

neo-conservatives who viewed 9/11 as a “transformative” moment that put “events in much sharper relief.”⁷⁷

The new document combined ringing reaffirmations about spreading democracy with tough-minded statements about the use of U.S. power. It admitted to only one “sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise,” vowed to “use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe,” and pledged to “defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all peoples everywhere.” *The United States would do what was needed to prevent any single nation or combination of nations from challenging its military preeminence.* The document paid lip service to cooperation with allies but also affirmed that the nation would “act apart when our interests and unique responsibility require.” Threats must be met before they reached U.S. shores. The United States would not wait until it had “absolute proof” of danger from weapons of mass destruction. It would not “hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively.” The principles of military preeminence, unilateralism, and preemptive war departed sharply from the realism of the first Bush administration and the basic principles that had guided Cold War strategies.⁷⁸

The new doctrine provoked a varied and often emotional response. Conservatives cheered and insisted that what public intellectual Robert Kagan called a “Behemoth with a conscience” would not abuse its power. John Gaddis hailed a “truly ‘grand’ strategy” to transform the Middle East by bringing it into the modern world. The “world must be made safe for democracy,” he concluded, “because otherwise democracy will not be safe in the world.”⁷⁹ On the other side, the *New York Times* complained that what was already being called the Bush Doctrine struck a tone of arrogance worthy of the Roman Empire or Napoleon. “The boys in Lubbock may want to pause before signing on for the overly aggressive stance Mr. Bush has outlined,” it concluded.⁸⁰ Harvard international relations specialist Stanley Hoffmann branded Cheney and Rumsfeld “High Noon sheriffs” and scored the Bush Doctrine as “Wilsonianism in boots.”⁸¹ Critics warned that the doctrine of preemption would encourage other nations to do the same, shattering any hope of world order.

77. Nicholas Lemann, “The War on What?” *New Yorker*, September 16, 2002, 44.

78. The text is in *New York Times*, September 20, 2002.

79. John Lewis Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy for Transformation,” *Foreign Policy* 133 (November/December 2002), 22.

80. *New York Times*, September 20, 2002.

81. Stanley Hoffmann, “The High and the Mighty,” *American Prospect*, January 13, 2003, 28–29.

Long before releasing the new doctrine, the administration began to contemplate war with Iraq. Dictator Saddam Hussein had somehow survived the crushing defeat of 1991 and a decade of UN sanctions, a glaring irritant to those like Cheney who had hoped to topple him in the Gulf War. Even in the first days of the second Bush administration, there was talk of Iraq. On the night of September 12, 2001, a still-shaken president wandering the White House Situation Room asked Richard Clarke "to go back over everything. See if Saddam did this. . . . I want to know any shred."⁸² Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz actually pressed for war with Iraq immediately after 9/11, but Powell urged focusing on Afghanistan, and Bush prudently concurred, although he did initiate war planning in November. Once the Afghan conflict appeared won, Iraq immediately resurfaced. Officials dismissed continued diplomatic pressure as too slow, a coup unlikely. Certain that Saddam had or would soon have weapons of mass destruction and fearing he might give them to terrorists, they were set on removing him. "A decision was not made," Haas later observed, "a decision happened, and you can't say when or how."⁸³

"Why Iraq? Why now?" These were questions often asked in the days ahead, and the answers are as complex as the individuals who pushed for war. The easy response, of course, was oil, but the reasons went much deeper. For the neo-conservatives, war satisfied deep philosophical convictions as well as immediate practical concerns. The neo-cons, as they came to be called, included Wolfowitz, Defense Department adviser Richard Perle, and journalist William Kristol. Along with Cheney's chief of staff, Libby, Undersecretary of Defense Feith, and Undersecretary of State John Bolton, they formed a sort of "cabal" under the younger Bush. Utopian in outlook, they believed that the United States had a moral duty to oppose tyranny and spread democracy. In their view, Saddam Hussein was behind world terrorism and would soon have WMD. Many of them had close ties to Israel and insisted that Saddam's overthrow would make that vital ally more secure. They fervently believed that extending democracy to Iraq would set off a reverse domino effect throughout the Middle East, thereby eliminating a major breeding ground for terrorism.⁸⁴

82. Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 32.

83. George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York, 2005), 45; Mann, *Vulcans*, 332-34; Bryan Burrough et al., "The Path to War," *Vanity Fair*, May 2004, 240.

84. Elizabeth Drew, "The Neocons in Power," *New York Review of Books*, June 12, 2003, 20-22. For Wolfowitz, see Bill Keller, "The Sunshine Warrior," *New York Times Magazine*, September 22, 2002, 48-54, 84, 86, 96. Also Jacob Heilbrun, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York, 2007).

The neo-con position complemented the views of other top officials. Powell also wanted to get rid of Saddam, although he accepted war only as a last resort and insisted on international backing. By January 2003, he had concluded that war was inevitable and went along. Assertive nationalists Cheney and Rumsfeld saw a chance to complete the unfinished business of 1991, eliminate a nuisance and potential threat, and demonstrate the efficacy of modern, high-technology warfare. Cheney was even more alarmed by an anthrax scare in the United States in the fall of 2001 than by 9/11 and viewed Saddam Hussein's biological weapons as a threat for which the United States was completely unprepared.⁸⁵

Advocates of war found a receptive audience in the White House. Thinking in mundane but for this administration crucial terms, White House political adviser Karl Rove saw in rallying the nation for war a chance to exploit the Democrats' post-Vietnam vulnerability on defense and national security issues, seal the Republican alliance with the Christian right, win the Jewish vote, help the party in the congressional elections, and build a permanent Republican majority.⁸⁶ Bush combined the Old West mentality of his native Texas with the missionary spirit of evangelical Christianity. He was neither a deep thinker nor particularly curious and could be remarkably ill-informed. Toppling Hussein would permit him to succeed where his father had failed and avenge the Iraqi dictator's 1993 attempt on his father's life. A born-again Christian, he saw the world in terms of good and evil and was certain he had been "called" to defend his country and extend "God's gift of liberty" to "every human being in the world."⁸⁷ His faith helped him choose a course. Once he had decided, there was no second-guessing. A war with Iraq would protect the security of the United States and eliminate a force for evil.

