.

²⁹ HALPER, Stefan and CLARKE, Jonathan (2004): *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 11.

³⁰ Governor Bush promised a foreign policy that would be based on “the modesty of true strength and the humility of real greatness“. HALPER and CLARKE (2004), p. 133.

³¹ For a more detailed discussion on this topic, see for example RICE, Condoleezza (2000). *Promoting the National Interest*. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.79, No.1 (January/February 2000), pp. 45-62.

³² THE ECONOMIST (2001): *On His High Horse*, Vol.365, Issue 8298 (Nov 9, 2001), p. 27.

³³ To give a few examples, neoconservatives criticized Bush’s decision not to increase dramatically military spending and his handling of a mini-crisis with China involving a forced landing of an American spy plane on Chinese soil. As Robert Kagan and William Kristol put it: “[Bush] may go down in history as the man who let American military power atrophy and America’s post-Cold War preeminence slip away.“ KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2001): *No Defense*. *Weekly Standard*, Vol. 3, No. 42 (July 23, 2001), p. 13.

However, the importance of neoconservatives rose dramatically with the launch of the war on terror. Several factors can be identified as to why this school of thought triumphed so decisively in the foreign policy debate in the aftermath of 9/11. First, as already mentioned, President Bush assumed office with scant foreign policy experience and little desire to make it a priority during his time in the White House. That might have made him more receptive to new ideas, no matter how controversial, at a time when foreign policy moved to the top of the agenda. Second, even though no neoconservatives held Cabinet-level posts in the Bush administration, they were present at second-tier positions in key departments and were thus able to influence their direct superiors.³⁴ Third, neoconservatives were the only conservative group that was able to offer a coherent, well-argued and also applicable plan of action at a time of national security crisis.³⁵ And perhaps most importantly, 9/11 created a political environment that was much more open to unorthodox ideas as long as they addressed the need of the nation. Crucially, there was nothing controversial about the goals of the neoconservative strategy per se, i.e. to defend America against external threats and to promote its values abroad.

As a result of having embraced the neoconservative ideology of muscular idealistic internationalism, in March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq and started a lengthy and ambitious nation-building project in a campaign that overshadowed the ongoing efforts in Afghanistan. The decision to fight a war in the Middle East was a result of an intense foreign policy debate and was based on the assumptions that Iraq under Saddam Hussein armed with WMDs represents a mortal threat that needs to be dealt with and that building a functioning democracy in the heart of the region represents a vital US interest. Supporters of the war prevailed over opponents, who challenged the link between Iraq and terrorism and the feasibility of building democracy there. They argued that in order to be successful, the conflict would take far more resources and time than expected by the administration.

³⁴ Here it is necessary to name at least Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, John Bolton, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Douglas Feith, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Richard Perle, Chairman of the defense Policy Board Advisory Committee, I. Lewis Libby, Vice President Cheney's Chief of Staff and Eliot Abrams, NSC Senior Director for Near East and North African Affairs.

³⁵ For an account of neoconservative activities prior to 9/11 along with the origins of their program presented to President Bush see for instance Chapter 3 (The Nineties: From Near Death to Resurrection) of HALPER, Stefan and CLARKE, Jonathan (2004): *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 74-111.

3. The First Phase of the Occupation of Iraq (2003-2004)

3.1 *Setting up the Occupation Regime*

The conflict between American armed forces and their regular Iraqi counterparts demonstrated American military superiority and less than four weeks after the start of hostilities Baghdad fell into the hands of coalition troops. Dire predictions that American and allied soldiers could get bogged down in nasty and intense urban fighting turned out to be wrong and on May 1, 2003, President Bush declared the end of “major combat operations” aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln.³⁶

To establish a governing body in post-combat Iraq, the Bush administration set up the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and charged it with rebuilding the country until power could be transferred to Iraqis and their representative. Curiously enough, as Kent Bolton emphasizes, even though combat operations were officially over, the Pentagon remained in charge of administering Iraq as the CPA was placed under the authority of the Department of Defense.³⁷ Also, the appointment of Paul D. Bremer III, who was reportedly “close to the neoconservative wing of the Pentagon” and “supported by [Secretary] Rumsfeld and Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz,” to lead the newly-created authority was a clear signal that President Bush was comfortable with DoD’s control over Iraq.³⁸ It was also the Pentagon which was at that time busy identifying members of the first post-war Iraqi government among the Iraqi émigré community. Foremost among these soon-to-be national leaders was Ahmed Chalabi, who had strong relations to the Department of Defense and was responsible for providing intelligence about Saddam’s WMD program from the “Curveball” source in the run-up to the war. Curveball’s information, subsequently proven false by the Iraqi Survey Group’s

³⁶ Full text of Bush’s speech is available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A2627-2003May1> [last accessed March 21, 2010].

³⁷ BOLTON, M. Kent (2008). *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policymaking after 9/11: Present at the Re-creation*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 229.

³⁸ ALLEN, Mike (2003). *Expert on Terrorism to Direct Rebuilding*. *Washington Post*, May 2, 2003. Available at <http://www.iraqwararchive.org/data/may02/US/wp03.pdf> [last accessed March 21, 2010].

findings, was instrumental in making the case for the war and was used by Secretary Powell in his infamous presentation to the United Nations in February 2003.³⁹

Analyzing the structure of the post-war administration, it is remarkable how much the State Department was left out of the process. Neoconservatives felt strong distrust towards State personnel reflecting their ideological differences in the pre-war period. Also, confidence and prestige gained in the swift military victory might have given the Department of Defense a reason to treat its State counterpart in a high-handed manner, especially if they compared, in the words of Newt Gingrich, “six months of diplomatic failure [e.g. failure to counter the French campaign against the war or to secure Turkey’s approval to host U.S. invading troops]” with “one month of military success”.⁴⁰ Once Saddam had been toppled and Pentagon officials could see themselves as liberators and democracy promoters charged by the president to rebuild the country, little heed was paid to State Department’s ideas and concerns. Well-grounded objections to the persona of Chalabi were dismissed⁴¹ and the role of Colin Powell and his officials kept to a minimum. When Bremer was installed in his office, Zalmay Khalilzad, in his title of Ambassador at Large for Free Iraqis the main point person for Iraqi exile leaders with considerable experience from the region learned that there would be no use for his services in the post-war administration, much to the surprise of the Secretary of State.⁴² On a similar note, when Ryan Crocker, a senior career Arabist from the State Department, suggested bringing his whole team to Iraq, he was rebuffed by CPA staff: “The fewer folks from State the better.”⁴³

As work on post-war development began, some of the policies of the Bremer-led authority became points of contention between neoconservatives and other Republican factions. The very first two decrees issued by CPA had a profound impact on the

³⁹ In yet another demonstration of the influence of Pentagon over U.S. Iraq policy, Wolfowitz, who was in charge of preparing ministries in Baghdad for post-war management and worked frequently with Chalabi, was referred to as “Wolfowitz of Arabia” in the émigré community. BOLTON (2008), p. 181.

⁴⁰ KESSLER, Glenn (2003). State-Defense Rivalry Intensifying; Gingrich to Urge Overhaul of Powell’s Department. *The Washington Post*, Apr 22, 2003.

⁴¹ The State Department was joined by NSC staffers in arguing that Chalabi was “trouble, dishonest, an inveterate self-promoter”. On top of that, he was accused of fraud in Jordan. Ironically, these reservations might have made Chalabi even more popular with neoconservatives. BOLTON (2008), p. 235.

⁴² GORDON, Michael R. and TRAINOR, Bernard E. (2006). After Invasion, Point Man for Iraq Was Shunted Aside. *New York Times*, Mar 13, 2006.

⁴³ ROBINSON, Linda (2008). *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way out of Iraq*. New York, NY: Public Affairs, p. 4.

American mission in Mesopotamia. Decree No. 1 from May 16, 2003 carried out the program of de-Baathification, as it barred high ranking members of Saddam's previously ruling party from holding jobs in a wide range of sectors, from government offices to hospitals to universities. Even more importantly, Decree No. 2 from May 23, 2003 effectively disbanded the Iraqi security and intelligence services and armed forces.⁴⁴ Traditionalists and realists challenged the neoconservative assumption that nobody from the former regime's power structures could be trusted and instead argued that, with a careful vetting process, new Iraqi institutions could build on the most talented professionals. Moreover, there would be significantly less resentment among the Iraqi population.⁴⁵ The benefit of hindsight suggests that the latter argument was a perfectly valid point as the security situation in Iraq soon began to deteriorate.

3.2 *Worsening Situation in Iraq*

While it is true that most Iraqis welcomed the fall of Saddam Hussein with satisfaction, positive feelings towards American troops were far from universal and resistance against the American occupation soon began to brew. As early as April 18, 2003, i.e. even before the formal end of major combat operations, anti-American demonstrators marched in Baghdad. Iraqis objected to the fact that Americans had neglected to provide security after Saddam was toppled and failed to prevent looting and other displays of chaotic behavior that occurred in the early days of the occupation.⁴⁶ As a sign of gathering troubles, open calls for resistance from clerics and ordinary Iraqis had become commonplace by the end of May 2003. More worryingly, these messages were not coming only from Sunni representatives, but also from Iraqi

⁴⁴ It is fair to add that by this point most members of these services had deserted. Nevertheless there was no attempt to call them back and find a way to reconcile. The chosen course of action was to start building a new army from scratch. ROBINSON (2008), p. 3.

⁴⁵ FINEMAN, Mark, VIETH, Warren and WRIGHT, Robin (2003). Dissolving the Iraqi Army Seen by Many as a Costly Move. Los Angeles Times, Aug 24, 2003.

⁴⁶ Another accompanying problem for American authorities was very poor reception of Ahmed Chalabi by the Iraqi population. FILKINS, Dexter and FISHER, Ian (2003). U.S. Is Now in Battle for Peace After Winning the War in Iraq. New York Times, May 3, 2003.

Shiites, who in the past bore most of the brunt of Saddam's oppression and thus stood to benefit most from his removal.⁴⁷

The United States enjoyed a few significant successes in the first year of Iraq's occupation. The most notable of achievements consist of the arrests of high-level Baath officials and top scientists with information on the alleged Iraqi WMD program, the elimination of Saddam's sons Uday and Qusay, and especially the capture of Saddam Hussein himself in December 2003 and the formal handover of sovereignty to Iraqis in June 2004. Despite these accomplishments, however, the situation on the ground deteriorated with every passing month. In addition to the frustration of Iraqis stemming from the failure of authorities to provide adequate security, basic utilities and services, sectarian divides in Iraq deepened as all three major factions of the Iraqi population were trying to assert their positions in the new post-Saddam order. Shiites, a sixty-percent majority of the population oppressed during Saddam's regime, felt they could voice their demands without fears of persecution and expected a share of political power reflecting their predominance among Iraq's overall populace.⁴⁸ Sunnis, having lost their advantageous position under Saddam, were determined to limit the power reversal as much as possible. And finally Kurds were largely interested in preserving their special status and de facto autonomy they enjoyed after the First Gulf War.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, as the political situation remained without a satisfactory solution, violence ensued and gradually worsened to such an extent that it threatened to evolve into a full-scale civil war. To make matters even worse, sectarian violence was welcomed and actively encouraged by global jihadis, who sought to establish a base in Iraq.⁵⁰

As demonstrations and protests were continuing and small armed conflicts were occurring at a steady rate, it became painfully clear that the United States and its allies

⁴⁷ BOLTON (2009), p. 187.

⁴⁸ This is why Iraqi Shiites called for holding elections to form a new national government as soon as possible. SHAHID, Anthony (2004). Shiites March for Elections in Iraq. The Washington Post, Jan 20, 2004.

⁴⁹ This does not mean there were no points of contention between Kurds and their Arab compatriots. To mention only the most notable one, the city of Kirkuk and control thereof has remained an unsolved puzzle even until the present days. FLEISHMAN, Jeffrey (2004). Iraqi Melting Pot Nears Boiling Point. Los Angeles Times, Jan 26, 2004.

⁵⁰ A document intercepted by the US military addressed to senior leaders of Al Qaeda laments the difficulty of recruiting local jihadis and lays out plans to attack Shiite sites with the hope of sparking a wide-spread conflict. FILKINS, Dexter (2004). U.S. Says Files Seek Qaeda Aid in Iraq Conflict. New York Times, Feb 9, 2004. RENNIE, David and FAIRWEATHER, Jack (2004). Islamic Militants Trying to Spark Civil War in Iraq, U.S. Claims. Kingston Whig – Standard, Feb 10, 2004.

found themselves enmeshed in a jihadist insurgency, rather than facing resistance from isolated groups of members of former Saddam loyalists. Associated with increasing attacks on American forces and American-trained local Iraqi forces⁵¹ was a hitherto unknown terrorist outfit called Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), sometimes referred to also as Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.⁵² This group included a significant number of foreign fighters among whom the most prominent was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who went on to become the head of the organization. The influx of foreign militants increased as the insurgency grew in importance and thus, in an ironic turn of events, while the invasion of Iraq was partly justified by the alleged presence of jihadis in Iraq, which was subsequently proved wrong, it actually turned out to be a major attraction for them.⁵³

3.3 Domestic Reception of Failing Occupation

With increasing troubles in Iraq and the inability to calm the situation down, it became evident that American planners were wholly unprepared for the post-combat phase of the conflict. This was not entirely caused by the lack of pre-war planning. Already in May 2002, Secretary Rumsfeld ordered making plans for “Phase Four” of the potential conflict, i.e. for stabilization operations after the combat phase has ended.⁵⁴ Simultaneously, the State Department embarked upon a project called “The Future of Iraq”, which aimed to plan the transition of Iraq towards democracy and to identify key tasks and issues to focus on.⁵⁵ Also, several leading Bush administration officials sent out a top-secret document “Iraq: Goals, Objectives and Strategy”, which contained guidelines not only for the invasion but also how to build a democratic system.⁵⁶ Thus the reason why the occupation was not going well was the fact that a significant amount of expert-quality planning and advice went unheeded and received scant, if any,

⁵¹ Appendices No. 1 and No. 2 show the death toll over time among U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

⁵² HENDREN, John (2003). Tape Claims Al Qaeda Is at Work in Iraq. Los Angeles Times, Jul 14, 2003.

⁵³ MacFARQUHAR, Neil (2003). Rising Tide of Islamic Militants See Iraq as Ultimate Battlefield. New York Times, Aug 13, 2003.

⁵⁴ BURKE, John P. (2005). The Contemporary Presidency: Condoleezza Rice as NSC Advisor: A Case Study of the Honest Broker Role. Presidential Studies Quarterly, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 567.

⁵⁵ FALLOWS, James (2004). Blind Into Baghdad. The Atlantic Monthly, Issue 293, pp. 55.

⁵⁶ GORDON, Michael R. (2004). The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a 2nd War. New York Times, Oct 19, 2004.

attention by decision-makers in charge.⁵⁷ For instance, the State Department's Future of Iraq project was largely ignored by the Department of Defense. Other documents, which were considered more seriously, reflected Pentagon's preference for a lighter footprint on the ground and for as speedy a withdrawal of troops as possible.⁵⁸

The most obvious and most criticized consequence of the inadequate planning in the run-up to the war was having deployed too few troops to Iraq. The number of soldiers sent to Iraq reflected Secretary Rumsfeld's belief in the capabilities of the transformed American military with high reliance on sophisticated weapons and communication systems rather than manpower.⁵⁹ The transformation of U.S. armed forces also increased its flexibility, so, according to Douglas Feith, more troops could be easily added after the war was started with "fewer forces than Saddam expected us [the United States] to have."⁶⁰ Despite CPA's worries, the Pentagon went ahead with drawing down the troops as planned so coalition forces in Iraq shrank from 150,000 in June 2003 to 108,000 in February 2004. After that point, the situation on the ground did not permit the withdrawal to continue.⁶¹

If high-ranking military personnel ever harbored concerns about the troop levels being sent to Iraq, they did not voice them publicly during the war preparations or with the occupation already under way. Partly, as Linda Robinson observes, this might have been due to optimistic tendencies within the armed forces and their pervasive "can-do" attitude.⁶² Nevertheless, as the shortage of soldiers on the ground became too apparent, American public was often reminded that the only exception, General Eric Shinseki, then the Army Chief of Staff, warned shortly before the invasion in a Congressional

⁵⁷ As James Fallows said already in February 2004 when the abovementioned documents began to leak, for example about the findings of the "Future of Iraq" project: "Most of the project's judgments look good in retrospect – and virtually all reveal a touching earnestness about working out the details of reconstructing a society." FALLOWS (2004), p. 57.

⁵⁸ The Pentagon prevented all senior officials involved in the Future of Iraq project from participating at Pentagon's planning. Jay Garner, head of the agency preceding CPA, was instructed to ignore its findings. RIEFF, David (2003). *Blueprint for a Mess*. New York Times Magazine, Nov 2, 2003, p. 32. BURKE (2005), p. 568. Pentagon's working assumption was it would be possible to start the withdrawal after mere 90 days. GORDON (2004). Kent Bolton adds Rumsfeld's aversion to predictions to the list of reasons why so few contingency plans were drafted at the Pentagon. BOLTON (2008), p. 179.

⁵⁹ For more on the transformation see for example KAGAN, Frederick (2006): *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy*. New York: Encounter Books.

⁶⁰ GORDON (2004).

⁶¹ In all fairness, this decrease was partially offset by the arrival of a new Polish division.

⁶² ROBINSON (2008), p. 12.

testimony that post-hostilities control would require far more significant ground presence only to have his estimations dismissed by Paul Wolfowitz as “off the mark.”⁶³ Similarly, the inadequate troop level was picked up by numerous conservative critics, such as the editors of *National Review*,⁶⁴ *New York Times*’ David Brooks,⁶⁵ or Robert Kagan of *Weekly Standard*. Mr. Kagan, writing in retrospect from a neoconservative perspective, blames the low number of committed troops on the unfortunate combination of Pentagon’s (wrong) embrace of the notion of “strategic pause” after the end of the Cold War according to which the unchallenged United States was able to pursue its interests at a lower cost and on pandering to realists’ aversion to nation-building projects.⁶⁶ What is more, in a joint piece with William Kristol, they castigated Secretary Rumsfeld for his obsession with military transformation leading to sending too few troops and hinted he should maybe resign, taking personal responsibility for inadequate resources in Iraq.⁶⁷

Another embarrassing aspect of Bush administration’s handling of post-war Iraq was the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, one of the core arguments to go to war in the first place. Initial reports from Iraq citing difficulties to find banned materials⁶⁸ were dismissed by Bush administration as premature, but with passing months it became increasingly difficult to fend off criticism. The final verdict on the issue of Iraqi WMDs was delivered in September 2004 by the so-called Duelfer Report of the CIA-commissioned Iraqi Survey Group.⁶⁹ The report stated that there was no evidence of WMD materials in Iraq, even though there was some evidence of intentions to acquire

⁶³ FALLOWS (2004), p. 73.

⁶⁴ In a list of mistakes, the magazine mentions also lack of willingness to get international help and an overall unpreparedness for the reconstruction efforts. NATIONAL REVIEW (2004). *An End to Illusion*. Vol. 56, Issue 8, pp. 14.

