

US Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times* (混迷期の米国外交政策)

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This article analyses the crisis in US foreign policy that has arisen in the wake of the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. It examines the most common explanations for the US action, and argues that the invasion should be understood in the context of America's unique role in the global balance of power.

US foreign policy is in crisis, its biggest crisis since the war in Vietnam. Given the prominent role of the US in the global political and economic system, this is a crisis not just for Americans, but for the whole world.

Relations with many of America's traditional allies in Western Europe and elsewhere were seriously damaged by Washington's decision to go to war against Iraq in March 2003 without the imprimatur of the United Nations Security Council. America's standing in the eyes of the public around the world has slumped alarmingly since it invaded Iraq. (See Appendix One.) The war itself saw a swift victory over Iraqi military forces, killing an estimated 5-7,000 civilians and 8-10,000 Iraqi soldiers. However, one year later the insurgency by opponents of the American occupation showed little sign of slacking off. US soldiers were being killed on daily basis, with the US death toll hitting 530 by February 2004, while losses among civilians and pro-coalition Iraqi officials were higher still. There were doubts about the feasibility of the transfer of sovereignty back to an Iraqi government by the target date of June 2004.

It was not supposed to happen this way. The United States won the Cold War, leaving it the sole superpower, the proud owner of the world's greatest military arsenal, and the custodian of the unchallenged ideology of liberal democracy and capitalism. The administrations of George H.W. Bush (1989-93) and William Clinton (1993-01) saw no country on the horizon capable of challenging the supremacy of the US in military, economic or political terms.

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The 1990s even saw a dramatic reversal of American economic decline, thanks to the bursting of the Japanese bubble and a surge in American growth and efficiency. The US economy grew by 27% over the decade compared to GDP growth of 15% in the European Union and a mere 9% in Japan.¹

There was confidence that America was #1, but less certainty when it came to what the United States should try to achieve with its unexpected but welcome hegemony. Earlier talk of a “new world order” gave way to more focused goals—of promoting peace, of encouraging democracy, and of spreading free trade and the benefits of global economic integration. A bad experience in Somalia (October 1993) followed by embarrassing inaction during the genocide in Rwanda (May 1994) made the Clinton administration more cautious in its zeal for humanitarian intervention.

The Clinton administration’s willingness to use military force—in the form of aerial bombing, but not ground troops—in defense of human rights in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999) was criticized by Republicans. In his second presidential debate with Democratic candidate Al Gore in October 2000, George W. Bush insisted that America must be a “humble” power, and wary of using its force to impose its views on other nations.² Unfortunately, that pledge of humility was probably tailored to win votes, and was not an accurate reflection of Bush’s foreign policy views.

The messy experience of working through the UN in Somalia and NATO in Yugoslavia also convinced the Republicans that if force was to be used, multilateralism was not the way to go, and that was a lesson that did undoubtedly shape Bush’s actions in the war on terror.

One Day in September

The world view of the Bush administration underwent a dramatic change in the wake of the September 11th attacks. It is hard to underestimate the impact of September 11th. “Unbombed America” had never previously seen its mainland cities attacked from the air, an experience that was all too familiar to the residents of nearly all the great cities of Europe and Asia from World War Two.

The death toll was substantial. 2,752 people killed in the World Trade Center, plus 184 killed at the Pentagon and 40 on Flight 93: the aircraft whose

passengers took on the hijackers, causing it to crash in a field in Pennsylvania. That is more Americans than died in the attack on Pearl Harbor, more than died in the first day of the Normandy landings, more than half as many as died in combat during all the battles of the American Revolution in the 1770s.

The audacity of the attack, its unexpectedness, was also staggering. The cruelty of turning aircraft into bombs, the terror of death in a 110 storey building, etched those events on the world's memory. The world had been familiar with aircraft hijackings since the 1960s, while suicide bombers started appearing in the 1990s (first in Sri Lanka, then Chechnya and Palestine). But it took Al Qaeda's "inventive genius"³ to combine the hijacking with a suicide bombing, and to pull off four such actions simultaneously, and inside the United States.

9/11 also represented a colossal intelligence failure, equal to the US failure to predict the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although the White House blocked the release of all the relevant documents, it seems clear that some sort of information pointing to the September 11th attacks was available to people in the CIA and FBI, and that a general warning even made it into the President's daily intelligence briefing in August 2001. (After all, Al Qaeda had planted a truck bomb at the World Trade Center in 1993.) It was just that the information was not put together, and was not acted upon.

