

American Foreign Policy and Galvanizing Support for the 2003 Iraq War

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On March 24, 2003 days after the United States invaded Iraq, the Gallup Poll asked Americans: “Do you think going to war with Iraq was a mistake?” 65 percent of respondents believed war with Iraq was appropriate while 20 percent agreed that it was in fact a mistake.<sup>1</sup> These figures stunned scholars of public opinion, such as political scientists Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner who argued that when Americans expect a military conflict to be long, result in heavy casualties and have high economic costs, they would express their opposition to such a military action. In addition, since some Americans believed that invading Iraq might increase terrorist activity on U.S. soil, public support for the Iraq War in theory should have been relatively low.<sup>2</sup> However, then President George W. Bush and his aides managed to cultivate public support over a period of nearly two years by portraying an impending invasion of Iraq as a necessary extension of the so-called “war on terror.”

The United States responded to the attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people on September 11, 2001 by launching a global war on terror. The U.S., with overwhelming support from the United Nations and America’s NATO allies, shortly thereafter invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban governing regime and root out the Al-Qaeda terrorists who found refuge in that country. However, many in President Bush’s administration argued that the post-9/11 counterterrorism campaign must include the removal of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (known to most of the world as a heinous dictator). Debates ensued on whether or not removing Saddam Hussein from power benefited the United States and its post-9/11 terrorism campaign.

Some Americans such as Brent Scowcroft, the National Security Adviser under previous Presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush, urged the U.S. to avoid war with Iraq in his

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Newport, “American Public Opinion and Iraq,” *Gallup*, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, “The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration’s Rhetoric,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no.3 (September 2005): 525.

August 2002 op-ed piece “Don’t Attack Saddam.” Scowcroft argued that “an attack on Iraq at this time would seriously jeopardize, if not destroy, the global counterterrorist campaign [the U.S.] have undertaken.”<sup>3</sup> Political officials recognized that in democratic politics, especially in the age of instantaneous global information technology, public opinion matters. In order for the president to launch military action, he needs the support of Congress and ultimately their constituents.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, with different opinions circulating on whether or not the United States should invade Iraq, the Bush Administration successfully tipped the scales of public opinion heavily in favor of war, shifting the focus of American foreign policy from national defense during the Cold War (1957-1991) to international law and order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the U.S. military was already deployed to Afghanistan following the horrific 9/11 terrorist attacks, how did the Bush Administration manage to gain support from the American people to invade Iraq so as to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein?

Before unpacking *how* the United States government cultivated support from the American people, it is important to understand *why* the U.S. initiated “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Even those against the war, like Scowcroft, agreed that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein “is a menace...[and] we will all be better off when he is gone.”<sup>5</sup> He brutally terrorized his own people and had often been an aggressor who launched two wars in the Middle East. Therefore, the United States shaped its foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to reflect the changing times and turned its attention to eliminating global terrorism which, the Bush Administration argued, included Hussein’s Iraqi regime. Since the end of the Cold War in 1992, Americans no longer rallied around the goal of containing communism. Therefore, the focus of

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<sup>3</sup> Brent Scowcroft, “Don’t Attack Saddam,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Jon Western, “The War over Iraq: Selling War to the American Public,” *Security Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 107.

<sup>5</sup> Scowcroft, 2002.

the U.S. as a global superpower had been unclear. The rising war on terror following the 9/11 attacks turned American foreign policy in a direction that concentrated on eliminating the terrorist threat.

The Cold War fear of communism contributed to U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War between 1965 and 1973. The U.S. failure to achieve its military goals in Vietnam caused many Americans to question the effectiveness of United States military action and foreign policy. Their subsequent hesitancy to support U.S. military action to achieve the country's foreign policy goals led many to suggest that America was experiencing a so-called "Vietnam syndrome." This Vietnam syndrome, which led many Americans to oppose global military efforts, supposedly ended in 1991 when the United States and its global partners won a lightning victory against Iraq during the Persian Gulf War. For the Bush Administration to galvanize public support to invade Iraq in 2003 as part of a war on terror, American citizens had to believe in military force as an effective means to achieve America's foreign policy goals. The rapid military success in the Persian Gulf War essentially cured many Americans of the Vietnam syndrome, enabling the U.S. government to once again suggest military force as a solution to international challenges. The UN Charter that ended the Persian Gulf War included Resolution 687 which required Iraq to destroy any weapons of mass destruction (chemical, biological, or nuclear arms) it possessed along with any material, such as uranium, it had that could be used to build such a weapon. With the lesson of the Persian Gulf War in mind, namely that war in the Middle East could be quick with minimal casualties, Americans were more likely to support the use of military force to invade Iraq in 2003.