By the summer of 2002, after virtually no internal debate and apparently little discussion of whether war with Iraq might be counterproductive in terms of Afghanistan or the larger struggle with terrorism, an administration fixated on removing Saddam and carried away with hubris was deeply committed to war. Conflict was "inevitable," a high British official reported to his government; "intelligence and facts were being fixed

85. *Washington Post*, March 30, 2003. The importance of anthrax is noted in Jacob Weisberg, "Fishing for a way to Change the World," *Newsweek*, January 28, 2008, 31-32.

86. Elizabeth Drew, "The Enforcer," *New York Review of Books*, May 1, 2003, Internet version.

87. Bill Keller, "Reagan's Son," *New York Times Magazine*, January 26, 2003, 26-31, 43, 49; Frum, *Right Man*, 24-25; Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," *New York Times Magazine*, October 17, 2004, Internet version.

around the policy."⁸⁸ Outmatched in Bush's first term, Rice's NSC did not play its intended role of giving the president a variety of options and questioning proposals from the agencies. Intent on invading as soon as possible, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and the neo-cons refused to subject their assumptions to close scrutiny. They were certain of what they knew, even in the face of contrary evidence and inconvenient facts. They dismissed opposing views from what they called "the reality-based community." "We're an empire now," one official boasted, "and when we act we create our own reality."⁸⁹ They placed more stock in what they learned from the shady Ahmad Chalabi and other Iraqi exiles than in their own intelligence agencies (they also funded Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress to the tune of \$36 million in 2002–3). They "cherry-picked" evidence that fit their preconceptions. They put subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—pressure on intelligence providers to come up with the right answers. Sometimes the providers tailored their assessments to fit their bosses' prejudices. CIA director George Tenet once famously called the case for weapons of mass destruction a "slam dunk," but in fact it was quite weak. There was no firm evidence that Saddam Hussein was close to acquiring WMD or indeed that he had anything to do with 9/11. But defeating Iraq seemed the next logical step in the larger war against terrorism, and preemptive war appeared justifiable.⁹⁰

After Labor Day 2002, the administration mounted an all-out campaign for congressional and popular support. "From a marketing point of view you don't introduce new products in August," a White House aide quipped.⁹¹ Bush and Cheney strong-armed Republicans and Democrats in Congress. Top officials kept up a steady drumbeat for war. There was "no doubt" that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, Cheney insisted, even though there was considerable skepticism within the government and no solid evidence to back up the statement. He and Rice issued increasingly ominous (later to be proven false) statements that Saddam would acquire nuclear weapons "fairly soon." In a major speech in Cincinnati on October 7, Bush spoke of a "grave threat," affirmed that Saddam had given "shelter and support to terrorism," and warned that the "Iraqi regime . . . possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons" and was seeking nuclear weapons. Did it make any sense, he asked, concluding

88. The so-called Downing Street memo of July 21, 2002, was first published in the (London) *Sunday Times*, May 1, 2005.

89. Suskind, "Without a Doubt."

90. Burrough, "Path," 282; Michael Isikoff and David Corn, *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (New York, 2006), chapters 2–11.

91. Isikoff and Corn, *Hubris*, 33.

with the administration's favorite scare-line (first used by Rice), "for the world to wait . . . for the final proof, the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud?"⁹²

The campaign provoked no more than scattered opposition, some of it, interestingly, from the elder Bush's top advisers. James Baker urged concerted efforts to gain international support.⁹³ When Brent Scowcroft publicly warned that an invasion of Iraq could divert attention and resources from the more pressing war against terrorism, damage U.S. standing in the Middle East, and provoke an attack on Israel that could set off a regional "Armageddon"—the younger Bush's aides branded him "Neville," an obvious allusion to Chamberlain and Munich.⁹⁴ Prominent realist scholars questioned whether Iraq was the right war, insisted that Saddam could be contained, and warned of further destabilizing an already volatile Middle East.⁹⁵ In one of the most fascinating developments of the new century, energetic young activists used the Internet to mobilize liberal opposition to the war. By the end of the year, MoveOn.org had 1.3 million members worldwide, 900,000 in the United States. It raised millions of dollars to support liberal congressional candidates. In early 2003, it organized a "virtual" anti-war march on Washington.⁹⁶ Worldwide, an estimated ten million people protested the U.S. drive to war.

In a strange, almost surreal way, an administration intent on invading Iraq carried a reluctant nation toward its first preemptive war with remarkably little dissent. The White House equated patriotism with support for its policies. It skillfully exploited the anniversary of 9/11 to rally a still-anxious people. Discussions of war with Iraq were "dominated . . . by images of smoldering buildings in New York and Washington," the *New York Times* reported.⁹⁷ Surveys revealed that Americans were more worried about a stagnant economy than about Iraq. Some feared a long and costly war. Most seemed resigned to the inevitability of war rather than persuaded by the case for it. Still shaken by 9/11, they fell into line. Polls

92. Burroughs, "Path," 282.

93. *New York Times*, August 25, 2002.

94. *Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2002; Jeffrey Goldberg, "Breaking Ranks," *New Yorker*, October 31, 2005, 58–60.

95. *New York Times* ad; Christopher Lehmann, "The War on What?" *New Yorker*, September 16, 2002, 36–44.