⁶⁵ While Mr. Brooks calls the initial troop level a mistake, he also lauds President Bush for acknowledging it and for intending to correct it. BROOKS, David (2004). *A More Humble Hawk*. *New York Times*, April 17, 2004.

⁶⁶ KAGAN, Robert (2008). *The September 12 Paradigm: America, the World, and George W. Bush*. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, Issue 5, pp. 25-39.

⁶⁷ KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2004c). *Too Few Troops*. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 9, Issue 31, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁸ GELLMAN, Barton (2003). *Banned Iraqi Weapons Might Be Hard To Find*. *New York Times*, Apr 5, 2003.

⁶⁹ The report was informally named after Charles Duelfer, who took over the chairmanship of the group after the resignation of David Kay. Full text of the report (formally called *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq’s WMD*) is available at https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/index.html [last accessed March 28, 2010].

these and of violations of U.N. resolutions in the domain of delivery systems. In other words, the report declared that WMD-related arguments put forward by the administration to justify the invasion were not correct. Such conclusions embarrassed American intelligence agencies; however, they also reinforced questions whether the Bush administration tweaked the intelligence it was getting to suit its purposes, further discrediting the whole project of the invasion of Iraq.⁷⁰

Faced with the prospect of not finding existing WMDs in Iraq, proponents of the invasion (especially neoconservatives) tried to play down the importance of such a failure. In a surprisingly candid interview with *Vanity Fair* in May 2003, Paul Wolfowitz explained that WMDs were chosen as a core reason to invade Iraq, because the Bush administration officials felt they were an argument everyone could agree on and was easy to present to wider audiences. The preference for WMDs did not mean, however, that there were no other reasons for toppling Saddam, such as his support for terrorism and his criminal treatment of Iraqi people.⁷¹ Similar reasoning was echoed by a *Weekly Standard* editorial several months later that maintained that liberating Iraqis would have been a sufficient reason, even though terrorism added urgency to the perceived WMD threat.⁷² Even after the publication of the Duelfer Report, David Brooks labeled it as the ultimate indictment of Saddam Hussein, pointing at his abuse of the sanctions regime and his intention to resume the WMD program once the sanctions were lifted.⁷³

⁷⁰ Efforts to answer this question fall beyond the purview of this thesis. Nevertheless, in 2006 Paul Pillar, national intelligence officer responsible for the Middle East in 2000-2005 accused the Bush administration of not relying on official intelligence while making significant decisions, of misusing intelligence provided to justify already made decisions, and of politicizing intelligence work. PILLAR, Paul R. (2006). *Intelligence, Policy, and the War in Iraq*. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, Issue 2 (Mar/Apr 2006), pg. 15.

⁷¹ DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (2003). Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Interview with Sam Tannenhaus, *Vanity Fair*. May 9, 2003. Available at <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2594> [last accessed March 28, 2010].

⁷² KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2004a). *The Right War for the Right Reasons*. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 9, Issue 23, pp. 20-28.

⁷³ BROOKS, David (2004). *The Report That Nails Saddam*. *New York Times*, Oct 9, 2004.

3.4 Conservative Debate about the War in Iraq 2003-2004

The unfavorable situation on the ground in Iraq during the first year and a half of the occupation sparked an intellectual debate within the American conservative movement and the Republican Party concerning the wisdom of past decisions and a proper course of action to improve America's standing in the conflict. In that debate, as David Brooks contended, problems arising in Iraq made critics and challengers to the neoconservative paradigm, most notably realists, more vocal.⁷⁴

James Kurth, who opposed the invasion from the very beginning, reiterated that the war in Iraq represented an unsuccessful radical departure from the traditional way America interacted with the rest of the world in its disregard for objections of its allies and its emphasis on democracy promotion through military occupation.⁷⁵ Fared Zakaria, having supported the invasion, joined in the critique declaring the Bush nation-building project failed.⁷⁶ Columnist George Will called upon President Bush to admit the failure in Iraq arguing from his traditionalist perspective that political control does not always automatically change political culture, even by introducing democratic institutions.⁷⁷

Other conservatives began to argue that it is time for the United States to scale down its goals in Iraq as events on the ground showed that functioning democracy was not achievable any time soon. Fouad Ajami somberly claimed that Iraq was not going to turn into a showcase of democracy in the Middle East,⁷⁸ which sharply contrasted with his pre-war optimism.⁷⁹ Andrew Bacevich agreed that original goals of the Operation

⁷⁴ BROOKS, David (2004). Crisis of Confidence. *New York Times*, May 8, 2004.

⁷⁵ Regarding the democracy promotion under military occupation, Kurth criticized supporters of Iraq for selectively choosing precedents of Germany and Japan, neglecting lessons from the Caribbean, South Asia or Yugoslavia. KURTH, James (2004). Iraq: Losing the American Way. *The American Conservative*, Mar 15, 2004.

⁷⁶ While it is somewhat problematic to label Mr. Zakaria as a realist conservative, he claims that Realpolitik-based reasoning was part of the appeal of the argumentation for the invasion. ZAKARIA, Fared (2004). How We Could Have Done Things Right. Like It's 1999. *The New Republic*, June 28, 2004. Available at http://www.fareedzakaria.com/ARTICLES/other/nr_2004.html [last accessed March 28, 2010].

⁷⁷ WILL, George (2004). Time for Bush to See the Realities of Iraq. *The Washington Post*, May 4, 2004.

⁷⁸ AJAMI, Fouad (2004). Iraq May Survive, but the Dream Is Dead. *New York Times* (Late Edition, East Coast), May 26, 2004.

⁷⁹ Shortly before the war, Ajami argued that there was "no need to pay excessive deference to the political pieties and givens of the region. Indeed, this [invading Iraq] is one of those settings where a reforming

Iraqi Freedom cannot be completed and called for injecting more realism into the U.S. strategy.⁸⁰ Owen Harries suggested that before foundations for a full-fledged democracy are laid, some sort of elite rule or “illiberal democracy” might be the best available option.⁸¹

Some conservative thinkers came to embrace the “pottery barn” argument (if you break it, you own it), i.e. once America got involved in Iraq, it was important to stay and finish the mission, no matter how flawed the reasons for going in were. Henry Kissinger called on his fellow realists to acknowledge that democracy promotion is a legitimate part of U.S. national interests and asserted that the only feasible exit strategy in Iraq is success. Nevertheless, he warned that the Iraq environment is different from that of Japan or Germany after World War 2, two successful examples frequently cited by neoconservatives.⁸² David Brooks shared the conviction about the uniqueness of Iraqi local conditions and reminded everyone that building democracy would have to be a long-term commitment, a notion still zealously opposed by the Pentagon.⁸³

In contrast to the above described criticisms, neoconservatives mostly remained adamant in their support for the war and in their belief in ultimate victory. Richard Perle reiterated in January 2004 that the decision to invade Iraq was a correct one, noting that it is in America’s best interest to take preemptive diplomatic, economic and, if need be, military action because “the hard line is the safe line.”⁸⁴ Other adherents of this school of thought called for more patience as it was, in the words of Andrew Sullivan, too early to tell if the insurgency “was persistent.”⁸⁵ Similarly, Victor Hanson argued that clean-

foreign power's simpler guidelines offer a better way than the region's age-old prohibitions and defects. AJAMI, Fouad (2003). Iraq and the Arabs’ Future. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, Issue 1, p. 2.

⁸⁰ BACEVICH, Andrew (2004). A Time for Reckoning: Ten Lessons to Take Away from Iraq. *The American Conservative*, July 19, 2004.

⁸¹ According to Harries, strong economic fundamentals are crucial for eventually succeeding in democracy promotion. HARRIES, Owen (2004). The Perils of Hegemony. *The American Conservative*, June 21, 2004.

⁸² Calling on idealists in the conservative movement, Kissinger urged them to realize they had won the ideological battle over the direction of U.S. foreign policy and invited them to participate at an honest discussion about its implementation. KISSINGER, Henry (2004). Intervention with a Vision. *Washington Post*, Apr 11, 2004.

⁸³ BROOKS, David (2003). Building Democracy out of What? *The Atlantic Monthly*, Issue 291 (June 2003), pp. 28-29.

⁸⁴ TORRIERO, E. A. and KIRK, Jim (2004). Perle Says He Has No Regrets About Iraq Stance. *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 14, 2004.

⁸⁵ There might be some reservations about labeling Sullivan a neoconservative. However, in the quoted piece he clearly identified himself with their reasoning, calling it in fact “hyper-realist,” as it incorporated

up efforts after a combat phase are always hard, especially since the United States was trying to mitigate damages and deaths and the shift of focus from numbers of enemy kills to protecting lives overshadowed the achieved military successes.⁸⁶ Max Boot reminded Americans that the United States is at war and engaged in a nation-building project that will inevitably take time. Still, as he pointed out, both American casualties and the frequency of abuses (such as Abu Ghraib) were comparatively low compared to major U.S. military operations in the past.⁸⁷ Norman Podhoretz went even further and viewed the war in Iraq as a part of greater mortal struggle against terrorism, which constituted World War IV (with the Cold War being World War III). According to him, in this conflict there was no room for moral relativism or compromising realist approaches, which failed to bring either stability or security.⁸⁸

However, even the neoconservative camp was not immune to internal dissent at this stage. Shortly after the occupation entered its second year, Francis Fukuyama, a hitherto prominent thinker associated with the neoconservative movement, broke ranks with his colleagues, published a comprehensive rebuke of numerous arguments in support of the war and accused neoconservatives of failing to acknowledge dire empirical facts on the ground.⁸⁹ Importantly, Fukuyama did not suggest fully embracing Kissingerian realism or any other (according to him) inadequate alternative, but rather called for a correction of what he saw as major flaws in the neoconservative approach, especially excessive

ideals into the U.S. national security agenda. SULLIVAN, Andrew (2004). Quitters. *New Republic Online*, April 20, 2004. Cited in: ROSEN, Gary (ed.) (2005). *The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, pp. 57-62.

⁸⁶ HANSON, Victor D. (2004). Iraq's Future – and Ours. *Commentary*, Vol. 118, Issue 1 (Jan 2004), pp. 15-20.

⁸⁷ BOOT, Max (2004). Reality Check: This Is War. *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 2004.

⁸⁸ PODHORETZ, Norman (2004). World War IV: How It Started, What It Means, and Why We Have to Win. *Commentary*, Vol. 188, No. 2, pp. 17-54.

⁸⁹ The piece itself was in fact a reaction to Charles Krauthammer's notion of America's unipolar moment (See KRAUTHAMMER, Charles (2002): *The Unipolar Moment Revisited*, *National Interest*, Issue 70 (Winter 2002/2003), pp. 5-17.) and Krauthammer's speech at the American Enterprise Institute (KRAUTHAMMER, Charles (2004). *Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World*. AEI Lecture, Feb 12, 2004. Available at <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1078705/posts> [last accessed April 11, 2010]. Among the most important negative developments Fukuyama cited are: failure to find WMDs in Iraq, growing anti-Americanism in the Middle East, failure to inspire democratic leadership in Iraq, growing insurgency and overall cost of the conflict, no progress on the Palestinian front and failure to legitimize the conflict ex post. As a result, other voices (realist, nationalist-isolationist, liberal-internationalist etc.) will have more influence. FUKUYAMA, Francis (2004). *The Neoconservative Moment*. *National Interest*, Issue 76 (Summer 2004), p. 58.

idealism and dismissal of the importance of legitimacy.⁹⁰ He argued that although the United States should never renounce the right to act preemptively, it needs to exercise caution, inject more realism into its policies at the expense of exalted idealism while at the same time keeping democracy promotion high on the agenda, and recognizing the need for allies.

An answer to Fukuyama was penned by Charles Krauthammer, who qualified his ideological stance as “democratic realism.”⁹¹ As opposed to democratic globalism, which is universalistic in its approach to democracy promotion, democratic realists act only in those instances, where there is a clear U.S. interest. As Krauthammer argued, Iraq is precisely one of those instances because fostering democracy in the Middle East strikes at the very heart of the terrorist problem and doing nothing about Saddam’s regime would have been costly in the future.⁹² He agreed with Fukuyama that legitimacy stemming from international support would have been desirable, but argued that it could not constitute a limiting factor on U.S. actions, since America was waging an existential struggle, a notion Fukuyama challenged. Ultimately, Krauthammer contended that nation-building projects are inherently risky and potentially costly, but it was stakes and resolve that drew the line between success and failure (e.g. between South Korea and Haiti). Therefore, America needed to stay committed to and see through its mission in Iraq.

The Bush White House did not waver in its commitment in the face of mounting criticisms and calls to reassess the policies in Iraq. It did, however, shift the rhetoric on its goals in the war and focused increasingly on Middle East stability and transformation at the expense of WMDs, which were nowhere to be found. Bush administration officials such as Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney or Condoleezza Rice drew parallels between 9/11 and Pearl Harbor and likened the Iraq War to post-WW2 occupation of Germany and Japan, with one important caveat: they did not envisage such a long

⁹⁰Fukuyama pointed out that American record of nation-building is pretty bleak, with Japan and Germany as exceptions rather than typical examples. In terms of legitimacy, he argued that a lack thereof (even ex ante, since no WMDs were found in Iraq) should bother both realists, as it would attract allies to share the cost, and idealists, as it compromises the ability of America to lead and inspire. Also, since the world changed after the Cold War with USSR no longer being a major threat and with U.S. being so dominant militarily, America might need to be tough at all costs. FUKUYAMA (2004), p. 62.

⁹¹ KRAUTHAMMER, Charles (2004). In Defense of Democratic Realism. *The National Interest*, Issue 77 (Fall 2004), pp. 15-25.

⁹² Krauthammer duly notes that the cost of inaction seemed to big even for so big a realist as Henry Kissinger. KRAUTHAMMER (2004), p. 22.

military presence in Iraq.⁹³ In terms of policies, President Bush adamantly stayed the course except for putting NSA Rice in direct charge of operations in Iraq in October 2003. This was ultimately a rather symbolic move that could be interpreted as a sign of growing displeasure with Pentagon's delivery. This move, though, failed to heal relations between the Pentagon and the State Department.⁹⁴

On Capitol Hill, bad news coming from Iraq translated into more anxious Republican lawmakers, who were being asked inconvenient questions by their constituents. As a result, Congressional conservatives started privately complaining about being left out from the decision-making process and more frequently demanded Bush administration officials to appear and testify about the plans for the continuing operations in Iraq. Crucially though, very few of them voiced their concerns publicly, with the most notable exception being Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who openly found Bush's policies "flawed."⁹⁵ The vast majority of Republican Congresspersons decided not to openly challenge or give too much platform to opponents of a war-time president, especially during an election year.

4. War on Terror and the 2004 Presidential Election

4.1 *George W. Bush as a Presidential Candidate*

President Bush faced no serious opponent in the 2004 Republican primaries and won every single one of them. Consequently, he and his running mate Dick Cheney easily secured the Republican nomination at the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City. The Grand Old Party rallied around a wartime president running mainly on the promise to continue working to keep America safe. In addition to choosing their candidates, party delegates at the convention adopted the 2004 Republican Party

⁹³ For an example of shifting emphasis in the Iraq discourse see MILBANK, Dana and ALLEN, Mike (2003). U.S. Shifts Rhetoric On Its Goals in Iraq; New Emphasis: Middle East Stability. The Washington Post, Aug 1, 2003.

⁹⁴ KESSLER, Glenn and SLEVIN, Peter (2003). Rice Fails to Repair Rifts. Washington Post, Oct 12, 2003.

⁹⁵ CURTIUS, Mary (2004). Congress Wants Answers on Bush's Plans for Iraq. Los Angeles Times, Apr 19, 2004.

Platform, a key policy document summarizing President Bush's successes and achievements in office, and offering guidelines and principles for president's eventual next term. The document is useful not only as a Bush campaign manifesto, it is also to a large extent indicative of the prevailing stream of thinking in the conservative policy debate as it was drafted by the Republican Platform Committee headed by then-Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) and consulted with the Bush campaign staff.

As far as foreign policy is concerned, the platform called for a continuation of the existing trend of what it referred to as "distinctly American internationalism" reflecting "the union of our [U.S.] values and our [U.S.] national interests. The document reiterated the key principles of the Bush Doctrine, mainly that the United States and peace is defended by taking the fight to the enemy and that no difference should be made between perpetrators of acts of terrorism and those who harbor and aid them, which forces nations to make a choice what side of the ongoing war they want to be on.

⁹⁶

Speaking specifically about the war in Iraq, the Platform argued that the country was on the course to become an example of a reformed regime in the entire Middle Eastern region with 25 million Iraqis enjoying much greater personal freedoms and liberties.⁹⁷ Responding directly to criticisms regarding the decision to invade Iraq, the document defended the decision pointing out it was agreed on by the president along with both parties in the Congress and was based on best intelligence available at that time.⁹⁸

In order to consolidate gains from successes the war on terror, the United States needed, according to the G.O.P., to stay committed in Iraq and not doubt the ongoing efforts, which would make the mission markedly more difficult. Also, America should build on the "large international cooperation"⁹⁹ mobilized by President Bush and strengthen its alliances to prevail against terrorism. However, international treaties and

⁹⁶ 2004 REPUBLICAN PARTY PLATFORM: A Safer World and a More Hopeful America, p. 6. Available at <http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/Sections/News/Politics/Conventions/RNC-2004platform.pdf> [last accessed April 4, 2010].

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 10.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 13.

institutions should not exercise a veto right over principled American leadership, which was one of Bush's core beliefs about foreign policy.¹⁰⁰

On the campaign trail, Bush stuck to the strategy of emphasizing achievements in the war on terror and keeping America safe, such as organizing a free election in Afghanistan, disrupting black arms markets, persuading Libya to renounce its WMD program or bringing Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to the anti-terror camp. The president reiterated his conviction that spreading freedom and democracy leads to a more secure America and that the situation in Iraq is developing in the right direction. He assured Americans that he has a strategy for victory and pointed at past successes, notably handing over formal sovereignty to Iraqis sooner than anticipated, training tens of thousands of Iraqi armed forces and bringing billions of dollars for reconstruction efforts.¹⁰¹

4.2 Candidacy of John Kerry and the Conservative Response

Democratic primaries in 2004 were significantly more competitive than their Republican counterparts. Ultimately, they produced John Kerry as the Democratic candidate to challenge the incumbent president in November elections. Senator Kerry ran as a staunch critic of Bush administration's handling of post-war Iraq and its unilateralism which provoked a backlash of right-wing politicians, thinkers and commentators.¹⁰² This conservative reaction that is highly relevant for the purpose of studying the conservative debate on the war on terror, rather than the actual position of John Kerry himself. Two elements stand out in the national security discourse in the 2004 presidential campaign.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Sovereignty was handed over to Iraqis on June 28, 2004, i.e. two days before originally planned. For an example of President Bush's campaign speech see BUSH, George W. (2004). President's Remarks in Wilkes-Barre, PA. Oct 6, 2004. Available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/10/20041006-9.html> [last accessed April 5, 2010].