Overnight, George W. Bush went from an isolationist president to an interventionist president.⁴ President Bush responded to the September 11th attacks with a pledge to wage war on international terrorism. In his remarks at the memorial service in the National Cathedral on September 14th 2001, Bush said "our responsibility to history is clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil."⁵ But the terrorist adversary was the shadowy Al Qaeda, an organization consisting of a network of cells spread across dozens of countries around the world. To bring America's conventional military strength into play, President Bush said the US would strike at those governments and countries that harbor terrorists; and those that offer terrorists support with finance or weapons; and those that *might* commit such acts in the future. America's huge military machine had found a new post-cold war mission: the war on terror.

The Bush doctrine, first enunciated in a presidential speech at West Point in June of 2002, stressed the need for US supremacy and the legitimacy of

preemptive use of force to prevent terrorist attacks.⁶ The catastrophic losses from 9/11 showed the inadequacy of the old approach to terrorism, treating it as a law enforcement issue with precautionary security screenings and ex-post pursuit of perpetrators.

The first and obvious target was Afghanistan, since Osama Bin Laden had been based in that country since 1996. Within days of 9/11 the US decided to topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, after its leaders refused an ultimatum to hand over Bin Laden. The US assembled a multi-national coalition for the task, with support from NATO (which invoked its article 5, on self-defense, for the first time in its history), and with the approval of the UN.

Also within days of 9/11, Iraq came up as a possible target—specifically, at a cabinet meeting at Camp David on the weekend after the attack.⁷ According to Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, it was a question of “when, not whether,” to deal with Iraq as part of the war on terror, and the decision was taken to deal with Afghanistan first.

In his State of the Nation address in January 2002 Bush named Iraq, Iran and North Korea as belonging to an “axis of evil,” implying that they would be the focus of the next stage in the war on terror. The war on terror became fused with a long-standing, pre-9/11 concern over the spread of nuclear weapons and other “Weapons of Mass Destruction” (that is, chemical and biological agents).

Why Iraq?

The attack on Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11 was logical, in that was the home base of Al Qaeda. It was also spectacularly successful, in terms of toppling the Taliban within a matter of weeks, with few casualties.

But the war did not lead to the capture of the Al Qaeda leadership, specifically Bin Laden, who appears to have retreated into the mountains on the other side of the border with Pakistan. Nor did the war lead to a stable security situation in Afghanistan. Eighteen months after the war, 10,000 US combat troops continued to patrol the southern mountains, while the 6,000 strong international peacekeeping force was confined to the capital city, Kabul. The US did not follow up with a full-scale occupation of Afghanistan, a decision criticized by some (but one that starts to make sense in the

wake of the experience in post-war Iraq).

The decision to invade Iraq as part of the war on terror was more controversial. The US persuaded some allies to support its war plan—most notably, Britain, Spain and Italy. But France, Russia and Germany spoke out against the US plan in February 2003. The opposition of France and Russia was critical, since as permanent members of the Security Council they could veto UN approval for the invasion. Failure to secure the support of Turkey denied the US the ability to move troops through that country so as to invade Iraq from the north.⁸ Other US allies in the region were also wary, with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarrak warning that the war would produce “one hundred Bin Ladens.”⁹

The US decision to go to war in Iraq was based on a combination of the following arguments.

a) Weapons of Mass Destruction

Iraq had Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), or had plans to develop them, and was willing to use them, or pass them to terrorists willing to use them. Saddam Hussein had proved he was willing to use WMD because he had used chemical weapons to suppress Kurdish rebels in 1988. After the 1991 war UN inspectors had uncovered extensive stocks of chemical and biological weapons and an active nuclear program.

b) Danger of Inaction

A decade of UN sanctions and seven years of inspections (the inspectors were expelled in 1998) had failed to lessen the long-term WMD threat from Iraq. The Iraqi government was still not cooperating fully with the UN inspectors who had re-entered the country in November 2002.

c) Terrorism

There were grounds for believing that Saddam Hussein had collaborated with Al Qaeda, and may have been involved in planning 9/11. Some argued that it was hard to believe such a complex operation could have been planned without the involvement of a state security service.

d) Stability

Saddam Hussein had attacked two neighboring countries in the past (Iran

in 1980, Kuwait in 1991) and would likely do so again in the future if not removed. Toppling Hussein would also enable the US to remove its troops from Saudi Arabia—their presence on the holy soil of Saudi Arabia being one of the main complaints of Al Qaeda. Stability in the Gulf is a vital security interest to the US and its allies given that it is the source of two thirds of the world's oil.