96. George Packer, "Smart-Mobbing the War," *New York Times Magazine*, March 9, 2003, 46–49.

97. *New York Times*, October 6, 2002.

indicated solid support, tempered by concern about casualties and insistence on gaining congressional and UN support.⁹⁸

The administration easily secured congressional backing. Taking aim squarely at neo-cons like Perle—and perhaps by indirection the president—Vietnam veteran and Nebraska Republican senator Chuck Hagel protested that “many of those who want to rush this country into war and think it would be so quick and easy don’t know anything about war.”⁹⁹ But even those Republicans with doubts succumbed to White House appeals to “trust us.” Divided among themselves, nervous about dissent in wartime, very much on the defensive against an aggressive executive and with midterm elections approaching, the Democrats failed to muster effective opposition. Leading senators such as John Kerry of Massachusetts and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York challenged only the way a war should be fought, not the war itself, insisting that support must be secured from allies and the UN. West Virginia Democratic senator Robert Byrd’s lonely and often eloquent dissent drew little attention. After brief discussion and with troops already pouring into the Persian Gulf, Congress in October 2002 gave the president blank-check authority to use U.S. military forces “against the continuing threat posed by Iraq” and to “enforce all relevant” UN Security Council resolutions on Iraq (77–23 in the Senate, 296–133 in the House). In the fall elections, the Republicans regained control of the Senate and increased their majority in the House. A debate mainly about how to go to war produced broad if not deep support for an administration firmly committed to invading Iraq. “There is no debate, no discussion, no attempt to lay out for the nation the pros and cons of this particular war,” Byrd protested: “We stand passively mute . . . paralyzed by our own uncertainty, seemingly stunned by the sheer turmoil of events.”¹⁰⁰

The administration could not steamroll the UN as it had Congress. Over Rumsfeld’s and Cheney’s strenuous objections, Powell persuaded the president to secure UN support, a move he may have hoped would delay or even thwart the headlong rush to war. Bush’s pledge to do so mollified critics at home and helped squelch a possibly searching domestic debate on the war, but it also produced major roadblocks. The United

98. *Ibid.*, June 10, 2002, August 27, 2002, September 8, 2002, October 7, 2002; *USA Today*, September 18, 2002.

99. *New York Times*, August 26, 2002.

100. Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: America’s Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York, 2006), 88; Thomas Powers, “The Vanishing Case for War,” *New York Review of Books*, December 9, 2003, 1–8.

States and its allies brought to the UN sharply divergent perspectives. Cheney, Rumsfeld, and the neo-cons preferred to go it alone. Viewing negotiations as a hindrance, top U.S. officials in late 2002 put on one of the most arrogant and inept diplomatic performances in the nation's history. Bush set the tone in a September speech at the UN by pointedly asking: "Will the United Nations serve the purposes of its founding, or will it be irrelevant?"¹⁰¹ Among leading nations, only Britain firmly backed the United States. France initially accepted war as a last resort, Germany openly opposed it, and Russia, China, and Mexico expressed grave doubts. The administration's haughty demeanor squandered much of the international goodwill lavished upon the United States after 9/11. The Europeans were alarmed by Bush's "axis of evil" speech and preemptive war doctrine. They believed the administration was obsessed with Iraq and that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction could be eliminated without resorting to war.

The UN negotiations degenerated into a nasty and highly public spat between the United States on one side and France and Germany on the other. The administration blundered early on by rejecting outright a compromise French proposal for a war resolution that might have averted much of what followed. "Every good reason not to go to war was irrelevant," Rice tartly informed a French diplomat.¹⁰² On January 20, 2003, what some U.S. officials called the "Day of Diplomatic Ambush," France issued a surprise announcement that it would not support war. French actions stunned Americans and undercut Powell's efforts to delay the war. They evoked an outburst of ally-bashing in the United States, with France the number one target. Playing to the most parochial of American instincts, Rumsfeld and other administration officials dismissed France and Germany as "old Europe." Long stereotyped by Americans as feminine and "sissy," the French provided a ready-made target.¹⁰³ To the glee of conservatives, the House of Representatives renamed the French fries on its cafeteria menu "freedom fries."¹⁰⁴

To counter French obstructionism and an allied effort to delay war by additional inspections of Iraqi weapon sites, an agitated and increasingly impatient White House in late January assigned Powell to make the case for war. "You have the credibility to do this," Bush told him. "Maybe they'll believe you."¹⁰⁵ Scrapping a shoddy and polemical draft prepared

101. Karen DeYoung, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell* (New York, 2006), 411.

102. Burrough, "Path," 289.

103. *New York Times*, September 28, 2003.

104. Burrough, "Path," 289.

105. DeYoung, *Soldier*, 439.

in the vice president's office, Powell's aides hurriedly put together the best case they could. Although uneasy with the results and certain he was being used by the White House, the secretary played the dutiful soldier. His seventy-five-minute speech on February 5, 2003, complete with photographs, recordings, and even a small vial dramatically displayed to show how little anthrax it would take to cause enormous loss of life, warned of the "sinister nexus" between Saddam Hussein and 'al Qaeda and detailed evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (much of it dubious and soon discredited). Powell's speech persuaded few at the UN but had a major impact in the United States, as much because of who was speaking as what was said, helping to bring some skeptics around and clinch the case for others.¹⁰⁶

At British prime minister Tony Blair's urging, the administration in February launched a last desperate effort to secure UN support. A French veto now likely if not indeed certain, U.S. officials set out to secure nine Security Council votes for war, thus exposing France as obstructionist. They fixed a tight deadline and demanded immediate answers. "It's time for people to show their cards, let the world know where they stand when it comes to Saddam," Bush proclaimed. Competing with France for votes, U.S. officials put tremendous pressure on Chile, Mexico, and three West African nations. "What can the Americans do to us?" an African diplomat asked. "Are they going to bomb us? Invade us?"¹⁰⁷ Nearly seven weeks of bullying and arm-twisting produced only the votes of Britain, Spain, and Bulgaria. On March 17, the United States and Britain declared the discussions ended. Two days later, President Bush announced the start of hostilities against Iraq. The United States would have its war, but without the support of close allies and the United Nations. It was a bold and risky move that would decisively affect the the Bush presidency and indeed world history.