¹⁰² The war in Iraq was a source of troubles for the candidacy of John Kerry. The senator voted in favor of authorizing the president to send troops to Iraq but opposed many subsequent Bush's Iraq policies, earning himself an accusation of flip-flopping on the issue. When WMDs were conclusively not found in Iraq, their absence became one of the themes of his campaign. BALZ, Dan and VANDEHEI, Jim (2004). Candidates Debut Closing Themes: Bush and Kerry Gear Up for Final Push. The Washington Post, Oct 15, 2004.

First, the spotlight of the presidential campaign put increased pressure on conservative thinkers and writers to articulate what the United States should be doing in the war on terror and what its priorities should be. By autumn 2004, the notion that America might fail to achieve its original goals in Iraq and therefore policies on the ground should aim to mitigate the cost of and potential fallout from the failure was no longer unthinkable. In the face of Democratic attacks, numerous conservative writers started using the argument that withdrawing troops from Iraq would have dire and far-reaching consequences, which would significantly outweigh the cost of a protracted conflict.¹⁰³

Second, as the war on terror occupied a prominent spot among campaign topics, the Democratic Party worked hard to close the “credibility gap”¹⁰⁴ on national security issues. In response, conservative punditry attempted to communicate that a Kerry administration would be “soft on terrorism,” no matter how muscular the Democratic rhetoric might sound. As David Brooks observed reporting on the 2004 Democratic National Convention, numerous prominent Democrats talked about a “life or death” struggle against terrorists and radical fundamentalism and called for a robust military buildup. Yet, according to Brooks, John Kerry’s acceptance speech was ambiguous and “shamefully evasive” on critical issues, namely laying out a plan for the future in Iraq.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, *Weekly Standard* capitalized on changes in Kerry’s stance on national security and Iraq and reinforced the dismissive comments about the Democratic candidate as a “flip-flopper.”¹⁰⁶ The overall intended message was that a Democratic national security policy would be incoherent at best and weak in defending America at worst. Apparently, the message was successful in reaching parts of the electorate since pre-election polls as well as exit polls demonstrated that the Republican Party managed to maintain a solid lead in this particular area. In general, John Kerry’s candidacy

¹⁰³ The necessity of succeeding in Iraq and potential cost of an early withdrawal is discussed, among many others, in the following pieces: BOOT, Max (2004). Reality Check: This Is War. *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 2004. KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2004e). Taking Flip-Flops Seriously. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, pp. 9-10. KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2005). Abandoning Iraq. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 11, Issue 11, pp. 9. KRAUTHAMMER, Charles (2004). In Defense of Democratic Realism. *The National Interest*, Issue 77 (Fall 2004), pp. 15-25. PODHORETZ, Norman (2004). World War IV: How It Started, What It Means, and Why We Have to Win. *Commentary*, Vol. 188, No. 2, pp. 17-54.

¹⁰⁴ Credibility gap in a sense that Republicans were generally perceived to be able to handle national security issues better than Democrats. The gap does not necessarily reflect actual capabilities of both parties, but rather serves as an indicator of trust among American voters.

¹⁰⁵ BROOKS, David (2004). All Things to All People. *New York Times*, Jul 31, 2004.

¹⁰⁶ For an overview of the evolution of Kerry’s stances on Iraq see KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2004e). Taking Flip-Flops Seriously. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, pp. 9-10.

slowed down the disintegration of the conservative support for the war as Republicans united in opposition to his campaign. It also prompted President Bush and his allies to emphasize the integrality of Iraq within the war on terror and the unacceptability of a withdrawal.

4.3 War on Terror in the 2004 Presidential Election Results

In November 2004, George W. Bush got reelected after obtaining 62 million votes (51.3% of the total cast) and carrying 31 states, which earned him a comfortable majority of 286 electoral votes.¹⁰⁷ Especially in comparison with the 2000 election, the president was entrusted with a clear mandate to pursue his program, which in the foreign policy domain meant primarily vigorously prosecuting the war on terror.

From the very beginning of his campaign, President Bush was perceived among voters as a stronger candidate on national security issues. A Gallup poll in late August 2004 showed Bush was favored over his opponent on “handling terrorism” by a convincing margin (54-37); similar results (56-40) were obtained two months later. Curiously, when “the situation in Iraq” was presented as a separate issue, Bush’s lead decreased to 49-43 and 51-46, respectively, still indicating the preference for Bush on the issue.¹⁰⁸ The early lead in the polls translated into electoral gains in November, where George W. Bush won 86% among the 19% of voters who considered terrorism to be the most important issue. On the other hand, Bush received only 17% among those who thought things were not going well for the United States in Iraq, a group that comprised 52% percent of voters, which was a telling indicator of a growing polarization concerning the war in American society.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ For a comprehensive overview of 2004 results see for example New York Times’ special feature at http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/politics/2004_ELECTIONRESULTS_GRAPHIC/ [last accessed May 14, 2010].

¹⁰⁸ GALLUP (2004). Importance and Candidate Performance, Nov 11, 2004. Cited in CAMPBELL, James E. (2004). The Presidential Election of 2004: The Fundamentals and the Campaign. The Forum, Vol. 2, Issue 4, pp. 1-16.

¹⁰⁹ Voters listed terrorism as the third most important topic, slightly lagging behind moral values (22%) and economy/jobs (19%). CNN (2004). Election Results: Exit Polls. Available at <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/epolls.0.html>, [last accessed April 7, 2010].

In the aftermath of the 2004 election, it was widely understood and accepted that one of the crucial factors contributing to Bush's victory was mobilizing religious voters. In the words of George Marlin, it was the plan of Bush's strategist Karl Rove to "go after the base vote Christian evangelicals and Catholics", a strategy that worked particularly well in the Rust Belt swing states, such as Ohio.¹¹⁰ Indeed, when the votes were tallied, Bush had impressive successes with this constituency, having won, for instance, 78% of conservative Protestants.¹¹¹ Such a good result was to some extent facilitated by the fact that citizen initiatives to prohibit same-sex marriages were put on the ballot in November 2004 in eleven states of the union, which drew a high turnout of citizens interested in religious and moral values.¹¹²

While voters with strong religious background often identified moral values as the most important issue in the election (22% of the total of voters did so) and preferred President Bush on that issue to his opponent, Bush's foreign policy was likely to appeal to them as well. Evangelical Christians, and among them especially those "born-again,"¹¹³ were associated with a more hawkish policy towards the Middle East region, and thus towards removing Saddam Hussein. Several prominent Evangelical leaders publicly expressed their position in strong support of the war in Iraq. Gary Bauer, president of American Values, claimed that the United States are involved in a "clash of civilizations" in the Middle East, Pat Robertson, of Christian Coalition, called Islam "brutal" and "bloody," similar views were expressed also by Jerry Falwell or Franklin Graham.¹¹⁴ Such opinions resonated well among ordinary Evangelicals, a third of whom claimed at the outbreak of the war that the views of their religious leaders impacted their own.¹¹⁵ As the war progressed and president's popularity waned, support from

¹¹⁰ John Kerry still managed to win overall among Catholics, but George Bush was successful in getting their votes in areas where they were significant electorally. For instance, he was the first Republican candidate in 20 years to carry Iowa. MOONEY, Brian C. and MISHRA, Raja (2004). Religion-Based Voters Provided Critical Edge. Boston Globe, Nov 4, 2004.

¹¹¹ CROFT, Stuart (2007). 'Thy Will Be Done': The New Foreign Policy of America's Christian Right. *International Politics*, Vol. 44, pp. 693.

¹¹² All eleven initiatives were passed with solid majorities. CURL, Joseph and DUIN, Julia (2004). Focus on Moral Values Tipped Vote for Bush. Washington Times, Nov. 4, 2004.

¹¹³ The significance of born-again constituents should not be underestimated. Their share in the population gradually rose over the past decades with 45% of Americans identifying themselves as such in 2000. CROFT (2007), p. 693.

¹¹⁴ Jerry Falwell was a founder of the Liberty University and a co-founder of the Moral Majority. Franklin Graham is a son of evangelist Billy Graham and heads the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

¹¹⁵ PEW RESEARCH CENTER (2003). Different Faiths, Different Messages: Americans Hearing about Iraq from the Pulpit, but Religious Faith not Defining Opinions. Cited in: BAUMGARTNER, Jody C.,

evangelical Americans decreased at a much slower pace, making the religion gap in the approval of Bush's handling of Iraq more visible.¹¹⁶

This is not to say that religious right in the United States had disproportionate influence over American foreign policy.¹¹⁷ Nor is it to say that the Iraq war enjoyed unanimous support from religious institutions. Admittedly, some noteworthy organizations, such as the National Council of Churches or the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, opposed the war.¹¹⁸ Instead, the point is to demonstrate that religious voters played a significant role in the 2004 election results and that the tone and mission of Bush's foreign policy was helpful in attracting, rather than deterring, them. A helping factor was that the Bush administration framed its national security policy as a struggle against evil and injected moralist terms and religious references into the discourse on the war on terror.¹¹⁹

4.4 Conservative Debate on Iraq in the Aftermath of 2004 Election

President Bush's victory in November 2004 did little to change the course of the internal debate about foreign policy within the Republican Party. Firm opponents of the war continued firing salvos at the president citing the human and financial costs of the conflict and its unsatisfactory results. Pat Buchanan reiterated his paleoconservative

FRANCIA, Peter L. and MORRIS, Jonathan S. (2008). A Clash of Civilizations? The Influence of Religion on Public Opinion of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East. *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 61, Issue 2 (Jun 2008), p. 173.

¹¹⁶ BAUMGARTNER et al. (2008), p. 177.

¹¹⁷ For an example of conservative religious grievances with Bush's foreign policy see WAKERLEE-LYNCH, Joseph (2005). *Evangelical Fervor in Foreign Policy*. *The Witness Magazine*, January 26, 2005. Available at <http://thewitness.org/agw/wakeleelynch012605.html> [last accessed April 10, 2010].

¹¹⁸ BAUMGARTNER et al. (2008), p. 174.

¹¹⁹ For religious references in the conservative discourse see for example SPIELVOGEL, Christian (2005). "You Know Where I Stand": Moral Framing of the War on Terrorism and the Iraq War in the 2004 Presidential Campaign. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Vol. 8, Issue 4, pp. 549-569. O'DRISCOLL, Cian (2006). Re-negotiating the Just War: The Invasion of Iraq and Punitive War. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (September 2006), pp. 405-421. KELLNER, Douglas (2007). Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the "War on Terror". *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, Issue 4 (Dec 2007), pp. 622-645.

position¹²⁰ and rejected the prospect of staying in Iraq any longer arguing that Arab democracy is not vital to the United States.¹²¹ Other conservatives accepted the necessity of the war but called for adjustments in its prosecution. Robert Ellsworth and Dimitri Simes were happy to see President Bush acknowledge various mistakes and warned that zealous prosecution of neoconservative principles might bring more damage in the future. Instead, the United States should adopt a more realistic approach and traditional prudence in world affairs. The global war on terror should remain the organizing principle of American foreign policy, but America should seek more multilateral action and rethink the premise that all major cultures share the same fundamental values.¹²² Similarly, Charles Kesler claimed that Bush might have overestimated the ideological part of his doctrine, namely democracy promotion. As a remedy, the United States should accept that government has to be suited to local character and conditions and acknowledge that the historical examples of Japan and Germany were notable exceptions rather than a rule in post-war reconstruction efforts.¹²³ Elliot Cohen focused in his January 2005 critique on the domestic dimension of the ongoing war effort. He advocated embracing war mentality and finding appropriate resources for the military in order to mitigate the excessively high operational tempo and use of reservists in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Also, the United States should expand the program of training local forces and adopt a clear counterinsurgency approach, a suggestion that was to become frequently repeated in the upcoming year.¹²⁴

Neoconservatives, buoyed by Bush's victory, by and large continued their defense of staying the course. For instance, in a characteristic piece for the *Commentary* magazine, Victor Hanson admitted that Iraq might be draining precious American resources that

¹²⁰ In terms of foreign policy, after the Cold War paleoconservatives were strong advocates of isolationism and opposed trade liberalization. This faction did not wield much influence within the Republican Party, though. For a paleoconservative manifesto see BUCHANAN, Patrick J. (2002). *The Death of the West*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books.

¹²¹ BUCHANAN, Patrick (2004). 'Stay the Course' Is Not Enough. *Creators Syndicate, Inc.*, Dec 27, 2004, available as Chapter 17 in ROSEN, Gary (ed.) (2005). *The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, pp. 201-203.

¹²² ELLSWORTH, Robert F. and SINES, Dimitri K. (2004). *Realism's Shining Morality*. *The National Interest*, Issue 78 (Winter 2004/2005), pp. 5-10.

¹²³ KESLER, Charles R. (2004). *Democracy and the Bush Doctrine*. *Claremont Review of Books*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Winter 2004). Available at http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1218/article_detail.asp [last accessed April 11, 2010].

¹²⁴ COHEN, Eliot A. (2005). *A Time for Humility*. *Wall Street Journal (Europe)*. Jan 31, 2005.

might be necessary for other security challenges around the globe. Nevertheless, it was precisely the effort in Iraq that had given the United States a wide range of options for dealing with the world, because both partners and potential adversaries witnessed American resolve in addressing vital issues. Therefore, America needed to continue aggressively promoting democratization in the Middle East lest the hitherto positive developments be reversed.¹²⁵ On a similar note, Norman Podhoretz interpreted Bush's victory as broad public support for his policies and accused the "anti-Bush coalition" of spinning the news and ignoring positive developments in the war on terror. Podhoretz praised the president for not yielding to his critics and for quelling an intra-administration "insurgency" by appointing Porter Goss to manage the CIA and by replacing Secretary Powell with Condoleezza Rice, who was perceived as more loyal to Bush.¹²⁶

5. Iraq during President Bush's Second Term

5.1 *Bush's Pervasive Optimism in 2005 and Strategy for Winning in Iraq*

In the beginning of his second term in office, President Bush and his administration exuded confidence about the course of the war in Iraq. Partly, their optimism reflected the recent electoral victory, partly it rested on several significant achievements on the ground. In January 2005, Iraqis elected a new provisional government charged with the task of drafting a new constitution. The document was subsequently ratified in a referendum held in October 2005 and the country was on track to hold parliamentary elections in accordance with the new constitution in December 2005.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ HANSON, Victor D. (2005). Has Iraq Weakened Us? Commentary, Vol. 119, Issue 2 (Feb 2005), pp. 43-47.

¹²⁶ PODHORETZ, Norman (2005). The War Against World War IV. Commentary, Vol. 119, No. 2, pp. 23-42.

¹²⁷ However, many observers noted that the elections actually lay the ground for the civil war to come as they enabled a Shia-dominated central government with potentially powerful regional power centers and thus did little to remove potential political grievances. ROBINSON (2008), p. 8.

In response to the positive developments in the Iraqi political process, the United States attempted to scale down its military presence in the country. Following the January election and relatively limited violence accompanying it, Paul Wolfowitz announced a pullout of 15,000 U.S. troops.¹²⁸ Similar reasoning was present in the assessment of the security situation in Iraq by General Abizaid, the head of U.S. Central Command from July 2005, where the top commander estimated that the United States could make “fairly substantial reductions” in its troop levels if the political process did not get derailed. The report also argued that a smaller coalition footprint would serve as an incentive for the Iraqis to improve their self-government.¹²⁹

Some conservative commentators shared the president’s rosy outlook. David Brooks observed in early 2005 that the era of large full-scale military operations like that of the assault on Fallujah in 2004 might have ended and that the Bush administration can devote more energy to other issues. On inter-agency rivalries, Brooks noted that the president was entering his second term with hostilities between the Pentagon and the State Department reduced and with no visible split between realists and neoconservatives within his administration.¹³⁰ Max Boot emphasized in summer 2005 that support for extremism was waning in the Muslim world and that rifts created by the Iraq invasion had slowly been mended, especially because it was obvious that the United States was serious about democracy in Iraq.¹³¹

In November 2005, the National Security Council published the National Strategy for Winning in Iraq.¹³² The document embodied Bush’s confidence about succeeding in Iraq and expressed satisfaction with the current course of action. It reiterated the importance of prevailing in Iraq, citing both American interests and the moral

¹²⁸ BBC NEWS (2005). US To Pull Out 15,000 from Iraq. Feb 4, 2004. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4235787.stm [last accessed April 11, 2010].

¹²⁹ Nevertheless, the document also warned that current troop levels might need to be kept in Iraq for an extended period of time if the conditions deteriorated. Also, the review envisaged a temporary increase in the number of soldiers to provide extra security for the upcoming December election. SCHMITT, Eric (2005). Military Plans Gradual Cuts in Iraq Forces. *New York Times*, Aug 7, 2005.

¹³⁰ BROOKS, David (2005). The Bushies’ New Groove. *New York Times*, Jan 29, 2005.

¹³¹ BOOT, Max (2005). Our Extreme Makeover. *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 27, 2005.

¹³² As Linda Robertson and numerous others pointed out, it was striking that the first official strategy for the conduct of the war was not published until when the conflict was well into the third year of its duration. ROBERTSON (2008), p. 19.

righteousness of helping the Iraqi people.¹³³ It warned that achieving victory might take time and refused to set any timetables for meeting targets and for withdrawal, calling these “irresponsible.”¹³⁴ The strategy identified three tracks of action, all of which had been hitherto vigorously and successfully pursued. Politically, the United States aimed to engage all Iraqi population with the exception of hard-core rejectionists, build national institutions and support the rule of law. As the strategy contended, this approach was working, as exemplified by electoral successes and mounting international support for a nascent Iraqi democracy.¹³⁵ In the security area, the document reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to the strategy of “clear, hold & build,” an approach vindicated by the significant progress in depriving the enemy of control over parts of Iraqi territory and by the expansion in Iraqi armed forces’ numbers.¹³⁶ Economically, the strategy called for continuing to “restore, reform and build” Iraqi economic potential, which would in turn improve the security situation in the country. To demonstrate the already achieved progress in this realm, the documents cited, among other developments, improvements in the Iraqi oil industry, rising domestic product or significant creation of new businesses.¹³⁷

5.2 *Mounting Adverse Momentum*

Despite the upbeat tone of the Bush administration described above, 2005 was a rather disastrous year for George W. Bush. In its course, the president suffered numerous significant setbacks ranging from the botched response to Hurricane Katrina to the ill-fated nomination of Harriet Miers to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court to the failure

¹³³ A part of the reasoning also reflected the conviction that a U.S. failure would embolden terrorists and make the United States more vulnerable in the longer run. NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL (2005). *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*. November 2005, p. 7. Available at http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_national_strategy_20051130.pdf [last accessed April 11, 2010].

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 18.

¹³⁶ Interestingly, the concept of “clear, hold and build” is in fact the core principle of counterinsurgency operations. It is debatable to what extent coalition forces were really following these guidelines and to what extent they adopted them after the publication of a new Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency in December 2006 and the surge in 2007. For the discussion of security achievements in the strategy, see pages 21-25.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 25.

of Social Security reform, which was a key domestic initiative for his second term.¹³⁸ The war in Iraq did not bring notable improvements in terms of security, either; what is more, protracted difficulties encountered in Iraq and a continuous influx of bad news dramatically altered the dynamics of the war debate in Washington, especially towards the end of the year.