e) Democracy

Regime change in Iraq would be an opportunity to introduce democracy to the Arab world, which had been obstinately resisting the wave of democracy which had spread to most other regions of the world in the 1990s. Iraq is educated, secular, and potentially rich. “The Arabs say, ‘If you want to try to build democracy somewhere, Iraq is probably a pretty good place to try it.’”¹⁰

f) Human Rights

Saddam Hussein was the leader of an evil regime that had killed some 300,000 Iraqi citizens, and this on-going violation of human rights justified his removal.

g) Israel

With or without WMD, Iraq represented a serious threat to Israel, and without removal of this threat peace in the Middle East would be impossible. Hussein had fired missiles at Israeli cities during the 1991 war, and reportedly paid a \$25,000 reward to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers.

These arguments were accepted by the Bush administration and were apparently sufficient to persuade the US Congress, and the governments of Britain, Spain and Italy, to approve the invasion plan.

The Controversy over WMD

Over time, the emphasis shifted between the various explanations.¹¹ In the run-up to the war, the Bush administration stressed the threat of WMD as the main justification for pre-emptive action (reasons A and B). Paul Wolfowitz later told *Vanity Fair* that “for bureaucratic reasons, we settled

on one issue—weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason everyone could agree on.”¹² It was also an argument that had powerful public and international appeal. In October 2002 the administration released a National Intelligence Estimate that contended that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons in hand, as well as active nuclear programs, as evidenced by their purchase of aluminum tubes, allegedly for use in uranium centrifuges. The document stated “We assess that Baghdad has begun renewed production of mustard, sarin, cyclosarin and VX,” and “had stockpiled at least 100 tons of chemical agents, and as much as 500 tons.”¹³ Hence Secretary of State Colin Powell went before the UN in February 2003 with photos and tapes of radio intercepts to “prove” the presence of such weapons inside Iraq, in a reenactment of the dramatic performance of his predecessor Dean Acheson regarding Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962.¹⁴

If WMD had really been the main US concern, one can argue that the Bush administration should have been more willing to give the UN inspectors more time to look for the presence of WMD. Instead, in March 2003 Bush resisted pressure from France, Germany and even from Britain to give the inspectors another 30-90 days. However, subsequent leakage of US government documents strongly suggests that a firm decision to go to war had been reached already in August 2002, and there was no intention to rely on the UN inspectors however much access they were granted by Hussein.¹⁵

After the war a team of 1,200 US inspectors scoured Iraq but failed to turn up any evidence of WMD. The head of the inspection team, David Kay resigned in January 2004 and reported that no WMD had been found or were likely to be found.¹⁶ The UN inspections and sanctions had done their job, and Hussein’s WMD program had been successfully contained. Hussein had been bluffing in his efforts to interfere with the UN inspectors: there was no program for them to find. As these facts became known the rhetoric of President Bush gradually shifted, from stockpiles of WMD, to WMD programs, to “WMD-related program activities” (in the State of the Union address delivered on January 20th 2003). But still President Bush insisted that “it was a war of necessity rather than a war of choice.”¹⁷

Bush’s stalwart British ally, Prime Minister Tony Blair, also found himself embroiled in a massive political scandal over the WMD issue that threatened to force his resignation. Blair’s government said in a September 2002 report that Saddam’s regime could “deploy chemical or biological weapons

within 45 minutes of an order to do so.”¹⁸ A subsequent BBC story claimed that government officials had “sexed up” the intelligence reports, igniting a controversy which led to the suicide of a senior weapons expert, David Kelly. An official enquiry under Lord Hutton exonerated the government, leading to the resignation of the two top leaders of the BBC.

As the chances of finding WMD evaporated, the rationale shifted to the evil nature of the Hussein regime (reasons D through G). The evidence that the Iraq government was connected to Al Qaeda (reason C) was slim, in fact mostly it was sheer supposition.¹⁹ But that argument, even though it was rarely made by the US administration, seemed to sway American public opinion, with polls indicating that many Americans did believe that there was a direct connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11.²⁰

Among security specialists, the hard-core rationale tends to focus on America’s interest in removing Hussein so as to create a more stable security environment in the Middle East (points D and G). There is some evidence that this goal, and not concern over WMD or terrorism, was prominent in the administration’s plans for the region from the onset of the Bush administration. Bush’s former Treasury Secretary, Paul O’Neill, said that the removal of Saddam Hussein had been raised at the very first National Security Council meeting after Bush took office in January 2001.²¹

What Went Wrong in the US Response to 9/11?