At the turn of the 21st century, U.S. foreign policy had to adapt to new challenges. The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 triggered a new era in which a

war on terrorism became the country's main foreign policy priority. The attacks showed that the United States and other western nations were vulnerable to foreign adversaries and terrorist activity. The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. intensified American anxieties and increased islamaphobia, a fear of Muslim peoples and their religion. Historically, Americans have been more apt to support war when their security was threatened. Therefore, post-9/11 foreign policy focused on eliminating terrorism as the U.S. government and military enhanced its role as a global protector from terrorism and leader of the free world. This role, some Americans believed, involved liberating oppressed peoples in order to grow freedom, democracy and free markets. Thus, the evolution of American foreign policy from the Cold War to the post-9/11 era, from national defense to international law and order, encouraged Americans to support military efforts in Iraq in 2003.

Neo-conservatism, an ideological movement that emerged in the late 1960's, provided political justification for including the elimination of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in the war on terror. Neoconservatives believed that the U.S. should use American power, including military force, to spread freedom and democracy around the world. A free and democratic world, they argued, was in America's national interests. Thus they believed that a free Iraq, liberated from its heinous dictator, would help modernize and positively change the Middle East, thereby eliminating the roots of terrorism in the region. As freedom spreads in the Middle East, the United States would have a greater opportunity to maintain strategic partnerships in the oil rich region, thus supporting U.S. national interests. Ultimately, the neocons in President Bush's cabinet advised that the United States use its military strength to liberate the Iraqi people and democratize the country. Many Americans, however, needed to understand how Iraq, which did not attack the United States on 9/11, was connected to their country's global war on terrorism

before they were ready to support invading that country. Therefore, the Bush Administration emphasized the dangers of Hussein, arguing that the Iraqi regime may have weapons of mass destruction and that those weapons might fall into the hands of terrorists. By connecting Iraq to the war on terror and WMD's through presidential rhetoric and strategic distribution of information, the Bush Administration convinced many Americans that their safety and security were threatened. Fearing for their safety, approximately 60 percent of Americans, according to Gallup, then supported the invasion of Iraq furthering the neoconservative agenda.

Presidential rhetoric and the deliberate distribution of information, such as suggesting that the Iraqi dictator possessed illegal weapons of mass destruction, persuaded the public to support war with Iraq in order to ensure the security of the U.S. and the international community. President George W. Bush and his advisors deliberately created a link between Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and the terrorist organization al-Qaeda, the perpetrators of 9/11, to convince the public that simply containing Hussein in Iraq (similar to containing communism during the Cold War) would not eliminate terrorist threats. The Bush Administration feared that as long as the Iraqi President remained in power, terrorist networks had a lifeline in the Middle East. President Bush and his advisors believed that if Hussein continued to preside over Iraq then he would ally himself with the terrorists by supporting, and potentially arming, the extremists. With the support of Congress, President Bush launched a war on terror and deployed U.S. troops to Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks. Despite no direct link between 9/11 and Hussein, the speeches President Bush gave leading up to Operation Iraqi Freedom implied a connection between al-Qaeda, 9/11 and Iraq. Therefore, the Bush Administration was able to cultivate support for the war through strategic presidential discourse.

Additionally, NATO and many U.S. allies supported invading Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban and dismantle al-Qaeda after 9/11. But the international community including U.S. allies such as the French, refused to support invading Iraq in 2003. President Bush insisted, on September 12, 2002, that the United Nations require Iraq to abide by the many UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions imposed upon them following the Gulf War in the early 1990's. These resolutions included dismantling their weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program. If Iraq refused to abide by these regulations then the U.S. had cause to declare war on Hussein's regime.<sup>6</sup> Trying to get a UN resolution in support of potential military action against Iraq, President Bush addressed the UN Security Council declaring that:

The conduct of the Iraqi regime is a threat to the authority of the United Nations, and a threat to peace. Iraq has answered a decade of UN demands with a decade of defiance. All the world now faces a test, and the United Nations a difficult and defining moment: Are Security Council resolutions to be honored and enforced, or cast aside without consequence? Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding, or will it be irrelevant?<sup>7</sup>

According to President Bush's address, if the Iraqi regime continued to defy the United Nations Security Council resolutions then the United States would be justified in invading Iraq. A November 8, 2002 resolution, UNSCR 1441, unanimously approved by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), informed Iraq that drastic measures would be taken if they continued to defy their past requirements of disarming their WMD program.<sup>8</sup> Thus, President Bush, concerned with the Iraqi's housing WMD's, declared war necessary to eliminate the threat of a

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<sup>6</sup> Eric V. Larson and Bigdan Savych, "Operation Iraqi Freedom," *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, (California: Rand Corporation, 2005): 129.

<sup>7</sup> George W. Bush, "President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly," September 12, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Eric V. Larson and Bigdan Savych, 131.

nuclear powered Iraq. Despite the UNSC's resolution, French President Jacques Chirac, asserted that his country was opposed to any military operations in Iraq and would veto any resolution supporting United States military action. Feeling betrayed, President Bush stopped seeking international support for the invasion, focused primarily on domestic support from the American public and then launched Operation Iraqi Freedom.<sup>9</sup> On March 17, 2003, American troops entered Iraq to begin the removal of Saddam Hussein.