Yet another blow to the popularity of the war in Iraq was delivered on March 31, 2005 when the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction published its findings.¹³⁹ Known informally as the Robb-Silberman Report according to the co-chairmen of the commission, it assessed by the order of the president why the American intelligence community had mistakenly concluded that Iraq possessed WMDs.¹⁴⁰ The report concluded that intelligence was “dead wrong” in almost all of its judgments before the war and called for sweeping changes in the organization of the intelligence community. As with the Duelfer Report a year earlier, President Bush was spared criticism in the final document; however, it left open the question to what extent the Bush administration pressured intelligence agencies to produce findings it was interested in getting.¹⁴¹

By summer and autumn 2005, a growing number of critics had begun calling for a change of course in Iraq. This group did not consist only of outright opponents of the war, but also of people who still supported the mission in Iraq but saw that the path that was being taken would not lead to success. A crucial article recommending alterations to the strategy in Iraq was published by Andrew Krepinevich in *Foreign Affairs* in August 2005. Krepinevich, a West Point and Harvard graduate who earned his academic reputation arguing that the U.S. Army, rather than politicians lost in Vietnam, concluded that in Iraq both withdrawing and staying the course would be mistake. He argued that

¹³⁸ President Bush proposed in early 2005 that contributors to the system would be allowed to invest a small portion of their payroll taxes according to their preferences in the private sector. However, the plan was met with significant opposition, notably the American Association of Retired Persons but also within the Republican Party itself, and was never voted on in the Congress.

¹³⁹ A full-text version of the report is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/wmd/index.html> [last accessed April 11, 2010].

¹⁴⁰ The goal of the commission was to come up with recommendations for the intelligence community to make sure that future threats are identified and prevented. Interestingly, its findings were made public only after the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act was passed. BOLTON (2008), p. 285.

¹⁴¹ In the words of the report, daily briefings provided to the president “seemed to be 'selling' intelligence in order to keep its customers, or at least the First Customer, interested.” PINCUS, Walter and BAKER, Peter (2005). Data on Iraqi Arms Flawed, Panel Says; Intelligence Commission Outlines 74 Fixes for Bureaucracy. *The Washington Post*, Apr 1, 2005.

the United States needs to adopt a true counterinsurgency approach, which would focus on winning hearts and minds of the Iraqi population by providing security and basic services and that coalition forces need to change its metrics of success, which until then emphasized destroying enemy force.¹⁴² The proposal was received with acclaim by numerous conservative thinkers¹⁴³ and among significant parts of the military, notably retired service members.¹⁴⁴ Krepinevich's article had a significant impact on Washington, D.C., where its ideas began to circulate, and prompted Rumsfeld to invite the author to the Pentagon; however, when he presented his ideas to the Pentagon, he was dismissed with a claim that the United States was already doing precisely what he had proposed.¹⁴⁵ Ironically, when the United States did change its strategy in Iraq roughly one year later, it largely followed Krepinevich's recommendations.

The rising wave of criticism in the internal Republican debate reached a new high in autumn 2005, when Lawrence Wilkerson, a former chief of staff to Secretary Powell, delivered a scathing critique of the Bush administration and its decision-making process. This constituted probably the most significant critique by a former insider in a senior position since the testimony of Richard Clarke before the 9/11 Commission in early 2004, in which the former chief counterterrorism advisor on the National Security Council was highly critical of Bush's approach to counterterrorism in the period before 9/11 and of the decision to start the war in Iraq.¹⁴⁶ Wilkerson accused a narrow group of people, characterized as a "cabal between the vice-president and the secretary of

¹⁴² KREPINEVICH, Andrew Jr. (2005). How to Win in Iraq. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, Issue 5 (Sep/Oct 2005), p. 87.

¹⁴³ For instance, David Brooks commented that this strategy might be one of the few ways how to resurrect public support for the war. BROOKS, David (2005). *Winning in Iraq*. *New York Times*, Aug 28, 2005.

¹⁴⁴ Here it is important to keep in mind that Krepinevich earned his doctorate while still on active duty and had thus military experience to support his claims. Also, it was in autumn 2005 that Gen. David Petraeus commenced his work on a new counterinsurgency manual in Fort Leavenworth, KS. The feelings of at least some representatives of armed forces summarized Retired Marine Lt. Gen. Gregory Newbold, who expressed his support for extra troops if needed. ("Better to surge now – with whatever that costs us – than to bleed for five years." U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE FOR FOREIGN RELATIONS: *Strategies for Reshaping U.S. Policy in Iraq and the Middle East*. Hearing Before the 109th Congress, Feb 1, 2005. Transcripts available at <http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/2005/hrg050201a.html> [last accessed April 13, 2010]).

¹⁴⁵ RICKS (2009), p. 16.

¹⁴⁶ Unlike Wilkerson, Clarke did not discuss the actual prosecution of the Iraq war very much. For Clarke's arguments see CLARKE, Richard (2004). *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror*. New York: Free Press.

defense,” of hijacking American foreign policy.¹⁴⁷ According to him, President Bush was easily swayed by “messianic neoconservatives” into making decisions unbeknownst to and without proper consultation with the bureaucracy.¹⁴⁸ As a result, the decisions were carried out poorly and the United States courted disaster in its endeavors, Iraq being a prime example. Characteristically, Secretary Powell remained loyal to his former Commander-in-Chief and distanced himself from chief of staff’s remarks; nonetheless, especially due to the seniority of the position previously held by Wilkerson, they exemplified the changes in the dynamics of the foreign policy debate in 2005.

5.3 Altering Power Configuration in Washington, D.C. in Late 2005/Early 2006

By the end of 2005, two important developments had occurred in American foreign policy establishment that had a profound impact on the war on terror debate. First, the neoconservative school of thought had been substantially weakened by the failure to progress in Iraq in terms of improving security and political stability, and by two prominent departures from the national security circles. Paul Wolfowitz left the Department of Defense to lead the World Bank in June 2007 and I. Lewis Libby was charged with several offenses in a CIA leak case, making his boss, Dick Cheney, assume a somewhat lower profile.¹⁴⁹ Second, facing mounting criticisms and slipping popularity, President Bush was forced to go on the defensive and think of ways how to salvage his failing second-term performance.

One sign of Bush’s loss of momentum was a change of tone regarding the war on terror. In sharp contrast with Bush’s first term and the beginning of his second one, the White House entered, in the words of Richard Haass, chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations, a “less triumphalist stage” in recognition of the growing discontent

¹⁴⁷ FROOMKIN, Dan (2005). Former Insider Lashes Out. *The Washington Post*, Oct, 20, 2005.

¹⁴⁸ LEIBY, Richard (2006). Breaking Ranks; Larry Wilkerson Attacked the Policy on Iraq and Wounded His Friendship with Colin Powell. *The Washington Post*, Jan 19, 2006.

¹⁴⁹ Libby was involved in a case of leaking a name of a CIA operative Valerie Plame to a New York Times reporter. Libby was charged with two instances perjury, two instances of making false statements to FBI agents and of obstruction of justice. He was convicted of all but one of them.

with the war.¹⁵⁰ Also, as Newsweek magazine noted in December 2005, Bush was for the first time in office willing to admit that things were not going well in Iraq.¹⁵¹ The president made an effort to dispel an image of him being isolated from reality in some sort of a White House bubble, and reached out in search of support and understanding for his policies.¹⁵²

In response to the overtures of the Bush administration, Congress made an effort to grow more clout and assert itself in the ongoing foreign policy debate, both as a consultation and overseeing body. Since the beginning of the war on terror, Congresspersons from both parties had been complaining about not being consulted by the White House very often and the president's efforts to revamp his presidency represented an opportunity to improve the situation.¹⁵³ Indeed, Capitol Hill Republicans felt increasingly pleased with the degree of engagement with the White House and the frequency of interaction, especially in comparison with Bush's first term. Admittedly, that might not have been a very high bar since then-Rep. Ray LaHood (R-IL) described Bush's attitude towards Congress in foreign policy questions in his first term as "my way or highway."¹⁵⁴

In addition to the formal and informal consultation processes, Republican lawmakers increasingly used their power of Congressional oversight and set up special committees to inquire into selected Bush's policies. These turned out to be a telling indicator of the ongoing intraparty debate. Especially contentious among covered topics were extraordinary wartime powers – special interrogation techniques used against detained foreigners and wiretapping programs. While the former earned strong condemnation from Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), who labeled it as "cruel, inhuman and degrading,"¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ TUMULTY, Karen and ALLEN, Mike (2005). His Search for a New Groove. *Time*, Vol. 166, Issue 25, p. 42.

¹⁵¹ THOMAS, Evan and WOLFFE, Richard (2005). Bush in the Bubble. *Newsweek*, Dec 19, 2005.

¹⁵² For example, Bush gave a briefing on the situation in Iraq at the Council on Foreign Relations on December 7, 2005 that was generally hailed as a sober assessment. He also delivered a prime-time Oval Office address on Iraq on December, 18, 2005 that attracted an audience of 37 million. BAKER, Peter and VANDEHEI, Jim (2005). Bush Team Rethinks Its Plan for Recovery; New Approach Could Save Second Term. *The Washington Post*, Dec 29, 2005.

¹⁵³ One of those who felt the White House should be doing a better job managing its Congressional relations was Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who recommended Bush to "have much more of a cadre of people in both houses, from both parties" visiting the White House on a regular basis.

¹⁵⁴ THOMAS and WOLFFE (2005).

¹⁵⁵ THE ECONOMIST (2006). Under Challenge. Vol. 378, Issue 8460.

the latter exposed rifts among conservatives on the issue of executive power. Advocates of a strong executive included Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS) and, not surprisingly, William Kristol. Representatives of the noninterventionist wing were Sens. Specter (R-PA), Hagel (R-NE), Sununu (R-NH), Craig (R-ID), and Snowe (R-ME), supported by, among others, the columnist George Will.¹⁵⁶ This split reflected long-term cleavage within the conservative wing regarding civil liberties and testified to the fact that neoconservatives and foreign policy hardliners were likely to accept greater power of the government, often at the expense of individual rights.

Importantly, while it is true that the Republican-led Congress became more assertive in the above described period in the foreign policy-making process, which represented a further step in the erosion of the support for President Bush, it would be too early to label the Congressional assertiveness a full-scale open dissent against the overall course of action in Iraq and against war on terror in general. It took almost one more year for such a situation to materialize.

5.4 Iraq in 2006: Situation Becomes Unsustainable

Entering 2006, Iraq was not showing many substantial improvements in its stability. Nevertheless, conservatives were split on the issue how bad things actually were in the country. Toeing the official administration line, Vice President Cheney hailed the 2005 December election as a major milestone in the reconstruction of Iraq and expressed his belief that the United States had “turned the corner” in the conflict.¹⁵⁷ Senator John McCain (R-AZ) was somewhat more cautious in his optimism; he contended that terrorists had failed to incite a civil war but that the situation remained fragile and the stakes high. He warned that Iraqi forces were not ready to take over the responsibility for maintaining security, which implied the need for a prolonged U.S. presence in the country.¹⁵⁸ Conversely, David Brooks was convinced that a civil war was already going on, caused to a large extent by the weakness of the government. Therefore, according to

¹⁵⁶ KING, Neil Jr. (2005). Wiretap Furor Widens Republican Divide. Wall Street Journal, Dec. 22, 2005.

¹⁵⁷ RICKS (2009), p. 31.

¹⁵⁸ McCAIN, John (2005). Winning the War in Iraq. Address delivered at the American Enterprise Institute, Nov 10, 2005. Available at http://www.realclearpolitics.com/Commentary/com-11_11_05_SJM.html [last accessed April 18, 2010].

him, the United States needed to stay in Iraq until the conflict deescalated and until the central authority built its power.¹⁵⁹

The question about the severity of the Iraq conflict was virtually put to an end by developments on the ground in spring 2006. On February 22, the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest Shia shrines in Iraq was destroyed in a bombing attack. The event, which represented a culmination of an existing trend, rather than an isolated significant incident, served as an eye-opening moment for a lot of policy-makers, observers and commentators. In the aftermath of the bombing, the level of violence reached new unprecedented highs, which were impossible to ignore.¹⁶⁰ Summer 2006 ushered in the bloodiest period of the war with around 1,000 roadside bomb attacks every week. According to the United Nations, at least three thousand Iraqis were killed in July 2006 alone; the twelve months starting in July 2006 have so far been the bloodiest ones during the war with over 1,000 American soldiers killed in action.¹⁶¹

Logically, the appalling security situation in Iraq provoked criticisms and calls for resignation of those responsible for the war's prosecution and, interestingly enough, the most consequential ones came from retired military officers. In early April, Ret. Army Maj. Gen. John Batiste, former senior military assistant to Paul Wolfowitz and commander of a division in Iraq, expressed his dissatisfaction with Pentagon's leadership ("We need leadership up there that respects the military as they expect the military to respect them"¹⁶²) and called on Secretary Rumsfeld to step down. He was joined by other distinguished commanders who had previously held posts in the occupation forces, such as Maj. Gen. Paul D. Eaton, Lt. Gen. Gregory Newbold or Maj. Gen. Charles H. Swannack, Jr., who complained about Rumsfeld's tendency to micromanage and disregard military advice and about the inadequacy of troop levels as

¹⁵⁹ BROOKS, David (2005). Taking a Long View of the Iraq Conflict. New York Times, Dec 18, 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Still, there were conservative efforts to spin the developments in a positive light. For instance, a Weekly Standard editorial tried to play down the importance of the carnage in Samarra and instead highlighted the progress in Iraq, demonstrated by the fact that no Iraqi political leader officially embraced violence as a means to resolve the sectarian strife or that desertion rates in Iraqi armed forces were remarkably low in the aftermath of the attack. KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2006a). Rumors of Civil War. The Weekly Standard, Vol. 11, Issue 27, pp. 11.

¹⁶¹ RICKS (2009), p. 45.

¹⁶² RICKS, Thomas E. (2006). Rumsfeld Rebuked Retired Generals; Ex-Iraq Commander Calls for Resignation. The Washington Post, Apr 13, 2006.

well as equipment for the mission.¹⁶³ The fact that it was officers with direct experience with the occupation regime under Rumsfeld's management who spoke up was indicative of how serious the disillusionment had become even for those who initially strongly supported the invasion.¹⁶⁴ The revolt of the generals also coincided with the publication of a book by Paul Bremer, who accused Rumsfeld of neglecting his concerns while serving as the head of the CPA (such as that not enough troops were being sent in) and of "pumping up" numbers in Iraq to make the situation there look less critical.¹⁶⁵ As a result, Rumsfeld's future in office was increasingly questioned, especially when coupled with the troubling news coming from Iraq.

Bush administration's response ranged from defiance to tacit acknowledgements of minor errors. In March 2006, President Bush issued his second national security strategy, which echoed the previous one in its push for democracy promotion. Indeed, the new document reiterated that it is U.S. policy to "seek and support democratic governments and institutions in every nation and culture" with the ultimate goal of "ending tyranny in our world."¹⁶⁶ On a similar note, the Pentagon produced a key planning document that did not envisage any dramatic changes in its strategy in Iraq. To the amazement of critics of the Department of Defense, the Quadrennial Defense Review of 2006 did not call for any substantial increase in U.S. Army, implying that the Pentagon was content with the force structure in Iraq.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Other notable generals who were vocal about their reservations regarding Rumsfeld's management style included Maj. Gen. John Riggs or Gen. Anthony C. Zinni, former head of the Central Command. CLOUD, David S. and SCHMITT, Eric (2006). More Retired Generals Call for Rumsfeld's Resignation. Apr 14, 2006. SPIEGEL, Peter and RICHTER, Paul (2006). Anti-Rumsfeld Chorus Grows. Los Angeles Times, Apr 13, 2006.

¹⁶⁴ For instance General Batiste was an officer who not only served as a commander in the initial phase of the Iraq war and thus was familiar with the conflict, but was also offered a promotion and spot No.2 among U.S. forces in Iraq, which he declined, not wanting to serve any longer under Rumsfeld.

¹⁶⁵ Despite Bremer's neoconservative orientation, it is probably necessary to view the book as an attempt to vindicate his job, rather than enter a serious ideological battle with the Secretary. GRAHAM, Bradley and RICKS, Thomas E. (2006). In a New Book, Bremer Defends His Year in Iraq. The Washington Post, Jan 10, 2006.

¹⁶⁶ THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, March 2006. Available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf> [last accessed May 13, 2010].

¹⁶⁷ In all fairness, the document planned a 15% increase in special operations forces to better reflect the needs of antiterrorism campaigns. Full text of the document is available at <http://www.defense.gov/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf> [last accessed April 18, 2010]. For an example of a critique of Pentagon's posture see EATON, Paul D. (2006). A Top-Down Review for the Pentagon. New York Times, Mar 19, 2006.

At the same time, the Bush White House underwent a few changes that hinted at the fact that the president is receptive of the mounting criticism. Secretary Rice was willing to concede that U.S. made tactical errors in Iraq.¹⁶⁸ In a step that could be interpreted as retreat from an overly conservative agenda of the Bush administration, Karl Rove was relieved of his policy portfolio to focus on strategic planning in regard to the upcoming November 2006 mid-term elections. Also, Bush accepted the resignation of his chief of staff of five years, Andrew Card, Jr. and replaced him by Joshua Bolten, who until then served as director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Both personnel changes were intended to mollify increasingly nervous Republican lawmakers, who felt threatened in the run-up to the mid-term elections in which significant Republican losses could be expected, largely due to the situation in Iraq. They deemed it necessary that the president, whose popularity had by then sunk below 40%, send out a signal that the White House is ready to make some changes and insert new dynamics into its policies.¹⁶⁹ However, Bush's reaction showed limits to his willingness to admit mistakes at that point. In choosing Bolten, Bush disregarded recommendations to expand the circle of his advisers to be more open to dissenting views and opted instead for a long-time insider.¹⁷⁰ Even more importantly, Bush decided not to replace the most beleaguered person, Secretary Rumsfeld, in his job, which would have sent the clearest signal, but instead unequivocally supported him. Doing so, Bush emphasized that Rumsfeld was doing a fine job in a way that spoke volumes about the president's management style and his propensity for instinctive decisions: "I'm the decider and I decide what is best. And what's best is for Don Rumsfeld to remain as the secretary of defense."¹⁷¹ Admittedly, firing Rumsfeld would have been more than Republican lawmakers were asking for. In spring 2006, Rumsfeld's critics were mainly commentators and retired military officers rather than

¹⁶⁸ BRINKLEY, Joel (2006). Rice, in England, Concedes 'Tactical Errors' in Iraq. *New York Times*, Apr 1, 2006.

¹⁶⁹ SANGER, David (2006). Bush Looks to Inner Circle After Chief of Staff Resigns. *New York Times*, Mar 28, 2006. Appendix 3 showed Bush's approval ratings over time.

¹⁷⁰ For a discussion of Bolten's new role see BALZ, Dan (2006). White House Shifts Into Survival Mode. *The Washington Post*, Apr 20, 2006.