Public opinion in most countries outside of the US considers the invasion of Iraq to have been a dreadful mistake. If Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction, did not have close ties to Al Qaeda, and cannot be stabilized in the wake of the war, then invading Iraq will meet none of the US policy goals listed above—not to mention the costs of the operation in terms of casualties, dollars and broken ties with US allies. Within the US itself the majority of the public continued to support the president’s action, although the skeptics were growing with each passing month.

Assuming for a moment that the skeptics are correct, how is one to explain such a strategic error?

The following are perhaps the most common half-dozen explanations that one hears for the US’s erroneous decision to invade Iraq. Each of them has

a surface plausibility, but the first three rely on *ad hominen* explanations that do not withstand scrutiny, while the second three are so sweeping that it is hard to connect them to the specific decision to invade Iraq.

a) Dumb President

Many commentators, including some who should know better, attribute the “rash” decision to go to war to George W. Bush’s intellectual limitations and lack of foreign policy experience. Famously, for example, at the start of the presidential campaign in 1999 Bush was asked in a TV interview to name the presidents of Pakistan, Chechnya and Taiwan, and he managed to name only the latter (“President Lee?”).

However, Bush sits astride a huge bureaucracy, and surrounded himself with experienced advisors, and this should insulate decision-making against ignorance. Moreover many people who have worked with Mr. Bush testify that he is in fact intelligent and reasonable. He did acquire a degree from Yale and an MBA from Harvard. And it is important to remember that even illustrious leaders such as Winston Churchill and F.D. Roosevelt were C students at school.

b) Evil Advisors

The blame is often laid at Bush’s advisors, particularly Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney, who are seen as power-hungry Machiavellis driven by personal grudges from their service in past administrations. A complicating factor is that the cabinet is also staffed by reasonable people such as Secretary of State Colin Powell or National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, against whom no-one seems to have a bad word. The fact is that this kind of division between hawks and doves has existed in every US administration, including those who oversaw the foreign policy triumphs of the 1980s and 1990s. There seems nothing unusual about the Bush team in this regard.

c) Neocon Conspiracy

It is argued that a small group of strategic thinkers, dubbed “neoconservatives,” have plotted for a decade or more to push the US towards a more aggressive policy in the Middle East, in part in order to ensure the security of Israel. To add spice to the conspiracy theory, many of the

group are themselves Jewish.

In 1992 Paul Wolfowitz and Lewis Libby (Cheney's Chief of Staff) wrote a Defense Policy Guidance document advocating US control over Eurasia and preemptive strikes against countries with WMD.²² Richard Perle, assistant secretary of defense under Reagan, and a member of the Bush Defense Policy Board, was author of a 1996 report for Israel's Likud party, "A Clean Break; A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," which certainly does look like a blueprint for the Iraq war. In 1998, 18 conservatives associated with the think tank Project for the New American Century (PNAC), which is chaired by William Kristol, wrote a letter to President Clinton urging him to "aim at the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power." Half of the signatories went on to join the Bush administration. In 2000 PNAC issued a report, "Rebuilding America's Defenses," which advocated "the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf."

Not only leftist critics subscribe to the neocon theory. General Anthony Zinni, the head of the US Army's Central Command chief until 2000, said "The more I saw, the more I thought that this was the product of the neocons who didn't understand the region and were going to create havoc there. These were dilettantes from Washington think tanks who never had an idea that worked on the ground."²³

The conspiracy theory approach exaggerates the role of these dozen-or-so intellectuals and downplays the influence of the huge defense and intelligence bureaucracies which generate a steady stream of their own strategic analysis. Daalder and Lindsay argue that the dominant strategic school in the Bush administration is what they call "assertive nationalists" such as Cheney, Rice and Rumsfeld, as opposed to "democratic imperialists" such as Wolfowitz.²⁴ (And for what it is worth, there is not a single Jew in the Bush cabinet.) The security of Israel has been a priority for successive US administrations, and any US administration would have had to review its options in light of the failure of the Oslo peace process, which began in 1993 and collapsed in 2000 despite the best efforts of President Clinton.

d) Dumb Society

It is often said that the American public does not understand or care to understand the outside world. This means that US foreign policy is constantly in danger of being hijacked by special interests. The American pub-

lies attitude towards other countries is framed by simplistic moral and ideological beliefs, and is shaped by the “CNN effect.” Images of violence and suffering lead the US to being drawn into foreign conflicts, then just as quickly repelled by them. Specifically, post 9/11 this ignorance allegedly led to the US mistakenly casting the war on terror as a crusade against the Moslem world, and naively believing that it could export democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq.