With the goal to remove Saddam Hussein from power and eliminate the threat of a heavily armed Iraq, the United States government considered Operation Iraqi Freedom to be phase two of the war on terror. Following the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the U.S. almost immediately invaded Afghanistan, home of vast networks of al-Qaeda terrorists. Following this invasion, the Bush Administration capitalized on the momentum provided by the terrorist attacks and encouraged the United States public, through neoconservative persuasion and presidential rhetoric, to support invading Iraq. A couple of years later the Bush Administration invaded Iraq in an effort to continue the war on terror, arguing that Hussein must be removed in order to eliminate the systematic conditions that could lead to a greater terrorist threat.

### **Brief History of American Foreign Policy in the Middle East**

In order to understand why the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, it is critical to understand decades of American foreign policy in the Middle East. During World War I, the Allied Powers consisting of Britain, United States, Russia, Italy and France, promised the Arabs in the Middle East their independence from the Ottoman Empire and self-determination if they successfully helped the allies achieve their goals. The Allied Powers demanded that the Arabs

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<sup>9</sup> Eric V. Larson and Bigdan Savych, 132.



rebel against their Turkish master who sided with the Germans, a key player for the Axis Powers.<sup>10</sup> Despite the Arabs cooperation, the Allied Powers neglected to follow through with their promises of autonomy largely due to the demand for oil and their support of Zionism, the Jewish national movement that sought to establish a Jewish homeland in the British-Mandate of Palestine. The Ottoman Empire that occupied a majority of the Middle East dissolved. Before the conclusion of the war, the French and British carved the Middle East granting themselves areas of influence and control through the secretive Sykes-Picot Agreement ultimately causing years of unresolved conflict.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, failure to take into consideration the complex demographics of Middle Eastern peoples resulted in extensive conflict. This consistent conflict will continue to effect American foreign policy in the Middle East for the next century.

### **American Foreign Policy during the Cold War**

The United States foreign policy in the Middle East after World War II reflected American internationalism, a global strategy to establish the U.S. as a leading force in the world and the region. American foreign policy rendered the U.S. as the so-called “Leader of the Free World” and that it needed to secure a new world order during the Cold War by maintaining its global footprint, especially in the strategic, oil-rich Middle East. However, this role did not appear over night and has been modified in order to respond to a changing world. During the Cold War, the main focus of U.S. foreign policy involved containing communism. Therefore, the presence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East during the Cold War encouraged the U.S. to facilitate strategic partnerships with nations in the region. These partnerships enabled the U.S. to

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<sup>10</sup> Phillip Knightley “Imperial Legacy” in Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf eds., *The Iraq War Reader* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Knightley, 9.

maintain its power and limit Soviet influence in the Middle East. The United States prioritized containing the Soviets in the Middle East in order to protect its access to oil in the region. An example of the policies that the United States government instituted in order to protect its influence in the oil rich Middle East included the 1947 Truman Doctrine. Although the Truman Doctrine sent aid to Greece and Turkey, strategic countries just outside the Middle Eastern region, it acted as the “first of several U.S. military doctrines covering the Middle East and aimed at the Soviets.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the U.S. used the Middle East and their role as global leaders to reduce Soviet influence, thus reducing the spread of communism.

The focus of American foreign policy during the Cold War can be easily summed up using a single word; containment. The United States believed that it must prevent the spread of communism abroad to protect its global interests such as trade. Therefore, the policy of containment meant that the United States refused to allow the Soviet Union and its communist allies to increase its global influence and spread its ideology. At the end of World War II in 1945, two major super powers remained in the world, the United States and the Soviet Union. The conflicting ideologies between the two ignited the Cold War. The Soviets emphasized the idea of communist collectivism where people lived and worked to benefit the society as a whole and were controlled by the state. On the other hand, American society focused on individualism meaning people had to be self-reliant with the freedom to choose their own path of action. As the Cold War persisted, containment weakened Soviet influence around the globe. Therefore, the Soviet Union increased “its willingness to follow U.S. foreign policy leads, as in the Gulf War.”<sup>13</sup> The diminishing Soviet power significantly changed the world order especially in the

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<sup>12</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, “The end of the Cold War and the Middle East,” *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 95.

<sup>13</sup> Keddie, 96.

Middle East. Because Soviet influence declined, it became “impossible for third world countries to counter the United States with Soviet backing,” a significant development in the new world order that allowed the U.S to invade Iraq for the first time in 1990 during the Gulf War.<sup>14</sup>

But with its severe domestic problems and diminishing international influence, the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and American influence increased in the post-Cold War era.<sup>15</sup> The end of the Cold War and the end of Soviet influence around the world allowed the United States to gain international support without the fear of an intensifying and potentially global conflict with the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War was a necessary step in the timeline that leads to the U.S. invading Iraq in the 90’s and then again in 2003.

## **Vietnam**

The emphasis on containment drastically affected United States foreign policy around the world. Containment encouraged the United States to engage in the Vietnam War with ground troops in 1965. The casualties and financial cost suffered by the U.S. with minimal successes led many Americans to regard the Vietnam War as an extensive failure for the Americans. No longer was the fight against communism the American public’s main priority.