¹⁷¹ RICKS (2009), p. 40.

conservative Congresspersons, with whom he still enjoyed considerable support, or at least few of whom were ready to speak out publicly against him.¹⁷²

6. Mid-term Elections in 2006 and Search for a New Strategy in Iraq

6.1 *Debate on the war in Iraq in Autumn 2006*

As the war in Iraq entered its bloodiest phase and criticisms were intensifying, the most relevant policy-making bodies launched their own Iraq review processes with the aim to assess the situation on the ground and to come up with recommendations regarding the future course of action. As early as March 2006, the U.S. Congress mandated the Iraq Study Group, a bipartisan panel led by former Bush Sr.'s Secretary of State James Baker III. and former Representative Lee Hamilton (D-IN),¹⁷³ to evaluate developments in Iraq and suggest policy recommendations. However, ISG's findings were not to be published until December 2006 and so the two most important Iraq reviews that took place and produced results in the run-up to the November mid-term elections were conducted by the White House and by the Pentagon.

The White House review, at that point informal, launched in September 2006, fell under the purview of Meghan O'Sullivan, deputy NSA for Iraq and Afghanistan. Gradually, it produced two main options that senior Bush administration officials were expected to discuss. The first was to attempt to change the dynamics on the ground by committing more resources to pursue the declared goals, the other was to scale back American military presence in the country by withdrawing from Iraqi cities and by

¹⁷² As Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, stated, Rumsfeld's resignation would be a mistake. MAZZETTI, Mark and RUTENBERG, Jim (2006). Pentagon Memo Aims to Counter Rumsfeld Critics. New York Times, Apr 16, 2006.

¹⁷³ The other Republican members of the panel were Lawrence Eagleburger, former Secretary of State, Edwin Meese III, former Attorney General, Sandra Day O'Connor, former Supreme Court Justice, and Alan Simpson, former member of the U.S. Senate (R-WY).

focusing mainly on counterterrorism operations.¹⁷⁴ Several participants on the review, especially State Department officials and among them most importantly Secretary Rice, expressed doubts that the United States would be able to keep under control Shia militias in Iraq and advocated instead a narrow, or realist, definition of American interests.¹⁷⁵ Espousing the other side of the argument, White House officials stressed that the United States simply cannot ignore the ongoing violence in Iraq and had to make an effort to curb it. Such reasoning was shared by Secretary Rumsfeld, who warned that lowering the U.S. profile in Iraq, let alone withdrawing in large numbers, could trigger an adverse domino effect in the entire Middle East region.¹⁷⁶ As a result, a group of proponents of the surge was formed, consisting of Deputy NSA O’Sullivan, her deputy Brett McGurk and Deputy NSA J. D. Crouch. However, the White House review group continued to discuss options on the table until late December 2006 when a final decision was taken by President Bush.

The Pentagon review was started in October 2006 at the behest of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Peter Pace. Ultimately, it produced an array of options not dissimilar to those pondered by the Bush administration. The first consisted of a large increase in the number of soldiers, the second envisioned a withdrawal of American forces, the third projected a long-term and low-profile of American troops mainly performing counterterrorism operations and serving as trainers and advisors to Iraqi forces. A fourth one was subsequently added, which combined the idea of the first and third ones, but reflected the availability (or lack) of manpower.¹⁷⁷

Importantly, no discernible consensus emerged among policy-makers in the review groups prior to the mid-term elections. The White House was at that point suffering from, as Philip Zelikow, then-counselor at the State Department, put it, a “strategic

¹⁷⁴ Importantly, while “more resources” meant primarily sending extra troops to Iraq, this option also encompassed increased civilian cooperation and financial aid. It can be assumed that the complexity of such an approach was understood by those numerous critics who called for increasing the troop level in Iraq. For an elaboration that attaining security is not solely a function of military action see CHIARELLI, Peter W. and MICHAELIS, Patrick R. (2006). *Winning the Peace: The Requirements for Full-Spectrum Operations*. *Military Review*, Oct 2006, pp. 13-26. One of the authors, Lt. Gen. Chiarelli, was at that time commander #2 in Iraq, a post he would soon relinquish to Gen. Ray Odierno.

¹⁷⁵ ROBINSON (2009), p. 25.

¹⁷⁶ NEW YORK TIMES (2006). *The Sound of One Domino Falling*. Aug 4, 2006, p. A16.

¹⁷⁷ In Pentagon’s parlance, these options were dubbed Go Big, Go Home, Go Long and Go Hybrid. ROBINSON (2009), p. 27.

void”.¹⁷⁸ Also, it still instinctively busied itself defending the situation in Iraq. Shortly before he was dismissed, Rumsfeld argued that the biggest mistake in Iraq would be not to transfer responsibilities over to Iraqis, despite the obvious fact that the developments on the ground did not permit the United States to start withdrawing its troops even after the Iraqi armed forces had reached planned numbers. Similarly, President Bush insisted in October 2006 that the U.S. is “absolutely winning” in Iraq, even though he did concede that he did not find the situation satisfactory.¹⁷⁹ The military was admittedly tilting towards rejecting the idea of the surge, with numerous high-ranking officers questioning its usefulness and necessity. The top commander in Iraq, Gen. Casey, opposed the surge, so did his number two, Gen. Chiarelli, and the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Schoomaker.¹⁸⁰ At the same time, some commanders welcomed the idea of (at least a temporary) increase in troop levels, such as JCS Chairman Pace or Gen. Odierno.¹⁸¹

In the run-up to the 2006 Congressional elections, the Bush administration was abandoned by and subject to criticisms from many erstwhile conservative loyalists. As the president’s approval ratings sank below 40%,¹⁸² and intelligence agencies publicly doubted that the war in Iraq helped counter the terrorist threat,¹⁸³ conservatives from virtually all schools of thought found mistakes to hold Bush accountable for. Traditionalist George Will criticized Bush administration’s “unrealism” of insisting that Iraq is central to fighting terrorism and of neglecting the usefulness of law enforcement approaches in combating terrorism.¹⁸⁴ David Brooks accused Bush of not having committed enough resources to defeat the terrorist ideological threat and thus of putting

¹⁷⁸ RICKS (2009), p. 54.

¹⁷⁹ RICKS (2009), p. 58.

¹⁸⁰ However, Gen. Chiarelli was one of the first officers to understand and embrace the principles of counterinsurgency warfare. His decision to speak out against the surge could therefore be attributable more to his unwillingness to challenge his direct superior.

¹⁸¹ ROBINSON (2009), p 27.

¹⁸² ZABOROWSKI, Marcin (2006). Mid-term Elections in the US: In the Shadow of Iraq. Institute for Security Studies Analysis, August 2006, p.1. Available at <http://www.iss.europa.eu/nc/actualites/actualite/browse/24/article/mid-term-elections-in-the-us-in-the-shadow-of-iraq/> [last accessed April 28, 2010].

¹⁸³ MAZETTI, Mark (2006). Spy Agencies Say Iraq War Worsens Terrorism Threat. New York Times, Sept 24, 2006.

¹⁸⁴ WILL, George F. (2006). The Triumph of Unrealism. The Washington Post, Aug 15, 2006.

American credibility and prestige at stake.¹⁸⁵ Neoconservatives reproached the administration that it brought America to war while remaining in peace-time settings and urged Bush to gain initiative by sending more troops to Iraq.¹⁸⁶

Crucially, autumn 2006 was the first time since the beginning of the war in Iraq that Republicans on Capitol Hill openly expressed their discontent with the policies of the Bush administration. Trailing behind in opinion polls, conservative lawmakers were harboring growing doubts about the administration's strategy in Iraq. Conversely, in anticipation of a sizeable electoral victory, Democrats were bashing their opponents on the campaign trail for the impending failure in the Middle East. The defense of the prosecution of the war that Republicans put up in response was rather muted and weak. Some Congresspersons, such as Sen. John Warner (R-VA), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, went as far as declaring Iraq as heading towards disaster.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, Sen. John Sununu (R-NH) expressed hope that the Bush administration will be able to learn from its mistakes. Interestingly, like the Bush administration officials and the Pentagon, conservative lawmakers did not seem to agree on the appropriate course of action at that point. For instance, Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) spoke against any open-ended commitment in Iraq, hinting at her preference for a timed withdrawal. In stark contrast, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) believed that the key problem was not having enough means to provide security in the country, implying his favorable view of the surge option. Other options were also kept on the table, for example Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-TX) stated she was willing to consider even some sort of partition of Iraq, even though that particular idea received little attention.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ BROOKS, David (2006). The Grand Delusion. *New York Times*, Sept 28, 2006.

¹⁸⁶ KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2006b). More Troops. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 12, Issue 3, pp. 11.

¹⁸⁷ Interestingly, as late as February 2006, Sen. Warner still expressed "a high degree of confidence" in the Iraq project. RICKS (2009), p. 58.

¹⁸⁸ ABRAMOWITZ, Michael and RICKS, Thomas E. (2006). Major Change Expected In Strategy for Iraq War. *The Washington Post*, Oct 20, 2006.

6.2 2006 Mid-term Elections as an Eye-opening Moment?

The Republican Party suffered a major, if expected, defeat in November 2006, which shattered Karl Rove's dream of a permanent conservative majority. Republicans lost control of both chambers, losing 30 seats in the House of Representatives and 6 in the Senate.¹⁸⁹ The war in Iraq was widely understood as the single most significant issue affecting the results, with 57% of voters disapproving of the war and with 58% having an unfavorable view of the president's job performance.¹⁹⁰ What is more, in a stark contrast from 2004, Iraq and terrorism were identified as by far the most important issues, as indicated by 49% and 46% per cent of voters, respectively, who labeled the issues as "extremely important".¹⁹¹

The impact of the elections manifested itself very soon thereafter. In a move laden with symbolism, President Bush asked Secretary Rumsfeld to leave the Pentagon and replaced him by Robert Gates. A mentee of Brent Scowcroft, Gates was a proponent of *realpolitik*, long critical of Rumsfeld's and Cheney's ideological conduct of foreign policy. His arrival, along with the fact that James Baker, Bush Sr.'s Secretary of State was already working on policy recommendations for Iraq as a chairman of ISG, demonstrated the extent to which neoconservatives were losing ground in Washington, D.C. at the expense of realist policy-makers, many of whom had ties with the administration of George H. W. Bush.¹⁹² The downfall and discrediting of neoconservatives in the aftermath of the mid-term elections was further emphasized by an admission by Richard Perle, one of the main architects of the ideological foundations for American interventionist foreign policy, that he should have never supported the

¹⁸⁹ For a comprehensive set of results see for example CNN's feature at <http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/> [last accessed May 15, 2010].

¹⁹⁰ CNN (2006). Exit Polls: Bush, Iraq key to outcome. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/11/08/election.why/> [last accessed April 22, 2010].

¹⁹¹ CNN (2006): America Votes 2006: Issue Tracker. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/special/issues/> [last accessed April 25, 2010].

¹⁹² For a commentary on Bush Jr.'s gradual embrace of his father's foreign policy team see DOWD, Maureen (2006). A Come-to-Daddy Moment. *New York Times*, Nov 9, 2006.

Iraq war in the first place, even though he kept rejecting any blame for mistakes made after the fall of Saddam Hussein on behalf of the neoconservative school of thought.¹⁹³

Even though President Bush reacted immediately to the electoral defeat and issued calls for more bipartisan cooperation, his administration also sought to tone down expectations of a dramatic turnaround in American foreign policy, especially in the direction of reducing American military presence in the Middle East. In a speech to the Federalist Society, Dick Cheney refused to consider the idea of pulling troops out of Iraq as it would disappoint American allies and provide a boost to terrorist enemies.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, partly in anticipation of ISG recommendations that were expected to call for a withdrawal schedule, Bush formally launched a review process within his own administration that would build on discussions conducted prior to the elections in the White House and in the Pentagon.¹⁹⁵

Bush's efforts to limit the electoral impact were backed by Sen. McCain (R-AZ), who reiterated his long-time calls for sending more soldiers to Iraq and rejected the idea of a withdrawal.¹⁹⁶ Echoing such sentiments, editors of *Weekly Standard* expressed their hopes that the new Defense Secretary will see the need for extra troops and for the expansion of American armed forces, realizing that withdrawing would precipitate collapse of Iraq.¹⁹⁷ What is more, according to neoconservatives, experience showed

¹⁹³ Instead, Perle claimed that disloyalty in the Bush administration was the main culprit. SPIEGEL, Peter (2006). Perle Says He Should Not Have Backed Iraq War. *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 4, 2006.

¹⁹⁴ ABRAMOWITZ, Michael and HSU, Spencer S. (2006). Cheney Rejects Idea of Iraq Withdrawal; He Also Decries 'Judicial Overreaching'. *The Washington Post*, Nov 18, 2006.

¹⁹⁵ WRIGHT, Robin (2006). Bush Initiates Iraq Policy Review Separate From Baker Group's. *The Washington Post*, Nov 15, 2006. One of crucial documents shaping the review process and offering an array of options for a further course of action, including the surge, was a memo by Deputy NSA O'Sullivan to her boss Hadley written after her fact-finding trip to Iraq in early November 2006. For full text of the document see *NEW YORK TIMES* (2006). Text of U.S. Security Adviser's Iraq Memo. Nov 29, 2006. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/29/world/middleeast/29mtext.html?_r=1 [last accessed April 25, 2010].

¹⁹⁶ WHITE, Josh (2006). Debate Grows Over Beefing Up U.S. Force in Iraq; Military Leaders Oppose McCain's Push for Thousands of Additional Troops. *The Washington Post*, Nov 17, 2006.

¹⁹⁷ *Weekly Standard* was actually also critical of Bush's handling of the war because of his unwillingness to commit more troops than were necessary to stave off immediate disaster. That, in turn, undermined Iraqi people's confidence that the United States has the will and capacity to provide security in Iraq and made them turn to sectarian militias in search for protection. KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2006c). Bush's Iraq Legacy. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 12, Issue 10, pp. 9-11.

that temporary deployments of U.S. troops could improve security, as campaigns in Tal Afar, Najaf or Fallujah in 2004 and 2005 demonstrated.¹⁹⁸

6.3 *Iraq Survey Group Findings and the Decision to Surge*

On December 6, 2006, the Iraq Survey Group published, after nine months of deliberation, its seventy-nine findings and recommendations.¹⁹⁹ In the military domain, the United States should devote more energy and resources to training local Iraqi forces and to performing counterterrorism operations. It should aim to move away from direct involvement from combat missions and gradually draw down its forces in the country. Politically, the United States should make its support of the Iraqi government conditional upon its performance. It should be made perfectly clear that America would not continue to commit soldiers and finances if the local government failed to keep its own commitments. In a third batch of recommendations, ISG suggested conducting more robust regional diplomacy, which would include talking directly to Iran and Syria. Importantly, at the insistence of James Baker, the report included a possibility of a short-term increase in troop levels in Iraq in order to achieve a situation favorable for executing the aforementioned recommendations.

The publication of ISG's conclusions was welcomed as a useful contribution to the ongoing debate on Iraq; however, the Bush administration made it perfectly clear that it did not agree with some of its arguments, nor did it feel bound to follow the recommendations. Even though Condoleezza Rice cautiously embraced some of the group's key points, namely applying more pressure on Prime Minister Maliki, several other officials described the recommendations as impractical and unrealistic. These objectors claimed that inserting conditionality of help to the Iraqi government in

¹⁹⁸ KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2006d). Time for a Heavier Footprint. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 12, Issue 11, pp. 9-11.

¹⁹⁹ Of course, the offered overview of ISG's main recommendations is a drastically shortened summary of the group's work. For more detail and further elaboration see BAKER, James A., HAMILTON, Lee H et al. (2006). *The Iraq Study Group Report*. Available at http://www.bakerinstitute.org/files/pubs/iraqstudygroup_findings.pdf [last accessed May 15, 2010].

exchange for political progress could make Maliki look like an American puppet, affect the fragile political dynamics, and would benefit Al Qaeda and the insurgents.²⁰⁰

The reception of the ISG report with conservative thinkers and lawmakers varied significantly. Bush's reluctance to closely follow its recommendations was supported and praised by numerous neoconservative media and institutions, for instance National Review, Weekly Standard or the Hudson Institute.²⁰¹ Such entities asserted that injecting more realism into American foreign policy at this stage, i.e. drawing down forces from Iraq, amounted to amoral abandonment of American ideals and would in fact be an act of surrender in the Middle East.²⁰² What is more, according to neoconservatives, the Baker-Hamilton study did not come up with any way to provide more security and stability in Iraq, since the formula of a drawdown and increased focus on training had been suggested before, but had never been permitted by conditions on the ground.²⁰³ Needless to say, the conditions on the ground in December 2006 were hardly better than in the past. Importantly, several Republican legislators shared this point of view and came to the conclusion that the only appropriate way forward was to send additional thousands of soldiers to Iraq. This group consisted of such Capitol Hill heavyweights as Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) or Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC).²⁰⁴

On the other side of the argument, ISG findings were endorsed by numerous high-profile conservatives, including Edwin Meese III., Attorney General under President Reagan. Colin Powell was also vocal about his support for recommendations in the report, stating that the United States was losing the war in Iraq. The way forward, according to him, however, was to apply pressure on Iraqi politicians and provide support for the development of Iraqi national forces; sending in extra troops would only deprive the United States of resources necessary for resolving any other crisis that might

²⁰⁰ RUTENBERG, Jim and SANGER, David E. (2006). Bush Aides Seek Alternatives to Iraq Study Group's Proposals, Calling Them Impractical. *New York Times*, Dec 10, 2006.

²⁰¹ ABRAMOWITZ, Michael and KESSLER, Glenn (2006). Hawks Bolster Skeptical President; The Right Rages Over Group's Plan. *The Washington Post*, Dec 10, 2006.

²⁰² KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2006e). Surrender as 'Realism'. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 12, Issue 12, pp. 9.

²⁰³ KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2006f). A Perfect Failure. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 12, Issue 13, pp. 11-12.

²⁰⁴ KAGAN, Robert and KRISTOL, William (2006g). It's Up To Bush. *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 12, Issue 14, pp. 9-11.

occur.²⁰⁵ In addition to trying to find an appropriate answer to the crisis in Iraq, it is conceivable that some Republicans viewed the ISG findings favorably because they represented a feasible exit strategy from the conflict early enough before the approaching 2008 elections.²⁰⁶

Faced with disunity in his own party about what to do in Iraq, President Bush spent December 2006 in deliberations. He declared that the United States was neither winning nor losing the war, which implied need for a change, and promised to take into consideration the opinion of the military whether extra troops were needed.²⁰⁷ However, a vast majority of active duty military commanders spoke publicly against the idea of a surge, even though the president was tilting precisely this way.²⁰⁸ One of the decisive moments for President Bush to make up his mind was a December meeting at the White House, where he was presented with a concrete plan for a temporary increase in American forces, based largely on results of a weekend exercise held at the American Enterprise Institute.²⁰⁹ Advocated mainly by Retired General Jack Keane, who had undertaken a thorough review of American strategy in Iraq, and seconded by Elliot Cohen, Professor at the School of Advanced International Studies, and John Hannah, security advisor to Dick Cheney, the plan was designed to enable the United States to hold areas previously cleared of insurgents and to conduct truly counterinsurgency operations, in accordance with a recently published Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency. The goal of American armed forces was to win support of local population by focusing on providing security and basic services rather than to try to eradicate terrorists. Overwhelming use of force and operating from safe bases was discouraged; on the contrary, U.S. troops were instructed to be as engaged with the

²⁰⁵ KLATELL, James M. (2006). Powell: We Are Losing in Iraq. CBS News: Face the Nation, Dec 17, 2006. Available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/12/17/ftn/main2274583.shtml> [last accessed April 25, 2010].