It is certainly true that US knowledge of the outside world in general and Moslem countries in particular is rather shallow. For example, the number of graduates majoring in Arabic in US universities in 2001 was the grand total of nine—for the entire USA. The State Department was reported to have five foreign service officers fluent in Arabic at the time of the Iraq war.

The ignorance argument only takes us so far, however. If the US policy-makers were so divorced from the reality of the Moslem world, how come they were able to so effectively co-opt the Northern Alliance, and topple the Taliban within a matter of weeks? Also, the notion that the US turned the war on terror into a war on Islam is not true, although some Moslems do perceive it this way. In the weeks after 9/11 President Bush went out of his way to meet with Moslem leaders and to reassure the US Moslem community that this would not be a holy war. (Although he did admittedly use the word “crusade” he did not mean this in a literal sense of a holy war.)

e) Manifest Destiny

Some social critics argue that the war on Iraq can be seen as part of a deep-seated proclivity for violence in pursuit of lofty goals which has been hard-wired into American culture. American exceptionalism called for the creation of a new society in the 18th century; its spread across the continent in the 19th (Manifest Destiny); and its intervention in two world wars to secure the triumph of democracy in the 20th.²⁵ In all these cases military force was seen as the midwife of progress and justice. Frederick Turner’s Frontier Hypothesis of America as a society based on righteous violence has been recycled for the 21st century by Michael Moore’s internationally influential film *Bowling for Columbine* and the endless stream of Hollywood action movies.

During the Cold War, American messianism was channeled into the war against communism, but constrained by fear of nuclear war. According to this line of argument, since 1991 this imperialist longing has been waiting for

an opportunity to break free, and 9/11 provided just such a chance.²⁶ Hence the spate of books and articles discussing the “American empire.”²⁷ Bizarrely, the official Christmas cards sent out by Vice President Cheney in December 2003 carried a biblical quote from Benjamin Franklin, “And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can arise without His aid?”²⁸ This cannot but be interpreted as an endorsement of the idea of empire by the Vice President.

This argument is certainly persuasive. But its sweeping nature makes it hard to use for explanations of specific events. Does it matter that America’s Manifest Destiny was fighting for human rights in the 1990s, but battling Islamic terror in the following decade? And how to explain the oscillation between isolationism and internationalism? American exceptionalism is without doubt a crucial element in US foreign policy, but it is not the only factor.

f) War for Oil

It is not a coincidence that Iraq sits on vast reserves of oil. Conspiracy theorists are convinced that Big Oil calls the shots in the Bush administration, pointing to the fact that both the President and Vice President made their careers in the oil industry. To the oil companies one can add the defense contractors, always keen to find new reasons to boost US military spending.

Certainly, it would be a grave mistake to ignore the role of business interests in the formation of US foreign policy. It was after all President Dwight Eisenhower who warned, in his 1961 Farewell Address, of the pernicious influence of the “military-industry complex” over US security policy. Eisenhower’s original draft referred to the “military-industry-political complex,” but his reference to “politics” (that is, the role of Congress) was seen as an inappropriate breach of the separation of powers.

However, it is worth adding some shading to this explanation. For one, the armed forces themselves showed no great enthusiasm for the war in Iraq. Quite the contrary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had grave reservations about the adequacy of the forces prepared for the Iraqi invasion, and were justifiably trepidatious given the number of unknowns (such as Hussein’s readiness to use chemical weapons).

There is no doubt that oil weighed heavily in the US decision to go to war in Iraq. (In Afghanistan of course it was irrelevant.) But the US was not simply

trying to grab Iraq's oil. Rather, the problem was that Hussein had used Iraq's oil wealth to build a huge army and attack his neighbors. Also the presence of oil held out the promise that Iraq could be rebuilt at low cost to the US.

g) Intelligence Failure

The official position of the American establishment seems to be hedging towards the "intelligence failure" explanation. They argue that when dealing with huge risks such as terrorists with WMD it is better to be safe than sorry, better to over-estimate than under-estimate the threat. More generally, they recognize that humans are fallible, that intelligence is more art than science, and that if the US and UK leaders erred, it was in stating as fact things which should have been described as probabilities, or even possibilities.