The Vietnam War began in 1955 as North Vietnam, backed by its communist allies the Soviet Union and China, battled South Vietnam which was supported by the United States. At the beginning of the war, the United States primarily supported the South Vietnamese financially, giving them American military equipment along with training from military personnel and the CIA.<sup>16</sup> After John F. Kennedy’s presidential election in 1960, the U.S.

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<sup>14</sup> Keddie, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Keddie, 100.

<sup>16</sup> Editors, History.com. "Vietnam War." History.com. October 29, 2009. Accessed May 10, 2019. <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>.

government continued its involvement in the Vietnam War. Kennedy and his advisers agreed that a non-communist South Vietnam was crucial to preserving American global interests, although the Vietnam War was never the President's main priority.<sup>17</sup>

Following Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) became President. Johnson preferred to focus on domestic issues, but as the fall of South Vietnam seemed likely in 1964, he elevated U.S. involvement by deploying full scale ground troops to Vietnam in 1965.<sup>18</sup> Johnson galvanized public support for American military forces to enter the Vietnam War on faulty and deceitful information.<sup>19</sup> Johnson and his administration claimed that North Vietnamese militants attacked U.S. ships in Vietnam's Gulf of Tonkin on August 4, 1964. The attack in international waters was later disputed and found not to have happened. However, this claim led Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which granted the president authority to use military force. Johnson did so in 1965 and launched a full scale military campaign to save South Vietnam by sending approximately 175,000 U.S. troops to the region.<sup>20</sup> Within two years, approximately 500,000 American troops were deployed on the ground in south Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> As the war ensued, many Americans became frustrated with LBJ's foreign policies and handling of the war. As thousands of Americans lost loved ones in the conflict and the astronomical cost of the war mounted, domestic support for the war effort declined dramatically.

Johnson's successor, President Richard Nixon (1969-1975) and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, adopted a "new approach to foreign policy to match a new era of

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<sup>17</sup> George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, (London: Oxford University Press: 2008), 729.

<sup>18</sup> Herring, 730.

<sup>19</sup> Herring, 738.

<sup>20</sup> Herring, 739.

<sup>21</sup> Herring, 740.

international relations.”<sup>22</sup> U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War ended through what became known as “Vietnamization.” Nixon began removing U.S. troops from the region thus pressuring the South Vietnamese Army to carry most of the burden of the fighting. Nixon shifted his focus of American foreign policy from containing communism to détente with the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> Détente served as a peace initiative with U.S. adversaries in an attempt to end the Cold War, a drastic change in American foreign policy. Nixon and Kissinger did not see détente as a complete abandonment of containment, but used it as a tool to influence the Soviets in other ways. The Nixon administration hoped this policy would improve relations with the Soviet Union and provide the backdrop for potential negotiations.<sup>24</sup> The new policy of détente and Nixon’s “era of negotiation” demonstrated the United States reluctance to continue using military power as the means of achieving its goals.<sup>25</sup> Détente also caused the emergence of neo-conservatism, a political ideology founded on preserving American interests with free markets and individual freedoms. The neocons believed that conservatives like Nixon and Kissinger were willingly giving up the United States role in the world, a belief that eventually provided the political justification for the United States to invade Iraq in 2003.

Additionally, the Vietnam War triggered many anti-war protests as millions of Americans grew to disapprove of a costly war that they came to see as a Vietnamese civil war rather than a proxy war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, many Americans felt betrayed and lied to as government officials assured them for years that the war was immediately coming to a victorious end. A credibility gap emerged between the American people and the Johnson and Nixon Administrations due to public anger and distrust in the U.S. governments promotion of

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<sup>22</sup> Herring, 760.

<sup>23</sup> Herring, 770.

<sup>24</sup> Herring, 771-772.

<sup>25</sup> Herring, 772.

military action to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals. as the “Vietnam syndrome.” The syndrome refers to many Americans hesitancy to support U.S. military involvement around the globe after the disastrous casualties and strategic failures in the Vietnam War.

American involvement in the Vietnam War resulted from Cold War foreign policy focused on containing communism. Therefore, 64 percent of the American public, fearing the spread of communism would threaten U.S. national security, initially supported the war according to a 1965 Gallup Poll. The support drastically decreased as the battles continued and numerous casualties became known to the public with little success.<sup>26</sup> The war created a sense of “cultural shame” on the home front. The shame stemmed from many Americans realization that the optimistic belief in military invincibility felt during the early stages of the war “had not been based on knowledge, reason and justice.”<sup>27</sup> Most Americans recognized that they supported U.S. involvement in a conflict they did not entirely understand with blind patriotism that ultimately cost the lives of 58,000 Americans and millions of Vietnamese.<sup>28</sup>

The misguided, misinformed and morally confused public lashed out against U.S. foreign policy with anti-war campaigns and vowed to remember the lessons of Vietnam, to never again be blinded by unwavering patriotism, but to demand as Americans to be properly educated and informed on the reasons and motives behind using military force to aid in conflict.<sup>29</sup> With the United States being plagued with the Vietnam syndrome in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American public must be properly and extensively persuaded to go to war again. Therefore, in order for

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<sup>26</sup> “Polls Tell Us No More Than Where We Are: Vietnam War Opinion,” *The New York Times*, September 7, 1988.