IV

In contrast to this inept diplomacy, Operation Iraqi Freedom proved a textbook operation, once more displaying the fearsome power of America's high-tech military machine. Washington went to great lengths to publicize the contributions of the twenty-six nations that made up its "coalition of the willing," a pointed reference to those countries who refused to fight. Aside from British operations in southern Iraq, however, it was a U.S. show. A fierce bombing campaign knocked out communications,

106. *Ibid.*, 440-51; Ricks, *Fiasco*, 93-94.

107. Paul Krugman in *New York Times*, March 19, 2003.

destroyed critical military installations, and softened up enemy forces, delivering “smart” bombs and missiles at the rate of a thousand per day.¹⁰⁸ On March 20, U.S. Army and Marine units drove north from Kuwait along two fronts. They met only sporadic resistance from shockingly inept and demoralized Iraq forces. British troops quickly seized Basra. The first Americans reached Baghdad on April 7, less than three weeks after the war began. Four days later, Iraqis toppled Saddam’s statue in Baghdad, signifying the regime’s collapse. The United States suffered only 109 casualties, Britain 31. On May 10, a jubilant Bush attired in full flight regalia landed on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* in San Diego Bay. Standing beneath a banner boldly proclaiming “Mission Accomplished,” the commander in chief hailed the triumph of his forces.

Celebrations of victory and talk of a new U.S. imperium quickly faded amidst fears of a quagmire. The first signs of trouble came with the fall of Baghdad. Instead of sending additional troops to secure the capital, Rumsfeld and Gen. Tommy Franks canceled deployment of the First Cavalry Division. The coalition did not have enough forces to maintain order, producing an orgy of lawlessness, violence, and looting, including the theft or destruction of priceless antiquities from the national museum. While U.S. troops stood helplessly, looters picked the city clean, even pulling the copper pipe and electrical wire out of walls. Iraqis lost faith in U.S. authority. The one protected building was the oil ministry, confirming their suspicions that the invaders were mainly interested in seizing the nation’s most valuable resource. Rumsfeld’s typically brusque remarks that freedom was “untidy” and “stuff happens” were as insensitive as they were irresponsible.¹⁰⁹

The occupiers did no better at providing essential services. In Baghdad, electricity worked only several hours a day, if at all. Telephones were dead, water in short supply and unsafe, sewage ran into the rivers, and hospitals were filled with patients and short of qualified workers and medical supplies. “It would be a tragic irony,” wrote *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, “if the greatest technological power in the history of the world came to the cradle of civilization with its revolutionary ideas and found itself defeated because it couldn’t keep the electricity on.”¹¹⁰

108. Rick Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers* (New York, 2004) is a lively account by an “embedded” journalist. Bernard E. Trainor and Michael R. Gordon, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York, 2006) is more thorough and critical.

109. Packer, *Assassins’ Gate*, 137–142; Ricks, *Fiasco*, 135–38.

110. *New York Times*, August 13, 2003.

Anarchy evolved into sustained guerrilla opposition. Elite Republican Guard soldiers melted away and armed themselves from huge stashes of guns and ammunition systematically scattered throughout the country before the invasion. By June, the number of attacks on U.S. troops and their Iraqi collaborators increased sharply. Bush's brash reaction to the insurgency—"Bring 'em on!"—seemed as foolhardy and inflammatory as Rumsfeld's response to the looting.

A war whose first stage was fought so effectively went sour so quickly because detailed planning for military operations was not matched by equally thorough preparation for the critical postwar period. To be sure, U.S. agencies and private charitable organizations spent months in planning. Some studies predicted the likelihood of looting and even a possible insurgency. But the president assigned responsibility to the Defense Department. As a result of crippling bureaucratic rivalries, bad advice, and fantastical assumptions, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Feith dismissed out of hand work produced elsewhere. An especially bitter struggle between State and Defense ensured that the former's massive and in many ways prophetic study would be tossed aside. Pentagon civilians began planning late and with inadequate staff and had no time to test their ideas. The neo-cons were also hoodwinked by the artful con-man Chalabi, who fed their illusions and manipulated them to advance his own interests. They believed their own wildly optimistic rhetoric that GIs, as in World War II, would be welcomed as liberators. One official spoke of a "cakewalk." The "planners" were confident that U.S. forces could overthrow the regime, turn over the government to Iraqi exiles, and get out within three months.¹¹¹

Overly optimistic assumptions and a refusal to listen to others also produced gross miscalculations of what would be required to maintain the peace. Recent experience in the Balkans stressed the importance of going in heavy and trimming down. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki insisted that several hundred thousand troops would be needed for postwar duties. Then at the height of his power and determined to validate his theories about the efficacy of small forces, Rumsfeld cut the figure in half and eased Shinseki into retirement. The coalition lacked sufficient forces to do the job.¹¹²

The U.S. Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) made three early mistakes that immeasurably worsened an already bad situation. Headed by

111. James Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," *Atlantic Monthly*, January/February 2004, 53-74; David Rieff, "Blueprint for a Mess," *New York Times Magazine*, November 2, 2003, 28-33, 44, 58, 76-78; Ricks, *Fiasco*, 85-111; Packer, *Assassins' Gate*, 100-148.

112. Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," 66; Seymour Hersh, "Offense and Defense," *New Yorker*, April 7, 2003, 43-45.