One can push this argument a little further, noting how during the Cold War the US (and the Soviet Union) developed a taste for exaggerating the importance of sparse intelligence. Again, the argument was the threat was so great (in that case, of nuclear war) that it was better to err on the side of caution, and assume the worst about the enemy's plans. Hence many times during the Cold War the US deployed military forces on the basis of what later proved to be erroneous intelligence—from the Bay of Pigs 1961 through the Gulf of Tonkin and invasion of Dominican Republic (both in 1965).²⁹

Towards a Structural Explanation

These explanations all converge on an image of America as dumb, ignorant, violent, muscle-bound, self-interested. This may make the rest of the world feel good about itself, but it is wrong.

While there are elements of truth in all these explanations, they are only fragments of the picture. And they ignore some important structural features. Also they assume that US policy is an intended outcome, willed by certain individuals or at least the direct product of their actions. Such an approach is comforting, but incorrect. This is part of a general tendency in human civilization, to anthropomorphize, to attribute social outcomes to individual wills, and to divide the world into good and evil.

It overlooks certain structural features of the global system and US society which don't fit the black and white explanation. These structural fea-

tures are hard-wired into the US security outlook, and the policy response to 9/11 was not the product of the idiosyncracies of the Bush team, but a logical and predictable response given the way US security thinking and capacities was structured.

The Problem of Anarchy

Political observers since Hobbes and Thucydides have recognized that the international system of states is essentially anarchic, there is no central authority that can enforce rules and punish transgressors. Each state must therefore look to its own security, and form alliances for self-protection.

What guarantees order and stability in the contemporary world? Many people would like to believe that this is the responsibility of the United Nations. But the UN is simply not up to the job. The UN can only act if there is consensus among the permanent members of the Security Council, who enjoy veto power. The UN does not have an army of its own. It has to beg and borrow troops from other countries. These forces are never adequate—in numbers, equipment, training or command. And their missions are not clear. Typically, they are sent to monitor peace, not to make peace, and not to make war to make peace. What use is a world policeman who cannot stop or arrest criminals, just “monitors” their crimes?

A date less noticed than September 11th but equally relevant is July 10th, 1995. On that day Serbian troops captured the city of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia. The women and children were separated from the men and sent on buses to Sarajevo. The men did not make it back alive. More than 7,000 men were shot over the next few days. This was the worst war crime in Europe since World War II.

What is more appalling is that it took place right under the noses of the United Nations peacekeeping troops. Srebrenica along with two other cities in eastern Bosnia had been declared UN safe havens for refugees. Dutch troops were guarding Srebrenica, and surrendered their weapons without a shot. Dutch fighter aircraft flew overhead but did not drop any munitions. UN officials were afraid of taking sides, and afraid that intervening would cause the Serbs to seize UN personnel as hostages, as they had done several times in the past.

Srebrenica was the last straw, even for the multilateralist Bill Clinton. After that, UN troops were withdrawn from Bosnia, and NATO under US direction started bombing Serbian positions. By the end of the summer Slobodan Milosevic was ready to make peace, and the peace treaty was duly signed at Dayton in November 1995.

Bosnia was not alas an isolated case. The UN had already proved its impotence. A series of crises—Somalia in October 1993, Rwanda in March 1994—showed that only US leadership could end genocides. And the US could not be relied on to play that role effectively in all crises.

US Military Predominance

Anarchy has long been recognized as an enduring feature of the international state system. But the 1990s saw a new situation: the emergence of a sole superpower, whose military capacity is greater than that of its ten nearest competitors combined.³⁰ The bipolar system of the Cold War was replaced by a unipolar system, dominated by US power. In this new, clear hierarchy of power there seemed to be a good chance that anarchy would be replaced by a US-structured order of relations between states. The gap between US power and its rivals is so great that there is no incentive for the other countries to try to challenge US power or to forge a balancing coalition.

There are four reasons why the US was and is the only power able to even try selectively to play the World Policeman role.

a) Money

The US spends \$400 billion this year on its military—more than the next 10 countries put together. This spending was increased by \$50 billion in the wake of 9/11.³¹ The US economy is huge, three times that of China or Japan, so if it is willing to spend 4-5% of EDP on defense while the others are spending 1-2% its military budget will be 10-12 times as large.

b) Equipment

Certain technologies are lacking in other countries—such as long-distance transport of heavy equipment by sea and by air; airborne radar aircraft; and satellite surveillance to provide intelligence and communication. Generally

speaking only the US and Russia has such equipment, since they built up these capacities during the Cold War. (For example, China does not have airborne radar or aircraft carriers; Japan prior to 2003 did not have its own intelligence satellites; no European country besides Russia has C5 scale transport aircraft.)