²⁰⁶ ABRAMOWITZ, Michael and KESSLER, Glenn (2006). Hawks Bolster Skeptical President; The Right Rages Over Group's Plan. The Washington Post, Dec 10, 2006.

²⁰⁷ WASHINGTON POST (2006). President Bush on Iraq, Elections and Immigration. December 20, 2006.

²⁰⁸ In a characteristic testimony, Gen. Abizaid, head of the U.S. Central Command, told the Senate on November 15 that sending extra troops into Iraq would be a mistake, since it would bring little gains and would increase the dependency of Iraqis on American forces. WHITE, Josh (2006). Debate Grows Over Beefing Up U.S. Force in Iraq; Military Leaders Oppose McCain's Push for Thousands of Additional Troops. The Washington Post, Nov 17, 2006.

²⁰⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the exercise and its outcome see KAGAN, Frederick (2007). Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq. AEI Report, Jan 5, 2007. Available at http://www.aei.org/docLib/20070111_ChoosingVictoryupdated.pdf [last accessed April 25, 2010].

population as possible and to assist with local development projects. The plan was crucial in that it gave the Bush administration a clear scenario for action in Iraq that was well argued and seemed feasible. The president would have something with which to counter mounting pressure for pulling troops out that had been growing since the Democratic victories in November and the subsequent publication of ISG recommendations.²¹⁰

On January 10, 2007, President Bush announced he would send additional 20,000 soldiers to Iraq.²¹¹ The decision reflected president's somber assessment that the situation in Iraq was not acceptable and that change was needed. The president conceded past mistakes, such as not sending in enough troops and placing restrictions on them, and expressed confidence that the new troops about to be sent to Iraq would be able to improve significantly the security situation in the country, which was deemed to be the most urgent task. The decision came in defiance of many experts, policy-makers and general public. Seventeen House Republicans joined their Democratic colleagues and condemned Bush's decision in February 2007.²¹² In a similar sign of disapproval, only 19% of self-described conservative foreign-policy experts in a Foreign Policy survey felt that the surge will bring any positive impact and a whopping 84% of them thought that the war in Iraq was adversely impacting U.S. national security.²¹³ Also, two thirds of conservative scholars interviewed by Foreign Policy remained skeptical about the prospects of a democratic regime in Iraq.²¹⁴ Nevertheless, the opposition and doubts notwithstanding, Bush's decision to surge almost four years after the initial invasion was a direct admission of past mistakes as well as a serious effort aimed at their correction.

²¹⁰ As one Bush administration official put it, "we would not have had the surge without General Keane's artful explanations and credibility. ROBINSON (2009), p. 35.

²¹¹ For full text of the speech see SERRANO, Alfonso: Full Transcript of Bush's Iraq Speech: President Pledges to Hold Iraqi Government Accountable for Progress towards Peace and Security. CBS News, Jan 10, 2007. Available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/01/10/iraq/main2349882.shtml> [last accessed April 25, 2010].

²¹² ANTLE, James W. III. (2007). The War Party. *The American Conservative*, Apr 23, 2007, available at <http://www.amconmag.com/article/2007/apr/23/00006/> [last accessed April 25, 2010].

²¹³ According to a survey conducted in February 2007. FOREIGN POLICY (2007). *The Terrorism Index*. Issue 162 (Sep/Oct 2007), pp. 60-67.

7. Factors Affecting the Outcome of the Conservative Debate

The January 2007 decision to surge in Iraq was the first significant change in strategy and the overall approach to the war in Iraq since its beginning. In other words, it took a considerable amount of time for the president and his advisors to admit that things were not going well in Iraq and that an overhaul of U.S. strategy was needed to avert a disaster, despite mounting criticisms not only from the opposition party, but, even more importantly, also from within the conservative movement. This thesis identifies three main factors that shaped the outcome of the conservative debate on the war on terror, i.e. the initial reluctance by the Bush administration to concede that the situation on the ground was not improving and the subsequent decision to send in extra troops in spite of a significant opposition to that move.

First, from a structural point of view, the outcome can be attributed to the setup of Bush's foreign policy-making bodies and the president's management style, both of which were not very open to considering dissenting views. Second, using the constructivist perspective, the debate can be seen as heavily influenced by ideological underpinning of the war on terror and the foreign policy narrative developed in the aftermath of 9/11. The narrative, which was built using a lot of political capital, succeeded in dominating American politics and as such was not easy to challenge, let alone abandon. And third, the conservative foreign policy debate can be regarded in realist terms as a mechanism for Republican electoral victories that only stopped working at the 2006 mid-term elections, which prompted the Bush administration to reconsider its policies in earnest.

It is conceivable that other factors affected the conservative debate as well. However, based on the above presented discourse analysis, these three factors were identified as the most significant ones, because they best reflect and offer an explanation for recurring motives and underlying themes in the debate on Iraq. Crucially, it is necessary to view the factors as complementary rather than exclusionary, since it is likely that the conservative debate and its outcome were shaped by a combination of all three of them.

²¹⁴ MALINIAK, Daniel, OAKES, Amy, PETERSON, Susan and TIERNEY, Michael J. (2007). Inside the Ivory Tower. *Foreign Policy*, Issue 159 (Mar/Apr 2007), pp. 62-68.

7.1 Bush's Management Style and the Setup of His Foreign Policy Team

George W. Bush brought a unique leadership style into the White House. He was the first and so far the only American president with a master degree in business administration, having graduated from the Harvard Business School in 1975. It comes therefore as little surprise that he was often regarded as the chief manager of his administration and even dubbed “the CEO President” by several writers and administration officials.²¹⁵ President Bush himself described his own management style in his 1999 autobiography titled *A Charge to Keep* as follows: "My job is to set the agenda and tone and framework, to lay out the principles by which we operate and make decisions, and then delegate much of the process to them [Bush's staff]."²¹⁶ This approach to leadership had significant impact on Bush's policies in Iraq and also on his reluctance to admit a mistake in three fundamental ways. First, a low variety of policy options was presented to him as a basis for decision-making, which made it difficult to contemplate alternative strategies for Iraq. Second, his low level of involvement in the execution of his policies made him somewhat less perceptive to the worsening situation in Iraq. And third, President Bush's tendency to select policies instinctively produced a great degree of insistence on the chosen course of action.

As John P. Burke points out, George W. Bush was a “process dependent” decision maker.²¹⁷ Being a president with relatively little foreign policy experience prior to assuming office in the White House (moreover, prone to frequent delegating), he relied to a large extent on the quality of advice given to him and on the deliberative process that delivered it. What is more, his national-security and foreign-policy teams were full of political heavyweights with considerable experience (Cheney, Rumsfeld or Powell), so much depended on how their ideas and proposals were confronted and processed.

²¹⁵ For example by Ronald Kessler in his book *A Matter of Character: Inside the White House of George W. Bush* (New York: Sentinel, 2004). Cited in: PFIFFNER, James P. (2007). *The First MBA President: George W. Bush as Public Administrator*. *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 67, No. 1, p. 6.

²¹⁶ ALLEN, Mike (2004). *Management Style Shows Weaknesses*. *The Washington Post*, Jun 2, 2004.

²¹⁷ BURKE, John P. (2005). *The Contemporary Presidency: Condoleezza Rice as NSC Advisor: A Case Study of the Honest Broker Role*. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 555.

Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor in Bush's first term in office, was partly picked for her job precisely because she was perceived to be the "honest broker" of ideas that President Bush was looking for.²¹⁸ However, Rice largely failed in that respect as she did not succeed in mitigating the disproportionate importance of different actors, namely Cheney and Rumsfeld in comparison with the rest. Especially to the frustration of the State Department, which had serious reservations about the prosecution of the war in Iraq, she rarely stood up to the Department of Defense to speak on behalf of internal dissenters.²¹⁹ It is therefore no coincidence that the perceived rift between Foggy Bottom and the Pentagon improved significantly after the 2004 election, when Rice replaced Powell as the Secretary of State and somewhat muted State's objections.²²⁰ Unfortunately, the improvement in the mutual relationship between the two departments meant also even less debate about ongoing policies since Secretary Rice was less likely to challenge Pentagon's ideas than her predecessor.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to lay all blame for the lack of an honest intra-administration discussion on NSA Rice only. Ultimately, it was President Bush who allowed Dick Cheney to become the most influential vice president in American history, or, using the corporate analogy, the COO of the Bush administration in charge of deciding about how the president's plans and policies will be carried out.²²¹ Bush also let the vice president transform his office and his own national security staff into an important and powerful body within the White House. Similarly, it was the president who firmly supported Secretary Rumsfeld until the bitter electoral end in November 2006. In reality, as David Rothkopf puts it, President Bush never declared that "this has to stop", when Rumsfeld or Cheney operated outside the scope of the National Security Council.²²² As a result, the amount of alternative advice provided to Bush by other administration insiders was fairly limited and the function of the Bush Cabinet was

²¹⁸ As Bush said about Rice: "[She is] both a good manager and an honest broker of ideas ... a close confidante and a good soul." SCIOLINO, Elaine (2000). *Compulsion to Achieve*. New York Times, Dec 18, 2000.

²¹⁹ KESSLER, Glenn and SLEVIN, Peter (2003). *Rice Fails to Repair Rifts, Officials Say; Cabinet Rivalries Complicate Her Role*. The Washington Post, Oct 12, 2003.

²²⁰ BROOKS, David (2005). *The Bushies' New Groove*. New York Times, Jan 29, 2005.

²²¹ PFIFFNER (2005), p. 6.

²²² KESSLER, Glenn and RICKS, Thomas E. (2004). *Rice's NSC Tenure Complicates New Post*. The Washington Post, Nov 16, 2004.

confined mainly to providing “a chorus of support for White House policies.”²²³ This description fits largely Bush’s entire first term and the beginning of his second one. The situation began to improve slightly in 2006 after a series of personnel departures from the Pentagon and Cheney’s office and as a result of increased criticisms. Both factors somewhat compromised the hitherto dominant standing of Cheney and Rumsfeld.

Another factor that produced the dearth of alternative ideas and dissenting views was the fact that Bush surrounded himself with a narrow circle of advisors, who served as gatekeepers and restricted access to the president. Bush himself made things perfectly clear by declaring that “I have no outside advice. Anybody who says they’re an outside adviser of this Administration on this particular matter [the war on terror] is not telling the truth” and that “the only true advice I receive is from our war council.”²²⁴ The president in fact admitted that he operated within a bubble that was very hard to penetrate, making him, in the words of *Newsweek*, one of the most isolated presidents in modern American history.²²⁵ Congressional Republicans were one of the main losers in such setup, as it necessarily reduced their ability to influence the president’s policy-making, despite them being in control of both chambers of the Congress. They did voice their grievances and concerns to the president, especially as they grew more assertive towards the end of 2005, and the president made a conscious effort to dispel the “bubble image” by reaching out to numerous Washington entities in late 2005/early 2006, but it would be difficult to argue that Capitol Hill conservatives had a profound impact on Bush’s deliberations. What is more, the replacement of Andrew Card with Joshua Bolten as his Chief of Staff as late as spring 2006 signaled that even at that point Bush was not ready to expand the circle of people surrounding him and that his outreach efforts were largely symbolic.

Reflecting his above described preferences, President Bush worked with a closed group of advisers and a narrowly constructed policy process. As stated by Christopher DeMuth, long-time president of the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute, “when they [the Bush administration] make decisions, a very small number of people

²²³ These are words of a presidential adviser commenting on possible cabinet reshuffle in the aftermath of the 2004 victory. The official noted that Bush would prefer to nominate low-profile cabinet members from whom little interference can be expected. VANDEHEI, Jim and KESSLER, Glenn (2004). President to Consider Changes for New Term. *The Washington Post*, Nov 5, 2004.

²²⁴ LEMANN, Nicholas (2004). Remember the Alamo. *The New Yorker*, Vol. 80, Issue 31, p. 158.

²²⁵ THOMAS, Evan and WOLFFE, Richard (2005). Bush in the Bubble. *Newsweek*, Dec 19, 2005.

are in the room, and it has a certain effect of constricting the range of alternatives being offered.”²²⁶ Keeping also in mind the disproportionate influence of Cheney and, to a lesser extent, of Rumsfeld, it is easy to see why discussions in the White House remained confined within firm limits and did not weigh many outside options and judgments. The danger with that approach was that regular White House meetings became somewhat self-delusional and detached from reality, as they often served for a justification of previously made decisions.

Interestingly, the decision making atmosphere in the Pentagon bore striking similarities to that of the White House and both can be perceived as suffering from the same structural flaws. As Paul Eaton writes, Pentagon under Rumsfeld was characteristic for its atmosphere of groupthink where staff members were reluctant to challenge the notions of DoD’s senior management.²²⁷ In such an ambiance any dissenter would risk being labeled as disloyal to leadership, which was a risk present in the White House as well. It is therefore not surprising that a vast majority of senior active duty military commanders on the ground and their civilian superiors did not see the need for change in Iraq up until the decision to surge. Tellingly, possibly because they did not need to fear any reprisals, it were retired officers (most notably Ret. Gen. Jack Keane) who started to put pressure on the Pentagon and were even in charge of drafting concrete plans of a change in strategy.

Another aspect of Bush’s management style that played a role in the outcome of the conservative debate was his lack of interest in details. As already mentioned in the summary of his leadership style above, he preferred to set the overall course of action and delegate the execution thereof to his staff. In sharp contrast with his predecessor and also his father, Bush favored short and crisp meetings and working with short memoranda without a profound elaboration of issues.²²⁸ James Fallows observed that President Bush had a clear preference for making crucial policy choices but lacked curiosity when it came to significant details.²²⁹ Consequently, he was remarkably little

²²⁶ SUSKIND, Ron (2004). What Makes Bush’s Presidency so Radical – Even to Some Republicans – Is His Preternatural, Faith-Infused Certainty in Uncertain Times. Without a Doubt. New York Times Magazine, Oct 17, 2004, p. 49.

²²⁷ EATON, Paul D. (2006). A Top-Down Review for the Pentagon. New York Times, Mar 19, 2006.

²²⁸ PFIFFNER (2005), p. 7.

²²⁹ FALLOWS, James (2004). Blind Into Baghdad. The Atlantic Monthly, Issue 293, p. 69.

involved in numerous decisions concerning ways how precisely to execute his master plans. It is therefore possible to argue that President Bush was always interested in the big picture of whether to fight the war in Iraq, but was somewhat detached from the seeming technicality of how to fight it. Characteristically, the question frequently posed by the president to those responsible for management of the war was *whether* they had everything they needed for victory, not *what* it was they needed. As a result, President Bush became really involved in planning and managing war operations only when the wisdom of continuing to fight in Iraq began to be seriously questioned, i.e. when calls for a timed withdrawal grew too significant to ignore.

Finally, another factor that shaped the decisions surrounding American policies in Iraq was Bush's readiness to decide complex questions in an intuitive manner. Throughout his time in office, he clearly tried to avoid getting bogged down in various details of an issue,²³⁰ and preferred to follow his instincts without actually feeling accountable to anyone. Bush himself described his approach in a conversation with Bob Woodward in the following terms: "I'm not a textbook player. I'm a gut player. ... I do not need to explain why I say things. That's interesting about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation."²³¹ This notion of him being a decider accountable to no one but himself enabled President Bush to exhibit an impressive degree of stubbornness and persistence that led him to be willing to take considerable political risk when pursuing what he believed was the right course of action. As he summarized his position in 2001: "'I know who I am. I know what I believe in. The good thing about democracy, if people like the decisions you make, they'll let you stay. If they don't, they'll send me back to Crawford. Isn't all that bad a deal, by the way."²³²

Some commentators described Bush's leadership as intellectually lazy, because he did not seem to build his decisions upon a thorough examination of options and alternatives

²³⁰ As Condoleezza Rice confessed, the one sentence that Bush liked her least to say was "this is complex." LEMANN, Nicholas (2002). Without a Doubt. The New Yorker, Vol. 78, Issue 31, p. 177.

²³¹ WOODWARD, Bob (2002). Bush at War. New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 144-146. Cited in: PFIFFNER (2005), p. 8.

²³² ALLEN, Mike and BRODER, David S. (2004). Bush's Leadership Style: Decisive or Simplistic? The Washington Post, Aug 30, 2004.

and instead trusted his inner voice.²³³ Arguably, his leadership demonstrated remarkable resilience facing mounting criticism and Bush initially showed few signs of being swayed by external opinion. Only after the 2006 mid-term elections results, which de facto amounted to a symbolic attempt to send him back to Crawford, did Bush agree to change the course. Crucially, even at that moment, President Bush did not betray his readiness to buck the trend and decided to surge in Iraq against the recommendations of numerous experts, majority of the military and the will of the electorate. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to argue that in this instance Bush's stubbornness produced positive results in stabilizing the situation in Iraq that had been gyrating out of control.

7.2 *The Narrative of the Global War on Terror*

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 ushered in a new era in American foreign policy. In their aftermath, the United States launched the global war on terror, which became a new organizing principle of American foreign policy. To cement this principle, the Bush administration constructed a new narrative that became the main framework for subsequent foreign policy-making. This narrative affected the conservative debate on and Bush's policies in Iraq in two crucial ways, first by portraying American foreign and national security policy as a struggle of the good versus the evil, and second by requiring much political capital from its creators and thus by increasing the political cost of admitting a mistake.

As Amy Zalman and Jonathan Clarke argue, the global war on terror served for the Bush administration as a "floating signifier," i.e. it was easily available to provide context for a whole variety of policies, decisions and actions.²³⁴ Its narrative could in fact be understood as an umbrella term constructed by President Bush and his team that

²³³ Intellectual laziness is a charge by, among other Bush's detractors, John Dean, White House Counsel under President Nixon in DEAN, John (2004). *Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush*. New York: Little Brown & Company.

²³⁴ The term floating signifier comes from semiotics and usually describes expressions that do not denote a concrete object or do not carry an agreed upon meaning. ZALMAN, Amy and CLARKE, Jonathan (2009). *The Global War on Terror: A Narrative in Need of a Rewrite*. *Ethics & International Affairs*, Vol. 23, Issue 2, p. 101.

covered an array of previously unlinked issues, such as Islamic terrorists of al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. Similarly, in the domain of Bush administration's policies it included both wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq, expanded domestic powers of the federal government such as enhanced surveillance programs, or controversial detentions of enemy combatants. The underlying message of the narrative was fairly simple, quite possibly so as not to impede its flexibility: the United States found itself confronted with the mortal threat of Islamic fundamentalism and had to fight for its own survival. The road to prevailing rested on two main pillars, on muscular military response to the security threat and on active promotion of American ideals, namely democracy.