J. Paul "Jerry" Bremmer, a hard-driving career diplomat, the organization was filled with young, zealous Republicans, eager to spread democracy but notoriously lacking in overseas experience and knowledge of Iraq. Most served only three months.¹¹³ The CPA's de-Baathification project, designed to eradicate "Saddamism" by removing members of his ruling party, eliminated many of the people who had run the country. A decision to disband the Iraqi army and police force left thousands of soldiers and police officers angry, without employment, and *with* weapons. "That's another 350,000 Iraqis you're pissing off, and they've got guns," snorted one CIA operative.¹¹⁴ Bremmer's decision to delay turning over the government to Iraqis provoked more anti-Americanism and fueled the insurgency.¹¹⁵

By the fall of 2003, U.S. troops faced a full-fledged and increasingly lethal opposition. The number of fighters was estimated as high as ten thousand. Foolishly dismissed by Rumsfeld as "dead-enders," their ranks included not only Baathist party members and Sunni Muslims who had backed Saddam and expected to be displaced under a new regime but also disaffected Shiites, the Sunnis' bitter rivals and the majority religious group, whose support Americans had expected. Jihadists from across the world slipped into the country to join the fight. By November, attacks numbered thirty-five per day; the insurgency spread from Baghdad throughout the country. Insurgents shifted from sniper attacks on individual GIs to ambushes of entire convoys and shooting down helicopters with rocket-propelled grenades and handheld missiles. To undermine international support, they attacked other coalition members and killed the chief UN envoy. Unprepared to deal with an insurgency, the U.S. Army struck back with conventional air and ground assaults that inflicted heavy civilian casualties and infuriated the population. The widespread violence further set back already glacial progress in reconstruction. The CPA increasingly huddled behind twelve-foot concrete barriers, the so-called Green Zone, "a bit of Belfast here, a bit of Cyprus there, here and there a sprinkling of the West Bank," one journalist described it.¹¹⁶ United States military leaders admitted by late 2003 that they were fighting a classic guerrilla war; Rumsfeld conceded a "long, hard slog."

As the insurgency worsened, the rationale for war crumbled. No evidence was found to support administration claims of connections between

113. Packer, *Assassins' Gate*, 111.

114. Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," 73; *Newsweek*, August 6, 2003, 35.

115. Ricks, *Fiasco*, 158–65. See also Roger Cohen in *New York Times*, August 17, 2007.

116. Mark Danner, "Delusions in Baghdad," *New York Review of Books*, December 18, 2003, 1–9.

Iraq and al Qaeda. Inspectors scoured the country for weapons of mass destruction and came up with nothing. In the meantime, critics discredited evidence employed to justify the nation's first preventive war. Often-used documents provided by a shadowy source called Curveball purporting to show that Saddam had attempted to buy uranium from Niger for nuclear weapons proved fabrications. United States spokespersons now claimed that removing Saddam had eliminated a bloody tyrant and made the world safer. A once invincible administration's credibility took a beating.¹¹⁷

The U.S. image was further tarnished by spring 2004 revelations of abuse of enemy detainees, especially at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison. By scrapping at the start of the conflict the 1949 Geneva Conventions setting standards for treatment of prisoners of war, the Bush administration opened the way for lower-level misconduct. As in so many other areas, the army's failure resulted from a hastily improvised reaction to unexpected events. Confronting an insurgency about whose sources and scale it knew next to nothing, it dumped into prisons thousands of captives, some mainly for interrogation. In Abu Ghraib, they were supervised by a demoralized reserve military police company that had expected to be home by late 2003. The unit perpetrated rampant abuse, graphically captured in photos taken by its members. Prisoners were left naked and chained to cells, piled naked on top of each other, made to wear women's underwear, and forced to simulate sexual acts. They were tortured in interrogation. The practices at Abu Ghraib violated a long U.S. tradition of humane treatment of prisoners. The pictures created a worldwide sensation. The army conducted a perfunctory investigation and punished only low-level people. The refusal to hold any top officials accountable became a Bush administration trademark, further tainting the war. "When you lose the moral high ground, you lose it all," one army general sadly reflected.¹¹⁸

The insurgency grew into a complex and, to Americans, unfathomable phenomenon, made up of numerous often competing groups. Baathists and Sunni Muslims who had dominated the country for years fought furiously against what they saw as a U.S. effort to impose Shiite rule. They shifted from costly direct attacks against U.S. forces to improvised explosive devices (IED), which they used with deadly effectiveness against GIs and Shiites. Shiite militias also resisted U.S. rule. Foreign jihadists established in Iraq a

117. Powers, "Vanishing Case for War," 1-8; Isikoff and Corn, *Hubris*, 211-30. The story of Curveball is told in Bob Drogin, *Curveball: Spies, Lies, and the Con Man* (New York, 2007).

118. Ricks, *Fiasco*, 291.

new training ground for terrorism. After 2006, the insurgency was joined by rising sectarian violence. Kurds sought to create an autonomous region in the north. In Baghdad and other cities, Shiites mounted ethnic cleansing campaigns against Sunnis. The Bush administration finally admitted the existence of a civil war, but even those words did not convey the complexity of the struggle. Shiites fought each other and Sunnis; Sunnis fought the coalition and in some cases al Qaeda; the jihadists fought both. There was widespread criminal violence. A Shiite-dominated police force was infiltrated by militias who operated as death squads to force Sunnis out of Baghdad.¹¹⁹ An estimated two million Iraqis fled the country to escape the violence, many of them middle-class people needed to get the country in operation. As many as two million more Iraqis became internal refugees.

The United States could not contain the rising violence or build a stable government. Saddam Hussein was finally captured in late 2003, tried by an Iraqi court, and later executed. The CPA nominally turned over the government to Iraqis in the summer of 2004. Elections were held, a National Assembly convened, a constitution drafted and approved, and a parliament established. But the new government was riddled with corruption and could not bring the disparate factions together or curb the violence. Iraqi troops remained untrained and generally unreliable and often participated in sectarian violence themselves.