Then in the 1990s came the revolution in military affairs—the application of information technology to the battlefield. Only the US developed this capacity, including precision guided munitions, real-time data collection, robot aircraft and the like. The US used this technology to devastating effect in the first and second Gulf wars, and in the 1999 Yugoslav war.

c) Political Will

Other powers proved morally disqualified to sustain their military power. Germany and Japan were defeated in World War Two and neutralized as independent military powers. Their constitutions barred them from waging war, and only very cautiously in the 1990s did they start sending troops on peacekeeping missions. Russia, France and Britain were all defeated in colonial wars and wrestled with the political consequences of loss of empire. In none of these countries, then, was there a political constituency for assertive military action. In contrast the US had overcome its post-Vietnam blues, going on to win the Cold War and reform its military. Only rising countries like China and India seemed to have the political will to use military force, but neither was at a level where a rational leader would contemplate a war with the US.

d) Professionalization of US Military

Civilian leaders are more willing to send professional troops into battle than to send conscripts—the latter are more likely to cause political trouble. So the US could not have taken on the world policeman role with a conscript army.

Since Aristotle's Athens through Machiavelli's Florence, it has been axiomatic for democrats that citizens must bear the burden of defending their democracy. But this link has been broken in the US since the abolition of the draft and the introduction of an all-volunteer military in 1972. This came in the wake of the Vietnam war because citizens did not want to serve in the army. The professionalization of the army was an unintended consequence

of the backlash against the military during Vietnam war.

The fear was that a professional military would dictate military policy to their civilian counterparts. But this has not occurred. On the contrary, the Joint Chiefs opposed the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s and were very cautious in the Gulf Wars—more cautious than their civilian bosses.

The Real Reason

“We knocked off Saddam to show we were the biggest, baddest junkyard dog around.” (Maureen Dowd)³²

“Sometimes smashing someone in the face is necessary to signal others that they will be held accountable for the intolerance they incubate. Removing the Taliban and Saddam sent that message to every government in the area.” (Thomas Friedman)³³

Taking the preponderance of US military power into account, let us return to the question of the war in Iraq.

In trying to figure out why the Bush administration decided to invade Iraq, there is a case for applying “Occam’s razor”—the idea that the simplest explanation, requiring the minimum number of assumptions and claims, is often the best. One can argue that the US decision to invade Iraq was essentially driven by the knowledge that the US had the *capacity* to carry out such an invasion quickly and successfully. The US had proved in 1991 that it could successfully invade Iraq, and in the intervening ten years Iraq had grown weaker while US forces had grown considerably stronger.

In other words, capacity drove intention. It was not a question of “Why invade Iraq?,” so much as “Why not?” As the saying goes, if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem starts to look like a nail. The US had a mighty hammer, in the shape of its military forces, and it decided terrorism was a nail. In fact other tools than invasion are needed to tackle terrorism: police work, intelligence gathering, espionage, diplomacy, economic development, etc. But using the mightiest tool in the US chest would provide at least a symbolic reminder to other states of US military superiority. The best case for war by the Bush administration may turn out to be the demonstration effect.

What Does the Future Hold?

"The greatest limit on hegemonic power comes from the innermost core of the hegemonic power itself. The hegemonic power is a nation and nothing else—not a council of global elders, not a non-governmental organization, not a global state. There is nothing to suggest that it will ever discard the rationalism of its own self-limiting national interests." (Karl Otto Hondrich)³⁴

This paper has argued that US intervention in Iraq can be seen as a predictable action in light of the preponderance of US military power. Its primary purpose was a demonstration of that power, and not the realization of some specific policy goal, such as the elimination of the threat of WMD or support for international terrorism, or bringing peace and stability to the Middle East.

If that is true, then there is reason for hoping that the limits of US unilateral interventionism have now been reached. The battlefield victory over Iraq provides the demonstration effect of US power that should deter any countries considering a sustained challenge to US hegemony. The "real" underlying goal of the US has been achieved, and the US can declare mission accomplished and quickly withdraw from Iraq, at least in the form of handing power to an Iraqi government, perhaps under UN assistance, and pulling US troops in Iraq back to a few strategic bases.