Key to the success of the global war on terror narrative was its internalization by other important actors in American society. Media, in perpetual search of dramatic and not-too-complex stories were happy to report on war developments, especially if these were possible to be presented using simple but attractive "*us vs. them*" rhetoric. The 24-hour news cycle actually reinforced the message by regularly providing news updates and breaking news stories on the topic, which helped bolster collective awareness and public acceptance of the narrative.²³⁵ Furthermore, 9/11 and the launch of the war on terror unleashed a wave of academic publications that attempted to provide intellectual and theoretical background for the ongoing events. Largely, these publications rather strengthened the dominance of the GWOT narrative.²³⁶ Think-tanks, most notably conservative ones, also lent intellectual support and came up with numerous policy papers and recommendations for the prosecution of the war. While they at times criticized perceived tactical errors, they more or less confirmed the righteous nature of the war effort in general. And most crucially, the narrative was embraced by also

²³⁵ As an illustration, the most covered story in 2004 on major networks was combat in Iraq. It was given twice as much airtime as the next story, which was postwar reconstruction of Iraq. GELPI, Christopher, FEAVER, Peter D. and REIFLER, Jason (2005). Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq. *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Winter 2005/06), p. 8. Unfortunately, the role of media on the GWOT narrative deserves significantly more space than allotted in this thesis. For a discussion of the topic see, among other works, HALPER, Stefan and CLARKE, Jonathan (2007). *The Silence of the Rational Center: Why American Foreign Policy is Failing* (New York: Basic Books).

²³⁶ A good example is "The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror" by Princeton's Bernard Lewis, published in 2003. Some authors, such as Columbia's Philip Bobbitt, even viewed the war on terror as a consequence of globalizing shifts in the world, lending thus the narrative an aura of inevitability.

political opposition, which did not challenge the very concept of the war on terror, but instead opted to debate what policies to adopt within this overarching framework.²³⁷

When constructing the narrative, President Bush often resorted to vocabulary of morality and righteousness. The war on terror was portrayed as a conflict between forces of good and evil, triggered by a unilateral declaration of hostilities on September 11, 2001. Americans and their allies in the conflict, both despised for their virtue of freedom, had to prevail to preserve their way of life and to deliver justice to the perpetrators of terrorism through forceful retribution. President Bush himself summarized the central theme line in the narrative as follows: “I see things this way: The people who did this on America, and who may be planning further acts, are evil people. They don’t represent an ideology, they don’t represent a legitimate political group of people. They’re flat evil. That’s all they can think about, is evil [sic]. And as a nation of good folks, we’re going to hunt them down, and we’re going to find them, and we will bring them to justice.”²³⁸ Such reasoning is also the underlying source of one of Bush’s most famous sound bites, the “axis of evil.”²³⁹ The Iraq theater of the global war on terror and the need to terminate the regime of Saddam Hussein was framed in the same good vs. evil language; indeed, Peter Singer notes that President Bush invoked the concept of evil in stunning 319 separate speeches between assuming office and invading Iraq.²⁴⁰

The reliance of the narrative on moral terms of good and evil had far-reaching consequences. Not only was the declaration of the global war on terror a right thing to do, the war and especially its protracted character was also in fact a test of national resolve against evil. According to the narrative, America was not allowed to waver in its commitment to defeating its enemies and had to remain strong when facing numerous

²³⁷ Admittedly, some fringe political actors protested even the GWOT narrative; here, political opposition means mainstream groups, namely the Democratic Party establishment. For an example of Democratic embrace of main GWOT principles, see the following, albeit critical, report: BROOKS, David (2004). All Things to All People. *New York Times*, Jul 31, 2004.

²³⁸ BUSH, George W. (2001). FBI Needs Tools to Track Down Terrorists. Remarks by the President to Employees at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Sept 25, 2001. Available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010925-5.html> [last accessed May 3, 2010].

²³⁹ To give credit where it is due, the phrase was suggested by David Frum and was used in Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address.

²⁴⁰ SINGER, Peter (2003). *The President of Good and Evil* (New York: Granta Books). Cited in: O’DRISCOLL, Cian (2006). Re-negotiating the Just War: The Invasion of Iraq and Punitive War. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (September 2006), p. 410.

wartime challenges. The 2004 presidential campaign is a good testimony to the power of the narrative. While debating Iraq at that time, President Bush was trying to push voters away from specific issues (such as the inability to find WMDs or poor postwar planning) and urged them not to lose sight of the big picture, i.e. that leadership character and toughness vis-à-vis evil matter a lot. The keys to final victory as defined by Bush were of spiritual rather than material nature (resolve, commitment, unwavering).²⁴¹ His opponent John Kerry, who was systematically described as a moral relativist and flip-flopper, actually surrendered to the power of the narrative, condoned Bush's moral language and agreed that America was in a war "against an enemy unlike any we've known before."²⁴²

The narrative of the global war on terror and the moralist vocabulary it employed had a significant positive rally-around-the-flag effect. At the same time, it in fact created big momentum leading American foreign policy in a firmly fixed direction of "fighting evil." Any attempts to challenge the narrative and modify the direction were thus easily condemned as unpatriotic and as dangerous for America at times when national unity was needed.²⁴³ President Bush and his administration never attempted to completely abandon the narrative they constructed, and they also initially shied away from any changes and corrections of the course, because these could have been perceived as a sign of weakness and as lack of will in the fight against evildoers. Similarly, some later adopted counterinsurgency programs, such as efforts to win over previously hostile Sunni tribes in the Anbar province, could have been regarded as compromising the morally noble goals of the war in Iraq. They became acceptable only when the worsening situation on the ground significantly dented the moralist dimension of the GWOT narrative and prompted policy-makers to take a more realist view of the conflict.

Another factor that contributed to the change-averse stance of the Bush administration was the unique position of the Iraq war within the GWOT narrative. Unlike with the campaign in Afghanistan, which was generally agreed on as a just response to the

²⁴¹ SPIELVOGEL, Christian (2005). "You Know Where I Stand": Moral Framing of the War on Terrorism and the Iraq War in the 2004 Presidential Campaign. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Vol. 8, Issue 4, p. 558.

²⁴² *Ibid*, p. 562.

²⁴³ For an example of such a rebuttal of criticisms see STEVENSON, Richard W. (2005). Bush Contends Partisan Critics Hurt War Effort. *New York Times*, Nov 12, 2005.

atrocities of 9/11, the reasons to go to war with Iraq were met with sizeable opposition, including mass anti-war demonstrations. Bush and his team, who systematically maintained that Iraq was an integral part of the global war on terror,²⁴⁴ had to invest much political capital to win support for their Middle Eastern strategy and in fact made it the key issue of the Bush presidency. When selling the war to lawmakers and broader public, Bush operated with the understanding that Iraq represented not only a mortal threat to American security, but also an historic opportunity to change the rules of the international system for the better and to transform the Middle East region.²⁴⁵ As Robert Jervis points out, there were practically no supporters of the war who did not believe in *both* Bush's arguments at the same time, i.e. virtually no one argued that the Iraqi threat had to be dealt with but that the project of democratizing Iraq was not feasible and America should settle for an acceptable alternative, e.g. a friendly autocrat.²⁴⁶ As a consequence, those who felt that the United States had to invade Iraq persuaded themselves that the occupation phase would be fairly easy. That in turn created resistance to admitting a mistake in Iraq as it would compromise the justification for the war. Out of all the participants in the war on terror debate, the Bush administration, having invested most credibility into the war and having the most stakes in it, showed the biggest resistance in this respect.

7.3 Foreign Policy as an Electoral Issue

Republican foreign policy in the new millennium, and especially its war on terror dimension, can also be seen as a political wedge issue designed to give the Republican Party large electoral advantage. As such, it was offered to American voters to complement traditional political cleavages and represented an area where Republicans seemed to be enjoying a significant lead over their Democratic rivals. Since Bush's

²⁴⁴ Characteristically, Bush continued to make that assertion and did not depart from the narrative even after the 9/11 Commission Report conclusively stated that there was no connection between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein. KELLNER, Douglas (2007). Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the "War on Terror". *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, Issue 4 (Dec 2007), pp. 638.

²⁴⁵ FOLEY, Michael (2007). President Bush, the War on Terror, and the Populist Tradition. *International Politics*, Vol. 44, pp. 678.

²⁴⁶ Based on a conversation with Robert Jervis, Prague, May 4, 2010.

handling of national security and the war on terror was a part of an electoral mix that brought the G.O.P. victories in 2002 and 2004, the Bush administration perceived no need to modify its course and policies. It was only after the crushing defeat in November 2006, where national security issues were clearly no longer a road to a conservative triumph, that a major overhaul of the Iraq policy was introduced.

The emergence of political wedge issues is a response to the polarization of American politics in the past half a century. Both major parties have gradually embraced stances that are ideologically more distant than in the past, with the Republican Party having moved to the right of center and the Democrats to the left.²⁴⁷ Interestingly, this development occurred even though attitudes of American public did not become more polarized.²⁴⁸ American voters reacted by re-aligning themselves in a fashion that liberal Republicans largely became Democrats and conservative Democrats became Republicans, which means there has been an increase in correlation between ideological identification (identifying oneself as conservative or liberal based on position on various key issues) and party identification.²⁴⁹ In such a political environment, parties started offering wedge issues as a complement to mobilizing their bases by moving away from the political center. Wedge issues emphasize a secondary political cleavage and aim to attract precisely targeted constituencies from supporters of the opposition. As Morris Fiorina notes, in order to make a wedge issue successful, a political party must take such a distinctive stance so that it is attractive for a voter to cast his vote primarily based on this particular issue, setting other preferences aside.²⁵⁰ Interestingly, the key to find such a stance is usually not moderation, but further polarization.

²⁴⁷ Unfortunately, it falls beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the causes of the polarization or the extent thereof. For more literature on this topic, see for example FIORINA, Morris P. (2006). *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York, Pearson Longman), SINCLAIR, Barbara (2006). *Polarization and the Politics of National Policy Making* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press) or McCARTY, Nolan, POOLE, Keith T., ROSENTHAL, Howard (2006). *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge: MIT Press).

²⁴⁸ Even though Karl Rove did proclaim that “there’s no middle.” LEMANN, Nicholas (2003). *The Controller Profiles*. *The New Yorker*, Vol. 79, Issue 11, p. 68.

²⁴⁹ ABRAMOWITZ, Alan and SAUNDERS, Kyle (2005). *Why Can’t We Just All Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America*. *The Forum*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, pp. 1-24.

²⁵⁰ FIORINA, Morris P. (2006). *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York, Pearson Longman), p. 167-182. Cited in: SNYDER, Jack, SHAPIRO, Robert Y. and BLOCH-ELKON, Yaeli (2009). *Free Hand Abroad, Divide and Rule At Home*. *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No.1 (January 2009), p. 172.

Being able to offer salient wedge issues is an especially urgent task for the Republican Party. The G.O.P. has to overcome an inherent disadvantage on economic issues in electoral contests, since if economic interests were to be the only determinant of voters' preferences, it would necessarily trail behind the Democrats, who favor a greater role of the government in redistributing resources within the society. Americans in general tend to say that they want the government to do (and thus spend) more on issues such as health care, education and the environment; even when Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, only 10% of Americans felt that the government was spending too much on such issues.²⁵¹ In order not to compromise their basic economic principles, in the 1980s and 1990s Republicans found a solution in coming up with an array of non-economic wedge issues, including items such as opposition to affirmative action, abortions, gay rights, gun control or the position of religion in public life, and managed to market these as a viable alternative to the traditional economic cleavage in electoral politics.²⁵²

The tragedy of 9/11 opened a window of opportunity for the G.O.P. to transform foreign policy into another of its wedge issues. Prior to the terrorist attacks, foreign policy was not very suitable as a secondary cleavage since it was almost impossible to find a plausible yet a sufficiently distinctive and divisive stance for a party to embrace. During the Cold War, both parties more or less agreed on a consensus in the foreign policy area, and in the 1990s, there was no external threat serious enough to cast foreign policy as a wedge issue. However, the launch of the war on terror and the subsequent Bush doctrine introduced a very apt campaign issue to the American political electoral scene. It echoed Republican hawkish record in foreign policy and its language of retribution and justice resonated well with the conservative base which favored toughness on crime, death penalty and other law enforcement measures. At the same time, it had great potential for outreach to independent and liberal voters. First, it relied

²⁵¹ James A. Stimson, *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 7. Cited in SNYDER, Jack, SHAPIRO, Robert Y. and BLOCH-ELKON, Yaeli (2009). *Free Hand Abroad, Divide and Rule At Home*. *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No.1 (January 2009), p. 174.

²⁵² Thomas Frank's book *What's the Matter with Kansas* (2005, Metropolitan/Holt) offers an account of how low-income social conservatives end up worse off as a consequence of conservative economic policies, yet they still vote for the G.O.P. because they hold social issues such as abortion, gun rights and school prayer dearer. However, Frank's analysis was not universally accepted; for instance, Princeton's Larry Bartels wrote a rebuttal aiming to disprove Frank's hypotheses. BARTELS, Larry M. (2005). *What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas*. A paper for an annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Sept 1-4, 2005. Available at <http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/kansas.pdf>, [last accessed May 15, 2010].

heavily on democracy promotion, which served to neutralize potential liberal criticism.²⁵³ Second, it revolved around a pressing concern of all Americans regardless of their political orientation – keeping America safe. And third, by embracing controversial notions of unilateralism and preemption, Republicans still managed to offer a position distinctly different from Democrats so that voters could actually see an important difference between the two parties and had to make a choice in this respect.

The mid-term elections in 2002 were the first electoral contest to see the war on terror at work as a campaign issue. Responding to public expectations that Democrats would do better at issues such as handling health care, Social Security or education, and that Republicans would be a better choice for national security issues, the war on terror, and foreign policy in general, Republican strategist Karl Rove advised G.O.P. candidates to “focus on the war” in their campaigns.²⁵⁴ The elections turned out to be a resounding success; the Republican Party bucked the historical trend of parties in power losing in mid-terms and actually gained eight seats in the House of Representatives and two in the Senate, assuming control of the upper chamber.

History repeated itself in the presidential election of 2004. Based on opinion polls and past electoral results, foreign policy and national security were perceived as an issue “owned” by the Republican Party.²⁵⁵ Since the G.O.P. enjoyed a significant lead among voters on that particular issue, it was only logical that it would trumpet its perceived superior ability to handle terrorism and other security concerns and rather downplay other topics. Indeed, during his reelection campaign, President Bush devoted a markedly larger proportion of his speeches and press statements to terrorism than his Democratic

²⁵³ In surveys of elite opinion in 1998 and 2002, more Democrats than Republicans thought that democracy promotion was an important foreign policy goal. SNYDER, Jack, SHAPIRO, Robert Y. and BLOCH-ELKON, Yaeli (2009). *Free Hand Abroad, Divide and Rule At Home*. *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No.1 (January 2009), p. 182.

²⁵⁴ According to Rove, the war on terror created a political advantage for conservatives because Americans “trust the Republican Party to do a better job of protecting and strengthening America's military might and thereby protecting America.” CARNEY, James (2002). *General Karl Rove, Reporting for Duty*. *Time Magazine*, Sept 29, 2002.

²⁵⁵ According to the theory of issue ownership, “the goal is to achieve a strategic advantage by making problems which reflect owned issues the programmatic meaning of the election and the criteria by which voters make their choice.” For a more detailed elaboration of the theory, see PETROCIK, John R. (1996). *Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study*. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 40, Issue 3, pp. 825-850.

rival.²⁵⁶ Interestingly, that does not apply to the narrow issue of Iraq, which Senator Kerry brought up with comparable frequency, as he tried to counter Bush's claims that it represents an integral and crucial part of the war on terror²⁵⁷ with counterarguments that it is being fought badly and that it actually is an unwelcome distraction from more important theaters.²⁵⁸ The effort to raise the profile of foreign policy and terrorism as an electoral issue was successful and voters' priorities evolved during the campaign. All three major groups of voters (self-proclaimed Republicans, Democrats and independents) indicated in opinion polls that throughout the campaign they had become more concerned about terrorism and Iraq, largely at the expense of the economy, an issue perceived to be owned by Democrats.²⁵⁹

The fact that George Bush emerged victorious from his contest with John Kerry was not interpreted only as a mandate to continue with his war on terror policies but also as a vindication of the chosen campaign strategy. While researchers cannot reach a consensus whether Iraq in reality helped Bush that much in the election,²⁶⁰ such cautious reflection was not present at Republican post-election analyses, where Bush's victory and the pick-up of three new House seats and four in the Senate was celebrated. As it was understood, foreign policy was a truly functioning wedge issue; it managed to

²⁵⁶ ALDRICH, John H., GRIFFIN, John D. and RICKERSHAUSER, Jill (2005). The Presidency and the Election Campaign: Altering Voters' Priorities in the 2004 Election. In: NELSON, Michael (ed) (2005). The Presidency and the Political System (Congressional Quarterly Press: Washington, D.C.), pp. 219-234.

²⁵⁷ As Karl Rove expressed his prediction, "They [voters] will see the battle for Iraq as a chapter in a longer, bigger struggle ... As a part of the war on terrorism." LEMANN, Nicholas (2003). The Controller Profiles. The New Yorker, Vol. 79, Issue 11, p. 68.

²⁵⁸ ALDRICH, John H., GELPI, Christopher, FEATHER, Peter, REIFLER, Jason, and THOMPSON SHARP, Kristin (2006). Foreign Policy and the Electoral Connection. Annual Review of Political Science 9 (2006), p. 487.

²⁵⁹ In all fairness, another issue that grew more pressing as the campaign progressed was health care. ALDRICH, John H., GRIFFIN, John D. and RICKERSHAUSER, Jill (2005). The Presidency and the Election Campaign: Altering Voters' Priorities in the 2004 Election. In: NELSON, Michael (ed) (2005). The Presidency and the Political System (Congressional Quarterly Press: Washington, D.C.), pp. 219-234.

²⁶⁰ Some authors argue that Bush would have fared better by limiting the debate on Iraq and actually focusing only on the greater topic of the war on terror – those who identified terrorism as the most important issue voted heavily for Bush, but those who cited Iraq as the most urgent issue preferred Kerry. SNYDER, Jack, SHAPIRO, Robert Y. and BLOCH-ELKON, Yaeli (2009). Free Hand Abroad, Divide and Rule At Home. World Politics, Vol. 61, No.1 (January 2009), p. 178. At the same time, it is possible to argue that Bush's war posturing had a positive spillover effect with voters interested in other topics (such as those with populist instincts lured by Bush's language of morality, optimism and "iconoclastic attitude" towards international institutions). FOLEY, Michael (2007). President Bush, the War on Terror, and the Populist Tradition. International Politics, Vol. 44, pp. 666-691. Overall, as described earlier in the

mobilize the conservative base,²⁶¹ and at the same time attract independents and some Democrats, mitigating the impact of the Republican disadvantage on economic issues. It is therefore hardly surprising that Bush and his team saw little need to change a well-oiled electoral strategy and rhetoric and the policies that appeared to be reinforcing it in the aftermath of the successful reelection.