Public support for the war at home began to decline in the spring of 2004 following the Abu Ghraib revelations and fierce fighting across Iraq. The drop occurred faster than in Korea and Vietnam, although the casualties were far fewer, mainly because Americans saw less at stake in Iraq than in these earlier wars. Once Saddam's weapons of mass destruction were not found, the ostensible reason for war evaporated. United States citizens were not enthused about spending blood and treasure to bring democracy to Iraq, the administration's public fallback rationale and the real reason for war in the minds of certain top officials.¹²⁰ By August 2007, three of four expressed pessimism about the conflict, six in ten believed the United States should have stayed out of Iraq, and only 23 percent approved Bush's handling of the war.

Despite the precipitous fall in support for the war and his rising unpopularity, the president refused to change course. Stubbornly optimistic, he continued to insist that the United States would remain until victory was secured. He refused to hold his advisers accountable even for

119. National Intelligence Estimate; *New York Times*, August 19, 2007.

120. John Mueller, "The Iraq Syndrome," *Foreign Affairs* 84 (November/December 2005), 44-46.

egregious mistakes and awarded medals to officials like CIA director Tenet and General Franks who bore substantial responsibility for the debacle. Although under intense fire, Rumsfeld hung on until after the Democrats regained control of both houses of Congress in 2006. The new Congress was bitterly divided on the war. Most members did not endorse an outright withdrawal, but by the summer of 2007 even some Republicans urged removing some forces from Iraq. Bush responded by sending thirty thousand additional troops to contain the rising violence.

The "surge" brought noticeable but tenuous gains. The troop increase and belated shift to a counterinsurgency strategy produced by late 2007 a decline in violence. Cooperation between the United States and Sunnis in Anbar province and with Shiite militia in the south brought some stability to those regions. In parts of Baghdad, life returned to normal; some refugees began to filter back into the country. Al Qaeda's power seemed on the wane. In some cases, however, good news resulted from bad. The relative quiet in Baghdad came from many Sunnis being driven from the city and others being ghettoized behind hastily constructed concrete "blast walls." Refugees returned not only because conditions had improved in Iraq but also because they were unwelcome in neighboring countries. Crime and corruption continued to flourish. Al Qaeda retained a stronghold in the north. The most glaring deficiency was the Shiite-dominated government's inability or unwillingness to bring together the country's bitterly divided ethnic and religious groups.¹²¹

At the start of 2008—a U.S. presidential election year—observers noted the huge disconnect between discussions of the war in Iraq and the United States. Top U.S. officials in Baghdad hailed the recent progress while stressing that it was "fragile" and that much more must be done to stabilize a war-shattered nation. They emphasized the need for a continued long-term U.S. military presence, speaking in terms of years, even a decade. As the presidential campaign geared up in the United States, politicians sought to appease public impatience. Republicans hinted that victory was near; Democrats pressed for troop withdrawals without discussing the possible consequences. The violence in Iraq apparently ebbing, the war lost its top priority; public attention shifted more and more to domestic issues, especially an increasingly shaky economy.¹²²

The war in Afghanistan also continued to falter. The Bush administration had been no more enthusiastic about nation-building there than in Iraq. In any event, by late 2002, its attention and resources had shifted to

121. *New York Times*, December 2, 30, 2007.

122. Michael Gordon in *New York Times*, January 20, 2008.

Iraq. The United States provided no more funds in Afghanistan than had been given to earlier efforts in Bosnia or even the 1999 UN intervention in East Timor. Only forty thousand NATO and U.S. troops were deployed to maintain security and assist with reconstruction. One frustrated diplomat called Afghanistan “the most under-resourced nation-building effort in history.” The central government exercised authority over little of the country. In most areas, local warlords held sway. More ominously, a revived and reinvigorated Taliban, funded partly by the lucrative opium trade, moved from safe havens in Pakistan into Afghanistan’s southern provinces, exploiting popular disaffection with the government. They were not able to take large towns, but they mounted widening attacks, even in Kabul. The war in Afghanistan was by no means lost, but an opportunity to stabilize an important country seemed squandered.¹²³

The cost of the wars for the United States was substantial. Nearly four thousand Americans had been killed in Iraq as of early 2008. Thousands more whose lives were spared by the miracles of modern medicine suffered horrible maiming wounds and severe psychological damage. The two wars strained the U.S. armed forces to the breaking point. A decline in enlistments, even with lowered standards and higher incentives, threatened the volunteer army concept, the mainstay of post-Vietnam national security policy. Popular disillusionment appeared likely to produce an Iraq Syndrome in the form of resistance to future military intervention abroad.¹²⁴ The Bush administration’s attitudes and policies damaged the nation’s image across much of the world and stirred virulent anti-Americanism. The economic costs were staggering, for both wars an estimated \$800 billion, roughly 10 percent of all government expenditures. The addition of long-term medical care for veterans was predicted to drive the long-term cost as high as \$3 trillion.¹²⁵

The impact of the war on Iraq and the Middle East was profound. Estimates of Iraqi war dead ranged from fifty thousand to more than two hundred thousand through 2008. The influx of Iraqi refugees destabilized neighboring countries such as Jordan and Syria. The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq provoked fury in the Muslim world, undermining Washington’s broader efforts against international terrorism. The one winner of the war was Iran, which no longer faced a strong Sunni nation to the south and had close ties with some Iraqi Shiites.¹²⁶

123. *Newsweek*, October 2, 2006; *New York Times*, August 12, 20, 2002, December 16, 2007.

124. Mueller, “Iraq Syndrome,” 53–54.

125. *Boston Globe*, August 1, 2007; *New York Times*, December 9, 2007, January 20, 2008.

126. *New York Times*, July 30, 2006.