<sup>27</sup> John Carlos Rowe, “The ‘Vietnam Effect’ in the Persian Gulf War,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 19 (Autumn 1991): 122.

<sup>28</sup> Rowe, 122.

<sup>29</sup> Rowe, 122.

war with Iraq in 2003 to be supported by the American public, the “Vietnam syndrome” must be eradicated.

### **American Success in the Persian Gulf**

Fast-forward decades later and the rapid success of the United States in the 1991 Persian Gulf War portrayed a sense of dominance in the Middle East. This dominance would essentially eliminate the Vietnam syndrome that many Americans had experienced since the end of the Vietnam War in the the mid-1970’s. President George H.W. Bush and his administration essentially concealed the fears of another Vietnam with the success of the Persian Gulf War, a crucial development in the timeline that leads to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In August of 1990, the army of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The United States and the international community worried they gave Iraq the ability to control the global price of oil and that if portended further Iraqi military conquest, namely in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia, next to then Iraqi-occupied Kuwait.

During President George H. W. Bush’s time in the White House (1989-1993), America’s priority in the Persian Gulf region was protecting the free flow of oil and to “prevent an inimical power from establishing hegemony over the region.”<sup>30</sup> The White House received word that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had amassed troops along the border of Kuwait on June 18, 1990. Iraq had previously accused Kuwait of driving down oil prices in the world market.<sup>31</sup> The Saudis and the United States feared that Iraq threatened the oil-rich territory that bordered Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Allowing Hussein to possess Kuwait and its resources would guarantee Iraqi control

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<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Pollack, “How Saddam Misread the United States” Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf eds., *The Iraq War Reader* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 76.

<sup>31</sup> Victor Navasky, “The Experts Speak on the Coming Gulf War” in Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf eds., *The Iraq War Reader* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 72.

of approximately 9 percent of the global oil production. Additionally, Iraqi military presence would threaten the Saudis, who controlled approximately 11 percent of the global oil production. This Iraqi threat would force the Saudis to follow the oil pricing policies implemented by Hussein in Iraq.<sup>32</sup> The Bush Administration declared that their main goal throughout this Iraqi aggression was to protect Saudi Arabia.<sup>33</sup> Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney traveled to Saudi Arabia to convince Saudi King Fahd to allow the United States to defend the Saudi kingdom from an Iraqi Invasion.<sup>34</sup> After the king agreed, President Bush ordered approximately 500,000 troops to be deployed to Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf so as to invade Kuwait in a military expedition known as “Operation Desert Shield.”<sup>35</sup>

The United Nations Security Council supported the U.S. military efforts and helped to form a coalition to militarily eject Saddam Hussein’s armed forces from Kuwait.<sup>36</sup> Before any fighting took place, President Bush issued an ultimatum to Iraq declaring that if Hussein’s forces did not exit Kuwait by January 15, 1991 it would face the coalition forces in a military pursuit. Hussein never responded to the ultimatum and his troops remained in Kuwait.<sup>37</sup> “Operation Desert Shield” transitioned into “Operation Desert Storm” on that day as the United States and its coalition allies unleashed a fearsome bombing campaign against Iraqi military targets in Kuwait. As the bombing continued, coalition ground troops entered Kuwait on February 24 and defeated Iraqi forces in just 100 hours of battle. The advanced military weaponry used by the United States and its allies overwhelmed the Iraqi military. Hundred of thousands of Iraqi soldiers died while the United States’ suffered 148 casualties.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Pollack, 76.

<sup>33</sup> Pollack, 78.

<sup>34</sup> Pollack, 77.

<sup>35</sup> "Operation Desert Storm." Ushistory.org. Accessed February 28, 2019. <http://www.ushistory.org/us/60a.asp>.

<sup>36</sup> “Operation Desert Storm.” <http://www.ushistory.org/us/60a.asp>.

<sup>37</sup> “Operation Desert Storm.” <http://www.ushistory.org/us/60a.asp>.

<sup>38</sup> “Operation Desert Storm.” <http://www.ushistory.org/us/60a.asp>.



On April 3, 1991 the Iraqi government and the coalition forces agreed to a ceasefire documented by a UN charter. The UN required the Iraqi government to abide by Resolution 687 which declared that Iraq and Kuwait adhere to their boundaries. Most importantly, this UN Charter that ended the Persian Gulf War reminded the Iraqi regime that it is not to use or possess weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) including biological, chemical and nuclear arms as well as any ballistic missile with a range over 150km.<sup>39</sup> A committee known as the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) formed in order to ensure the Iraqi regime abides by the imposed sanctions.<sup>40</sup> The resolution required that the Iraqi government disclose the location of its WMDs and accept their immediate destruction. The UNSCOM provided international supervision to ensure that Iraq properly destroy its WMD program and any biological or chemical capabilities.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the International Atomic Energy Agency, with the help of the UNSCOM, ensured that any nuclear capabilities be destroyed and demanded that Iraq “unconditionally agree not to acquire or develop nuclear weapons or nuclear-weapon-usable material.”<sup>42</sup>