The Republican foreign policy card stopped working in the 2006 mid-terms. Worsening situation in Iraq and the perceived inability of the Bush administration to improve America's standing in the war effectively destroyed the Republican advantage in the issue of national security and handling of terrorism. The G.O.P. was still able to mobilize large portions of its conservative base; however, foreign policy was rendered unusable as a wedge issue because it was not able to attract independents, let alone liberals. Numerous conservative politicians actually saw the approaching electoral disaster in the run-up to November and urged the president to reconsider his policies. Bush, though, remained adamant and offered voters the same approach, famously insisting in October 2006 that the United States was "absolutely winning" in Iraq.²⁶² It was only after the drubbing at the polls that George Bush realized the extent of the rejection of his policies and began a serious search for an alternative. Admittedly, at that point George W. Bush was not seeking reelection, so his change of mind could be perceived as a way to revamp foreign policy as a wedge issue for his party fellows, or as a personal legacy buildup effort.

thesis, the largest group of voters in 2004 was concerned with moral values; while these voters tended to favor Bush's foreign policy, it is impossible to assert that it was their main motivation to vote for him.

²⁶¹ In some aspects, the extent to which Bush's foreign policy actually mobilized the conservative base and polarized American politics in the years to come is truly striking. For instance, the percentage of Republican voters who believed that Iraq had possessed WMDs actually grew by late 2005, compared with a significant Democratic drop. Also, by late 2005 a gap amounting to 60 percentage points had developed between supporters of both parties in whether invading Iraq was a good idea. SNYDER, Jack, SHAPIRO, Robert Y. and BLOCH-ELKON, Yaeli (2009). *Free Hand Abroad, Divide and Rule At Home*. World Politics, Vol. 61, No.1 (January 2009), p. 180.

²⁶² RICKS (2009), p. 58.

8. Conclusion

The conservative debate on the war on terror in 2003 – 2007 was inevitably to a large extent a reflection of developments on the ground in Iraq. These were not entirely positive; quite on the contrary, the position of the United States worsened over time and threatened to lead to a defeat. Arguably, there were numerous significant achievements in that period, most notably a series of free and democratic elections and a referendum on a new post-Saddam constitution. However, these were overshadowed by the realization that the occupation would be longer than anticipated, the failure to find WMDs, one of the main rationales for the war – and most importantly, the growing death toll of the war, both on the side of Iraqi civilians and U.S. troops.

The conservative debate was remarkable in how its internal dynamic changed in the face of the abovementioned negative news coming from Iraq. In basic terms, it can be described as a gradual disintegration of the camp of war supporters, with the Bush administration remaining the most adamant advocate of the way the war was prosecuted. Various participants in the debate differed mainly by the timing and the extent of their breaking ranks with the White House and by their proposals with which they hoped to influence the outcome of the conservative debate.

Conservative intellectuals, commentators and thinkers who did not embrace the neoconservative line of reasoning became vocal with their objections as early as the first year of the occupation, when the inadequacy of pre-war planning for the post-combat phase of the war was evident and when the WMDs allegedly possessed by Saddam Hussein were nowhere to be found. Their main argument was that the once noble goals of the occupation (especially building a viable democracy in Iraq) might need to be reassessed and possibly scaled down, as the United States seemed unable to provide security and stability in the country. Their criticism only grew louder in the subsequent years as several high-profile former administration officials joined in, along with retired military officers, who launched an unprecedented attack on Secretary Rumsfeld in spring 2006. Importantly, while a majority of this group identified themselves with the findings of the Iraq Study Group and supported a timed, and if possible honorable, withdrawal, some actually embraced the so-called “Pottery Barn” argument (you break

it, you own it) and argued that the United States had to carry through the mission now that it was involved so deeply in the conflict.

Neoconservative thinkers were much more persistent in their support for the war than the previous group. Even though they were not immune to internal dissent, as Francis Fukuyama proved in 2004, they largely continued to endorse American war efforts. Faced with an increasingly difficult situation in Iraq in 2005/2006, they decisively warned against any attempts to withdraw and emphasized the importance of carrying on in Iraq, utterly rejecting the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton report in December 2006. Throughout the war, their criticism was also directed at the Bush administration, but in a completely different direction than that from war opponents. Staunch neoconservatives insisted that their main ideological reasoning remained valid and argued that it was Bush's wrongful implementation of correct policies that caused problems. They accused the president mainly of not having committed enough resources (both manpower and finances) to the war and thereby of jeopardizing its outcome. Logically, they were pleased by Bush's decision to surge, which they vehemently supported.

Congressional Republicans represent ambivalent actors in the debate. In the early phase of the occupation, they exercised their oversight rights and subjected numerous administration officials to various inquiries, for example about (non-existent) WMDs or overall strategy for the conflict. Yet this involvement, while probably implying their discontent with the course of the war, did not translate into any criticism of the Bush administration. Instead, it rather symbolized the desire to earn more weight in the policymaking process. Similar motivation can be traced in the increased assertiveness of the Congress in late 2005/early 2006, though G.O.P. Congresspersons at that point still fell short of speaking against their president, despite growing uneasiness about the war. An open split between the White House and Capitol Hill occurred only in the run-up to the 2006 mid-term elections with numerous conservative lawmakers calling upon Bush to admit the unsatisfactory realities of Iraq and take remedial steps.

President Bush and his team kept an upbeat tone throughout almost the entire studied period. The White House insisted that the United States was on the course to victory well into 2006, having won reelection for Bush in 2004 after a campaign full of emphasis on Iraq achievements and having published two optimistic and ambitious key

documents – the 2005 strategy for Iraq and the 2006 National Security Strategy. Beginning in late 2005, President Bush was willing to concede that minor details were not necessarily going well in Iraq, but was still absolutely confident that these obstacles would be overcome without any need to change the course, as demonstrated best by keeping Secretary Rumsfeld in his job until November 2006. It was only in the aftermath of the 2006 mid-terms that the president admitted certain errors and ordered an overhaul of the strategy in Iraq, consisting of sending in additional tens of thousands of troops in defiance of a majority of well-qualified advice.

This thesis identified three main factors that shaped the outcome of the conservative debate, which was mainly the unwillingness of the Bush administration to admit past mistakes, its insistence on a chosen course and ultimately the decision to surge. First factor was the setup of Bush's White House and his management style. President Bush surrounded himself with a narrow group of advisers which limited the range of options and alternatives offered to the president for deliberation; what is more, ideas were not brokered effectively within the White House, which created an atmosphere of groupthink and unanimity where dissenting views on how to prosecute the war were not seriously considered. Furthermore, Bush's lack of interest in details, wariness of complexities and his reliance on instinctive decisions developed a great degree of persistence and stubbornness, which led the president to reject calls for change until very late in his presidency. Arguably, the fact that the president had only a limited set of options as a basis for decisions is a serious flaw of the policy making process; at the same time, however, Bush's management style led him to disregard majority of advice and opt for a surge in Iraq, which now appears to have been a right correction of the course of the war.

Second factor was a new paradigm for American foreign policy constructed by the Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11. The paradigm relied on a new narrative of the global war on terror, according to which the United States was engaged in a struggle of good versus evil. Since the narrative used such moralist language, which was embraced and accepted by other actors in American society (including political opposition), the key to prevailing in the war on terror was resolve and unwavering commitment, which created a self-reinforcing mechanism for American policies in Iraq. Modifications to a chosen course, let alone admittance of mistakes, would have been

interpreted as a sign of weakness and as an indicator of insufficient leadership. Moreover, the narrative enabled dissenting voices to be labeled as unpatriotic and dismissed as demoralizing for the ongoing struggle. Importantly, since the rationale for invading Iraq was far from universally accepted, introducing the war in Iraq as an integral part of the narrative extracted a significant amount of political capital from the Bush administration and its supporters, which only strengthened the resistance to change exhibited by American policymakers. The advantage of the narrative was undoubtedly its mobilization effect on American politics in the time of war; yet it is far from clear that this benefit outweighs the fact that the narrative rendered an honest discussion of policy options more difficult by requiring acceptance of its main principles (fight against evil, need of resolve etc.).

Third factor was the use of foreign policy as an electoral wedge issue by the Republican Party. American political parties have used issues creating secondary political cleavages in their campaigns for decades, and 9/11 and the launch of war on terror enabled foreign policy to be transformed into one as well. The G.O.P. exploited the fact that it was perceived by voters to handle terrorism and national security better than Democrats and accentuated these issues in the electoral contests of 2002 and 2004 in order to compensate for their inherent disadvantage in economic issues. Since the strategy produced tangible results in both mentioned elections, the Bush administration felt little incentive to change policies that were supposedly approved at the ballot box (brought electoral victories to their party). It was only after Bush's policies were outright rejected in November 2006 and foreign policy as a wedge issue turned counterproductive that the president began his search for a change. Importantly, this is not to say that the Bush administration invaded Iraq in order to reap domestic electoral benefits. It did, however, attempt to use the already ongoing war on terror as a source of political advantage.

Crucially, these three factors are not utterly independent of each other but rather mutually reinforcing. Therefore, the best answer to the research questions of the thesis – why did American policies in Iraq and their overall course remain virtually intact until early 2007 and what were the factors that influenced the outcome of the conservative debate? – is likely a combination of the three suggested hypotheses, since numerous linkages between them can be observed. For instance, the GWOT narrative in general

limited the availability of dissenting views on the war on terror, which applied to the narrow circle of Bush's advisors as well. Bush's management style and the setup of his team were based on his strong leadership and vision, which were qualities perfectly marketable in electoral contests. And in turn, Republican (until 2006 successful) use of foreign policy as a campaign issue created an incentive to maintain and strengthen the war narrative. At the practical level, though, these synergies translated into a somewhat dysfunctional policy making process, which limited the room for a productive debate and took long to respond to crisis situations in Iraq.

Summary

In March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq in order to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein, eliminate the WMD threat and promote a democratic regime in the country. This undertaking reflected changes in American foreign policy in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, namely the launch of the war on terror and the embrace of preemptive action. While the initial military operation against Iraqi army was a resounding success, the subsequent occupation of the country turned out to be far more problematic. Political stability was difficult to achieve and, gradually, the United States found itself facing an Islamic insurgency. With the increasing cost of the war and unsatisfactory news coming from Iraq, criticism of the Bush administration was increasingly frequent and Iraq policies were subjected to a profound debate. This thesis aims to analyze the conservative debate on Iraq and explain why President Bush stayed the course until late 2006 despite the apparent shortcomings of his policies.

The first part of the thesis puts the Iraq war into the context of the broader war on terror. The campaign in Iraq was a result of a neoconservative victory in the policymaking debate in early 2000s, as a result of which the United States embraced muscular internationalist idealism as the main ideological orientation of its foreign policy. According to this doctrine, it was in the U.S. interest to remove the security threat Saddam Hussein represented and simultaneously to promote American ideals by helping build a democratic regime in the post-war Iraq. The decision to start the war was, however, far from universally supported and had numerous opponents, including various conservative thinkers and writers.

The second part focuses on a discourse analysis of the intraparty Republican debate on Iraq and monitors the gradual erosion of support for the war and its prosecution among various conservative groups and schools of thought. Realists, traditionalists and paleoconservatives, albeit to a different extent, expressed their criticisms already in Bush's first term, when insufficient postwar planning was all too apparent and alleged WMDs were not found in the country, and some of them called for scaling down American goals in Iraq. Their objections intensified in Bush's second term when the situation on the ground further deteriorated. They largely came to advocate a gradual

withdrawal, even though these groups included supporters of the surge as well. Neoconservatives generally supported continuing with the mission in Iraq throughout the occupation. Their main concern was insufficient resources committed to the war and they were vocal about the need to increase the troop levels in Iraq. The Bush administration did not see any need for change and adamantly defended its policies on the ground for a larger part of the studied period. It was only in the aftermath of the 2006 elections that President Bush admitted past mistakes and ordered extra troops to be sent to Iraq to regain initiative in the conflict.

To answer the research questions of the thesis, its final part thesis offers three explanations for the outcome of the conservative debate on Iraq. First, from a structural point of view, the outcome can be attributed to the setup of Bush's foreign policy-making bodies and the president's management style, both of which were not very open to considering dissenting views. Second, using the constructivist perspective, the debate can be seen as heavily influenced by ideological underpinning of the war on terror and the foreign policy narrative developed in the aftermath of 9/11. The narrative, which was built using a lot of political capital, succeeded in dominating American politics and as such was not easy to challenge, let alone abandon. And third, the conservative foreign policy debate can be regarded in realist terms as a mechanism for Republican electoral victories that only stopped working at the 2006 mid-term elections, which prompted the Bush administration to reconsider its policies in earnest.

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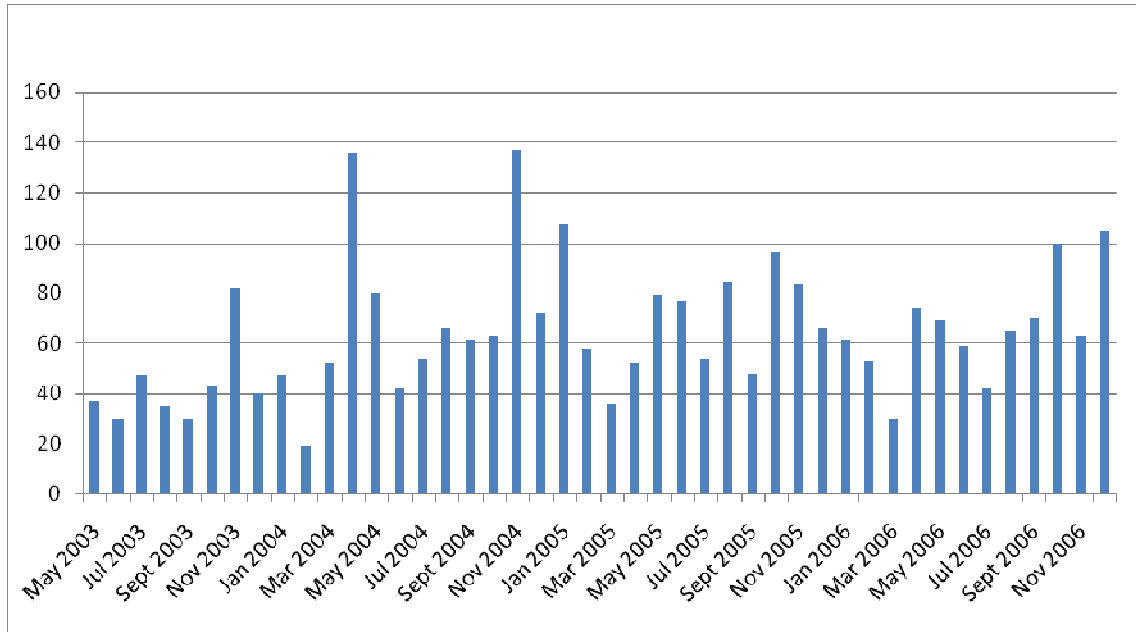
Appendix No. 1: Killed U.S. Troops in Iraq, March 2003 – May 2007 (graph)

Appendix No. 2: Total Killed U.S. Troops in Iraq since March 2003 (graph)

Appendix No. 3: Approval Ratings of President Bush (graph)

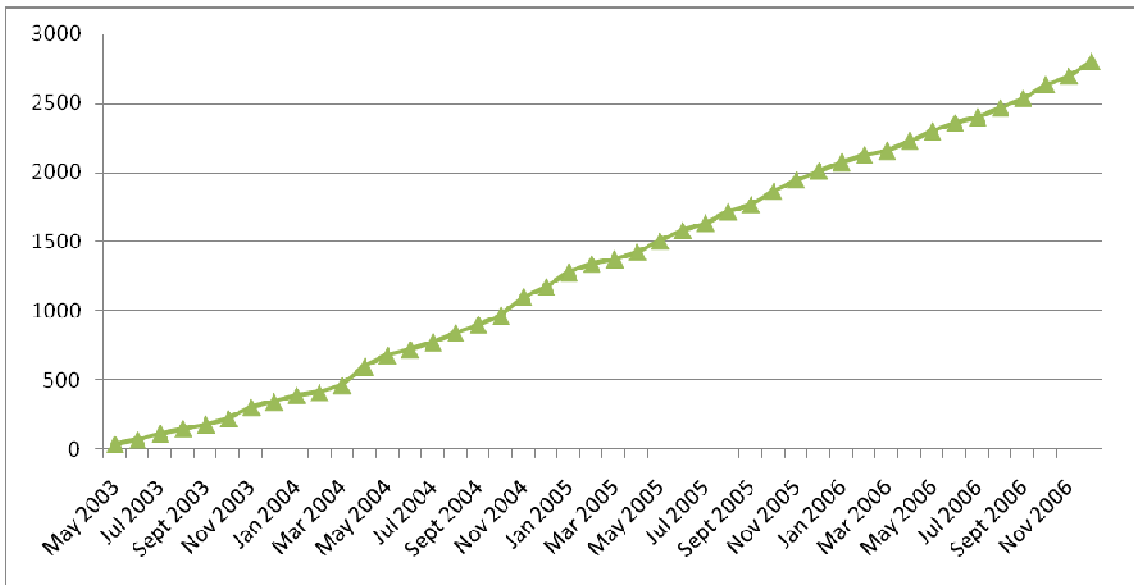
Appendices

Appendix No. 1: Killed U.S. Troops in Iraq, March 2003 – May 2007 (per month)



Source: GLOBAL SECURITY: U.S. Casualties in Iraq. Available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm [last accessed May 15, 2010]. Graph includes both hostile and non-hostile killed and does not include reported dead unidentified by next of kin.

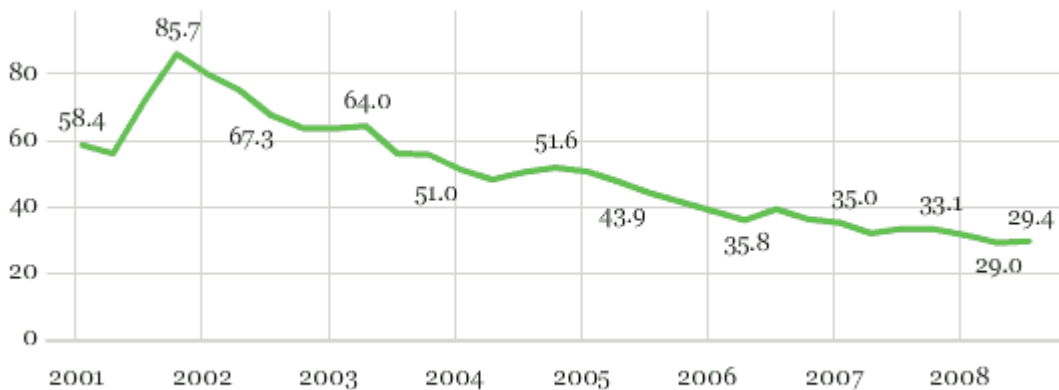
Appendix No. 2: Total Killed U.S. Troops in Iraq since March 2003



Source: GLOBAL SECURITY: U.S. Casualties in Iraq. Available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm [last accessed May 15, 2010]. Graph includes both hostile and non-hostile killed and does not include reported dead unidentified by next of kin.

Appendix No. 3: Approval Ratings of President Bush

George W. Bush Quarterly Job Approval Averages



GALLUP POLL

Source: GALLUP (2008): Bush Approval Ratings Doldrums Continue, Oct 20, 2008. Available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/111280/bush-approval-rating-doldrums-continue.aspx> [last accessed May 15, 2010].