The scorecard of the so-called Global War on Terror seemed also on the negative side. To be sure, the United States had not been struck since 9/11. Anti-terrorist forces across the world foiled numerous plots, notably in England and Scotland. But the war was far from won, and the United States was little safer than before 2001. Using the respite provided by the war in Iraq, al Qaeda revived and reconstituted itself and remained intent on striking the United States again. "We thank God for appeasing us with the dilemmas of Iraq and Afghanistan," bin Laden's deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri proclaimed in 2003.¹²⁷ Perhaps more important, the terrorist "movement" had transformed itself. The war in Iraq boosted recruitment among Muslims across the world. The Internet increasingly served as the major "training camp." Instead of al Qaeda, the United States and its allies faced a more diffuse and elusive al Qaedaism, an international conglomeration of thousands of separate cells operating more or less on their own. "We have taken a ball of quicksilver and hit it with a hammer," one expert observed. Nine-eleven may not be replicated, but smaller attacks mounted by more amateurish terrorists seemed possible if not likely. A summer 2007 National Intelligence Estimate warned of a "heightened threat environment."¹²⁸

As if Bush were chastened by these events, the tenor if not the essential thrust of his foreign policy changed in his second term. Powell resigned and was replaced by Rice. Her deputy Stephen Hadley took over as national security adviser; after Rumsfeld's departure, Robert Gates, her former NSC boss, became secretary of defense. Given the new foreign policy lineup and her especially close relationship with Bush, Rice emerged as a major player.¹²⁹ Amidst the wreckage of Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush's soaring second inaugural commitment to spread democracy and end tyranny in the world never got off the ground. On the contrary, elections in Palestine and Lebanon produced victories for Hamas and Hezbollah, militant movements tied closely to Iran. With "Madame Rice," as the president called her, in the lead, the United States set out to repair the damage to relations with the European allies done in the first term. Over loud protests from neo-cons like Bolton, the administration reopened negotiations with North Korea and made concessions that permitted a fragile agreement to halt its nuclear program.

127. Bruce Hoffman in *Washington Post*, September 9, 2007.

128. Mark Danner, "Taking Stock of the Forever War," *New York Times Magazine*, September 11, 2005, 47; Samantha Power, "Our War on Terror," *New York Times Book Review*, July 29, 2007, 8.

129. Rice's role is analyzed in Glenn Kessler, *The Confidante: Condoleezza Rice and the Creation of the Bush Legacy* (New York, 2007) and Elisabeth Bumiller, *Condoleezza Rice: A Biography* (New York, 2008).

The major second-term initiative was to infuse new life into the Arab-Israeli peace process. During his first years, Bush studiously refrained from involvement in this issue. When he spoke out, he usually sided with Israel. His late switch undoubtedly reflected his and Rice's hopes to leave a legacy for world peace and their willingness—both were avid football fans—to try the big play. It also resulted from changes in the region brought about partly by the invasion of Iraq. The rise of Iran as a major regional power with nuclear potential and its ties with Hamas and Hezbollah frightened Saudi Arabia and other predominantly Sunni nations, spurring what has been called an "alliance of fear."¹³⁰ Bush and Rice thus stepped onto perilous ground. The secretary of state visited the region eight times during 2007. She brought Israeli and Palestinian leaders, along with Saudi and Syrian representatives, to a conference in Annapolis, Maryland, in November. While maintaining a certain detachment, Bush made clear his commitment to a Palestinian state and his hopes for an agreement before he left office. The two sides agreed to work toward a settlement. But many thorny issues had to be resolved, especially the status of Jerusalem and the right of return of Palestinian refugees. The post-Annapolis talks deadlocked. The political weakness of the two major figures, Ohlmert and Abbas, along with Bush's reluctance to engage himself, left experts skeptical whether the "fifty-year headache" could be cured. Indeed, one commentator saw the conference less as producing peace than as "girding the region for conflict."¹³¹

A final assessment of the Bush legacy in foreign affairs lay in the lap of the future. Yet even if Iraq should emerge from its present chaos unified and stable, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it was the wrong war in the wrong place fought in the wrong way. It diverted attention and resources from the war in Afghanistan, what should have been the preeminent concern. Saddam Hussein was a cruel tyrant, to be sure, but his removal brought more misery to the Iraqi people, destabilized a critical region, and created a new training ground for terrorists. The Bush administration's dismissive attitude toward allies in the run-up to war, its scandalous incompetence in fighting the insurgency, and its abandonment of the Geneva Conventions, widespread use of torture, and detainment of suspects without recourse to the law compromised its claims to world leadership. The United States of 2008 bore little resemblance to the global behemoth of the turn of the century. It is one of the supreme ironies of recent history that leaders bent on per-

130. *New York Times*, September 17, 2007.

131. Michael Oren in *New York Times*, December 2, 2007.

petuating U.S. primacy squandered it through reckless use of the nation's power. Talk of unipolarity ended; pundits once more spoke of a nation in decline.

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM WAS EXPERIENCING MAJOR CHANGES as the first decade of the twenty-first century neared an end, even, according to Fareed Zakaria, undergoing a "seismic shift in power and attitudes."¹³² The European Union (EU) and China had joined the United States as economic great powers, competing for resources, markets, and influence across the world. The European market was now the world's largest. Europe's technology challenged that of the United States. The EU provided more foreign assistance to other countries than the United States and drew many countries into its commercial orbit. China appeared to be achieving in East Asia the sort of economic influence Japan sought in the 1930s. Its reach extended to Africa and Central Asia. Rising "Second World" nations such as Russia, India, Turkey, the Middle Eastern oil states, and Brazil might form the principal battleground of a new world order. Even beyond the Second World, economic growth was stunning in its scope and magnitude. Pundits spoke of the "end of the era of the white man," the "rise of the rest."¹³³

Commentators also agreed that America's unipolar moment had ended. Indeed, Samantha Power observed, the erosion of U.S. strength was the "core fact of recent years."¹³⁴ Despite the costs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States in terms of its military spending and vast nuclear arsenal remained easily the world's strongest nation. In the "post-American world," however, military power seemed less important than economic clout, and the global economic position of the United States had changed significantly since the turn of the century. Along with the tax cuts enacted early in Bush's presidency, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq produced soaring deficits. The national debt grew by more than \$3 billion. Once the world's greatest creditor, the United States became its greatest debtor, borrowing more than \$800 billion per year from China, Japan, South Korea, and other nations. One of the most significant indicators of recent economic trends was the way in which other nations buoyed up the U.S. economy by pouring money into its corporations and financial institutions.

132. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of the Rest," *Newsweek*, May 12, 2008, 27.

133. *Ibid.*; Roger Cohen in *New York Times*, March 17, 2008. The importance of the Second World is discussed in Parag Khanna, "Waving Goodbye to Hegemony," *New York Times Magazine*, January 27, 2008, 37, 39, 40-41, 62.

134. Quoted in Cohen, *New York Times*, November 12, 2007.

The United States' decline was perhaps most evident in the area where the nation was once most dominant, its soft power, the sway of its ideals. This change resulted from an inevitable worldwide reaction against U.S. hegemony. It was also the product of competing sources of information. The United States no longer dominated world airwaves as it once did. Global viewers and listeners had many choices. The Arab television network al Jazeera, for example, reached 100 million households worldwide. But the decline also reflected recent U.S. actions. The Bush administration's policies provoked anti-Americanism across the world. Its mishandling of the conflict in Iraq as well as of Hurricane Katrina on its own Gulf Coast severely undermined its credibility. Perhaps most important in weakening U.S. claims to world leadership has been the huge gap between the principles its leaders proclaimed and the actions they took, especially in the much publicized mistreatment of captives. "Today, six years after the terrorist attacks produced a moment of global kinship, America is feared, loathed, and misunderstood across the world," journalist James Traub observed in late 2007.¹³⁵ America's decline may be temporary, as in the 1970s. It could certainly be slowed if not arrested by intelligent policies. But it may represent a longer-term trend.

Experts disagreed on whether the emerging world order would be peaceful or menacing and on how the United States should respond to it. Some insisted that terrorism remained the most urgent threat and that the United States, working with other nations, must vigorously combat it, even to the point of intervening in states that harbored terrorists.¹³⁶ Others warned that economic growth might spur a rising nationalism, especially among autocratic nations like China and Russia. The United States must therefore retain superior military power and must be prepared to use it to contain expansionist tendencies on the part of autocratic nations and to defend and extend democracy.¹³⁷ Still others played down the threats posed by terrorism and autocracy and argued that the new international system would be more benign, if also more complex and much messier. The United States must adapt by relearning the art of diplomacy and by reverting to the multilateralism that served it so well in the Cold War era. It must work closely with other nations to address urgent international problems. It must recommit itself to free trade and

135. James Traub, "Persuading Them," *New York Times Magazine*, November 25, 2007, 19–20.

136. This view is set forth in Philip Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent: The Wars for the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2008).

137. See, for example, Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York, 2008).

open immigration. It must learn to function in a world where it can no longer call the shots. “For America to continue to lead the world, we will have to join it,” Zakaria concluded.¹³⁸

Even if in decline, the United States will remain a crucial player in world affairs, and in coping with the challenges of a new and complex era the nation has a rich foreign-policy tradition to draw on: the pragmatism of the peacemakers of the American Revolution; the basic realism of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams; the practical idealism of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln; the worldliness and diplomatic skill of John Quincy Adams; the remarkable cultural sensitivity of diplomats such as Townsend Harris and Dwight Morrow; the commitment to public service of Elihu Root and Henry Stimson; the noble aspirations for a better world espoused by Woodrow Wilson; the intuitive understanding of the way diplomacy works—and its limitations—and the “world point of view” manifested by Franklin Roosevelt in World War II; the coalition-building of Dean Acheson and the Wise Men of the Truman years and the George H. W. Bush administration during the first Gulf War; the strategic vision of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger; the ability to adapt and adjust displayed by Ronald Reagan; the efforts of countless men and women who sought to share with other peoples the best of their country and to educate their fellow citizens about the world.

Americans must also “disenthrall” themselves, to borrow Lincoln’s apt word, from deeply entrenched ideas about their country and its place in the world. They must “think anew, and act anew.”¹³⁹ They must cast away centuries-old notions of themselves as God’s chosen people. In today’s world, such pretensions cannot fail to alienate others. They should recognize the historical truth that the United States in its dealings with other people and nations has not been uniquely innocent and virtuous. It has done much good in the world, but in its drive to superpower status it has often violated its own principles and inflicted harm on other peoples. Unilateralism served the nation well for its first century and a half, but in the vastly shrunken and still very dangerous world of the twenty-first century, it is simply not viable. Most problems are global in scope and require multi-lateral solutions. The United States cannot resolve them by itself and on its terms, and efforts to do so, as the Iraq war has made clear, will likely be counterproductive. The United States must be more prudent in the use of

138. Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York, 2008).

139. Lincoln’s Second Annual Message, December 1, 1862, in James C. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (20 vols., Washington, 1897–1925), 7:3343.

its still quite considerable power. In the aftermath of Iraq and Afghanistan, it must not withdraw from a seemingly hostile and ungrateful world. But it must also recognize that power, no matter how great, has limits. The nation cannot rid the world of evil, as it defines evil; it cannot impose its way on other peoples by military force or diplomatic pressures. "The American idea can still resonate," columnist Roger Cohen recently observed. But, he adds, U.S. "leaders must embody it rather than impose it."¹⁴⁰ They must lead by example and especially by listening to other peoples and nations. The United States cannot dictate the shape of a new world order, but the way it responds to future foreign policy challenges can help ensure its security and well-being and exert a powerful influence for good or ill.

140. Cohen in *New York Times*, October 1, 2007.