Hussein’s regime resisted the sanctions imposed upon them following the Persian Gulf War, which allowed the Bush Administration to convince many Americans that Iraq continued to possess illegal WMD’s. Instead of abiding by Resolution 687, Iraq refused to comply until an end date was established that would free Iraq from these sanctions. The Iraqi regime often questioned the authority of UNSCOM claiming it was essentially an American espionage agency and that it had a disproportionate number of American and British inspectors.<sup>43</sup> Due to Iraq’s

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<sup>39</sup> Ruth Wedgwood, “The Enforcement of Security Council Resolution 687: The Threat of Force Against Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction,” *The American Journal of International Law* 92, no. 4 (October 1998): 724.

<sup>40</sup> Wedgwood, 724.

<sup>41</sup> Wedgwood, 724.

<sup>42</sup> Wedgwood, 724.

<sup>43</sup> Wedgwood, 725.

resistance to these inspections, UNSCOM was unable to verify that Iraq had fulfilled its obligation by dismembering its weapons of mass destruction. Thus, Iraqi failure to transparently destroy its WMD programs created an opportunity for President George W. Bush's Administration to add a war aim to the 2003 Iraq War agenda. President Bush claimed, without proof or evidence from the United Nations, that the Iraqi's continued to possess WMDs. Thus, Bush argued, it is the duty of the United States to eliminate the threat of a heavily armed Iraq through military action by removing Hussein's regime from power.

### **The Persian Gulf War as an Antidote to the Vietnam Syndrome**

The American public considered Operation Desert Storm and the liberation of Kuwait a tremendous success. With few U.S. casualties in a short and successful war -- the complete opposite of the Vietnam War in the 1960s to the 1970s -- the majority of Americans approved of the Gulf War and admired President George H. W. Bush's leadership during this conflict. According to Gallup, Bush acquired "the highest job approval rating any president has received since Gallup began asking the question in the 1930s, with 89 percent of Americans indicating their approval."<sup>44</sup> This high public approval for U.S. military action in the Persian Gulf in the early 90s signified that many Americans believed that the U.S. was capable of efficiently achieving its goals through the use of military force, a substantial shift from American public opinion following the Vietnam war. This change in public opinion influenced President George W. Bush's Administration's ability to cultivate public support to militarily invade Iraq again in 2003. The United States needed approval from the public in order to continue its war efforts.

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<sup>44</sup> David W. Moore, "Americans Believe U.S. Participation in Gulf War a Decade Ago Worthwhile." Gallup. Accessed March 5, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1963/americans-believe-us-participation-gulf-war-decade-ago-worthwhile.aspx>

The Vietnam War demonstrated that poor approval rating and the public's discontent with the war abroad, makes for immense problems on the home front, thus, the emergence of the so-called "Vietnam syndrome." A majority of Americans rallied against the war in Vietnam and with approximately 50,000 American casualties, the public demanded to bring U.S. troops home. By 1971, 60 percent of Americans believed it was a mistake to involve our military in Vietnam.<sup>45</sup> Due to the Vietnam War, many Americans opposed U.S. military intervention in foreign wars believing military force to be ineffective and costly. Therefore, the war in the Persian Gulf with minimal casualties and immediate successes acted as the perfect antidote for the Vietnam syndrome.

On March 2, 1991, during a speech given to White House legislatures, President George H. W. Bush declared "by God we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all."<sup>46</sup> This statement insinuates a sense of relief from the president. Bush believed that the effectiveness of Operation Desert Storm essentially reduced the impact the Vietnam War had on the American public. The Vietnam syndrome became irrelevant to many Americans because now it was "contained between World War II and the Persian Gulf Victory," allowing Vietnam "to be treated as an 'anomaly', a unique case of failure whose mistakes might be 'corrected' the next time."<sup>47</sup> The success of Operation Desert Storm led many Americans to naively believe that wars in the Middle East would end quickly with minimal casualties. Thus, in the wake of the Persian Gulf War, Americans became more likely to support going to war with Iraq in 2003 in order to

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<sup>45</sup> Frank Newport and Joseph Carroll, "Iraq Versus Vietnam: A Comparison of Public Opinion." *Gallup*. Accessed March 5, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/18097/iraq-versus-vietnam-comparison-public-opinion.aspx>

<sup>46</sup> Maureen Dowd, "After the War: White House; War introduces a tougher Bush to the Nation." *New York Times*, March, 2, 1991.

<sup>47</sup> Rowe, 124.

remove Saddam Hussein from power. Following the successfully executed Persian Gulf War, the American public's reluctance to use military force decreased.

### **The 2001 Terrorist Attacks Leading to the Global Counterterrorism Campaign**

The most significant event that enabled U.S. officials to galvanize public support for war with Iraq happened on September 11, 2001, the day that would transcend America's global war on terror. On that day al-Qaeda terrorists executed a premeditated, violent plot against the United States, killing nearly three-thousand people.