Adding to the pressure for withdrawal is the strain on US military assets. The new high-tech professional military is expensive to maintain and relatively small. It cannot handle long-term colonial occupation. The US is already running out of troops to maintain the occupation of Iraq. The 130,000 soldiers currently there represent half of the active ground combat services of the US. (For comparison in the 1870s the Russian Empire had one third of their army pacifying the Caucasus, and in 1938 the British had one third in Palestine.) One quarter of the troops in Iraq are volunteer National Guardsmen, who have been kept from their civilian occupations for a year. This is the maximum tolerable deployment, and US military leaders fear the continuation of such deployment will have a damaging effect on recruitment into the National Guard.

There is also evidence of a mellowing of the administration's diplomatic

posture, while at the same time the demonstration effect of the war produced more cooperative behavior from countries hostile to the US. Rhetoric about the axis of evil has dropped out of the Bush administration lexicon. Take the evolution of US policy towards North Korea, for example. In July 2003 Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage reiterated that the US was not interested in regime change in North Korea, and Pyongyang agreed to take part in six-party talks that took place in August 2003, in which China played a leading role. At the APEC meeting in Bangkok in October 2003 President Bush offered to provide Pyongyang with written assurances that the US did not intend to attack North Korea.³⁵

Thanks in part to diplomatic pressure from Europe, Iran and Libya, two pariah states long regarded by the US as among the leading sponsors of terrorism, announced their willingness to renounce the search for nuclear weapons in the fall of 2003.³⁶ They invited in International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to verify their cooperation, a process that generated a wealth of information about the networks of nuclear proliferation, mostly centered in Pakistan. On October 28th 2003 Deputy Secretary Armitage told a Senate committee that the US was not seeking regime change in Iran.

Mark Twain joked about the New England weather—if you don't like it, just wait, it will soon change. US policy is the same. For all the limitations of US democracy, it is still fairly responsive. Leaders can quickly fall from power, and policies can quickly change if voters perceive that something is wrong. The cycle of accountability has speeded up since the Vietnam war. President George W. Bush is facing a tough fight for re-election in November 2004, and even if he wins, his party and Congress will presumably be wary of repeating the Iraqi experience anytime soon.

Appendix One Unpopular America

The percent of respondents in three surveys who viewed the United States favorably.

	1999/2000	summer 2002	summer 2003
Brazil	56%	52%	34%
Britain	83	75	70
France	62	63	43
Germany	78	61	45
Indonesia	75	62	15
Morocco	77	n.a.	27
Nigeria	46	77	61
Pakistan	23	10	13
Russia	37	61	36
South Korea	58	53	46
Turkey	52	30	15

Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Views of a Changing World," June 2003

<http://www.people-press.org>

[n.a.—not available]

Notes

- 1 G. John Ikenberry, "Introduction," in Ikenberry (ed.), *America Unrivalled* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 1.
- 2 "If we are an arrogant nation, they'll view us that way, but if we're humble nation, they'll respect us." Wake Forest University, 11 October 2000 <<http://www.c-span.org/campaign2000/transcript>>.
- 3 The term "inventive genius" is used in Mahfuz ibn al-Walid, "The legal and factual view of the consequences of the attacks on the USA," reproduced in *Spotlight on Terror* 1, no. 2 (22 December 2003) <<http://www.jamestown.org>>.
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- 5 <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news>>.
- 6 Speech delivered on 1 June 2002 <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news>>.
- 7 Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2002).
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- 9 Speaking to soldiers in Suez, CNN, 31 March 2003.
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- 13 Michael Gordon, "Looking for intel on the intel," *New York Times*, 29 January 2004. The NIE text is on the Carnegie Endowment website <<http://www.ceip.org/files/projects/npp/pdf/Iraq/declassifiedintelreport.pdf>>.
- 14 Speech on 5 February 2003 <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/17300.htm>>.
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- 17 Interview on "Meet the press," NBC, 8 February 2004.
- 18 Simon Rogers (ed.), *The Hutton Enquiry and its Impact* (London: Politico Publishing, 2004).
- 19 Bruce Hoffman, "Saddam is ours. Does Al Qaeda care?," *New York Times*, 17 December 2003.
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- sought to oust Hussein from start," *New York Times*, 12 January 2004.
- 22 For links to these documents, see Joseph Cirincione, "Origins of regime change in Iraq," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Proliferation Brief* 6, no. 5 (19 March 2003) <<http://www.ceip.org>>.
 - 23 Thomas Ricks, "For Vietnam vet Zinni, another war on shaky territory," *Washington Post*, 23 December 2003.
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 - 32 Maureen Dowd, "Murder most foul," *New York Times*, 7 February 2004.
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 - 35 Radio Free Asia, 2 July 2003.
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