Led by Saudi exile Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda is a terrorist organization that consists of Islamic extremists. al-Qaeda essentially launched war on the United States on 9/11 due to its anger about the U.S. presence in the Middle East, specifically anger towards U.S. support for Saudi Arabia. al-Qaeda viewed the U.S. as an enemy of the Muslim faith and believed that Muslims were in a vicious battle known as Jihad, the mission to fight for Islam and against its enemies such as the U.S. al-Qaeda executed terrorist attacks prior to their attack in 2001. They were responsible for the simultaneous bombings of the U.S. embassy's in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 killing over 200 people. They launched a devastating attack on the U.S.S. Cole warship in Yemen on October 12, 2000. In so doing, al-Qaeda became a military adversary unlike any other that Americans had experienced. Since al-Qaeda was based in Afghanistan since 1996, the United States and its NATO allies responded to 9/11 by invading Afghanistan so as to dismantle the Taliban regime that gave refuge to al-Qaeda and that refused to give up these terrorists. The extremists practiced suicide terrorism meaning that they sacrifice their own lives in order to carry out their mission.

al-Qaeda's suicide terrorists hijacked four commercial planes on September 11. The first two crashed into the Twin Towers, the tallest buildings within the World Trade Center located in New York City's financial district where many Americans and international people worked. A third plane flew into the west wall of the Pentagon, the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense located in Washington D.C. When the passengers of the fourth plane, flight 93, realized they had been hijacked to serve in this suicide terrorist plot, they heroically stormed the cockpit. In response, the terrorists crashed the plane in a field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania thereby failing to destroy its intended target, likely the U.S. Capitol building in Washington D.C.

U.S. intelligence agencies observed al-Qaeda terrorists prior to the attacks on U.S. soil. In January of 2000, al-Qaeda terrorists gathered in Malaysia for a secret meeting. During this meeting, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was able to take surveillance photos and captured a picture of Khalid al-Mihdhar who would later fly American Airlines flight 77 into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.<sup>48</sup> Along with the photograph, the CIA learned the terrorist's full name and his passport number.<sup>49</sup> George Tenet, the director of central intelligence at the time, later confessed that the CIA should have placed al-Qaeda suicide terrorist al-Mihdhar on the State Department watch list which would deny him entry into the United States. Instead al-Mihdhar held a multiple-entry U.S. visa and entered the U.S. months prior to the attacks.<sup>50</sup> Thus, U.S. intelligence agencies were well aware that al-Qaeda terrorists were responsible for the terrorist activity. On October 7, 2001, nearly a month later, the United States, with support from NATO allies, began a bombing campaign known as "Operation Enduring Freedom" (OEF) that

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<sup>48</sup> Amy B. Zegart, "September 11 and the Adaption Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies," *International Security* 29, no.4 (Spring 2005), 78.

<sup>49</sup> Zegart, 78.

<sup>50</sup> Zegart, 78.

targeted Taliban bases that the al-Qaeda network reportedly used. The United States obsession with eliminating terrorist regimes and overthrowing Saudi exile and al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden intensified.<sup>51</sup> A Gallup Poll conducted shortly after the U.S./NATO military action from October 19 to October 21, 2001 concluded that 80 percent of Americans supported ground troops in Afghanistan as opposed to the 18 percent of Americans who were unsupportive of these efforts.<sup>52</sup> The public thus supported the United States military action in response to 9/11. But this 2001 poll also revealed that 22 percent of Americans were categorized as “reluctant warriors” who would not have supported war with Afghanistan if the attacks on 9/11 never happened.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the terrorist attacks clearly enraged the American people and persuaded them to support war with Afghanistan with overwhelming margins. The Bush Administration continued to channel American outrage and desire to answer 9/11 with military action to cultivate support for war with Iraq in 2003.

### **Cultivating Public Support for the 2003 Invasion of Iraq**

September 11, 2001 altered the course of U.S. foreign policy. Since Americans tend to urgently look towards the country’s leaders during times of crisis for explanations and potential solutions, President Bush and his aides had a greater opportunity to shape public opinion.<sup>54</sup> The terrorist attacks inflamed Americans anger and, for some, vengefulness. This unifying patriotism invoked a collective consciousness for the citizens of the United States which reestablished the nations mission, a sense of focus that had been missing since the end of the Cold War.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the terrorist attacks united the American national identity and the objective of U.S. foreign

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<sup>52</sup> David W. Moore, *Gallup*.

<sup>53</sup> David W. Moore, *Gallup*.

<sup>54</sup> Paul T. McCartney, “American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy from September 11 to the Iraq War,” *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 407.

<sup>55</sup> Paul T. McCartney, 400.

policy. Not only was the U.S. going to focus on the perpetrators of the attack but “the only way to ensure that such atrocities never happen again, Bush decided for the United States, was to change the global context that had made them possible.”<sup>56</sup>

The scope of the post 9/11 foreign policy agenda broadened rapidly in the weeks following the attacks. During Bush’s address to the nation on the night of 9/11, Bush declared that, “The United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.”<sup>57</sup> This statement implied that the U.S. would focus on those who planned and enacted the attacks, explicitly al-Qaeda and their leader Osama bin Laden. However, the scope of the war on terror expanded on September 17, 2001 while the U.S. President addressed the employees at the Pentagon. Bush articulated that “the focus right now is Osama bin Laden... and his organization. But there are other terrorists in the world. There are people who hate freedom. This is a fight for freedom.”<sup>58</sup> With these words President Bush revealed the focus of the United States new foreign policy. It was not enough to eradicate the perpetrators of the attack, but the United States goal was to end terrorism, a focus on international law and order. Therefore, declaring war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the ruling body in Afghanistan that gave refuge to al-Qaeda, was simply step one of the elaborate plan to eliminate terrorist regimes.

### **President George W. Bush’s War Cabinet and Neo-conservatism**

As the new, intensified version of the war on terror emerged immediately after the September 11 attacks, Iraq appeared on Washington’s radar as potential suspects. President Bush, in his first formal address to the nation following the attacks, declared that “I have directed

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<sup>56</sup> Paul T. McCartney, 400.

<sup>57</sup> Paul T. McCartney, 411.

<sup>58</sup> George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President to the Employees at the Pentagon,” September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010917-2.html>

the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.”<sup>59</sup> President Bush was determined to justify a link between al-Qaeda and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, as he believed the Iraqi dictator “harbored” terrorists. The neoconservative opinion which focused on America using military force to be a global protector pressured President Bush to militarily liberate the people of Iraq.

Neoconservatives favored using the strength of the United States military to remove Hussein from power and eliminate his influence in the region. Historically the neoconservative opinion on foreign policy had been focused on initiating regime change in Iraq through military action. Throughout the 1990’s, neoconservatives “were openly contemptuous of the disparity between US conventional military supremacy and presidential willingness to use it aggressively on behalf of the American interests and values.”<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the neocons believed that regime change in Iraq was a necessity since the Persian Gulf War. Many neoconservatives believed that Operation Desert Storm failed to complete the entirety of the mission. Because Hussein remained in power, the neocons determined the Persian Gulf War as unfinished and further condemned the Clinton Administration’s failure to remove Hussein from power.<sup>61</sup> Many of these same neoconservative ended up in President Bush’s cabinet, pushing for war with Iraq.<sup>62</sup> They determined that the “root cause of terrorism lay in the Middle East’s lack of Democracy” in the region.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the neocons on the President’s cabinet convinced Bush that the war against terror and the complete elimination of al-Qaeda as a global threat had to involve the

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<sup>59</sup> George W. Bush, “9/11 Address to the Nation” September 1, 2001.

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911addresstothenation.htm>

<sup>60</sup> Jeffrey Record, “Why the Bush Administration Invaded Iraq: Making Strategy after 9/11” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2008), 65.

<sup>61</sup> Record, 74.

<sup>62</sup> Record, 75.

<sup>63</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “After Neo-conservatism.” *The New York Times* February 19, 2006.



democratization of the region which could start with the military ousting of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.<sup>64</sup> Confident due to the quick military victory over the Taliban, the neoconservative mistakenly believed that invading Iraq would result in an easy and decisive victory.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the neoconservative political ideology compelled President Bush and the U.S. to invade Iraq so as to democratize the region, protecting the world from terrorist threats and increase U.S. national interests abroad.

### **Presidential Rhetoric Linking Terrorism and Hussein**

During times of crisis, many Americans look towards the president to provide guidance and answers making presidential discourse a persuasive tool. Presidential rhetoric encouraged the public to support the invasion of Iraq by uniting Americans under a common goal, to eliminate the threat of global terrorism. This discourse, given through speeches and addresses to the nation or government employees, successfully persuaded the American public to support militarily removing Saddam Hussein from power. President Bush and his administration strongly believed that "any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq."<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the administration persuaded a majority of Americans to embrace the use of military action as a means to accomplish U.S. foreign policy goals.

U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Afghanistan's link to 9/11 was undeniable and obvious. However, "the administration simply asserted Iraq's connection for the purpose of mobilizing public and congressional support for a war that otherwise would have been a hard,

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<sup>64</sup> Record, 65.

<sup>65</sup> Record, 72.

<sup>66</sup> Project for the New American Century, "Open Letter to President Bush: 'Lead the World to Victory'" in Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf eds., *The Iraq War Reader* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 223.

even impossible, sell.”<sup>67</sup> Iraq had no direct connection to the events that transpired on 9/11. The Bush Administration discovered during their initial attempts at mobilizing the American people for war that “the American public was largely predisposed to a focus on Iraq as the logical second phase to the war on terror.”<sup>68</sup> In order to capitalize on this momentum, the Bush Administration deliberately created a link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. The Bush Administration encouraged Americans to expand their view on the war on terror to include regime change in Iraq. The presidential rhetoric used by the president mobilized the public by creating a link between Hussein and al-Qaeda, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks.

American intelligence agencies determined that Iraq was not involved with 9/11. But as early as September 17, 2001, President Bush told his National Security Council that “I believe Iraq was involved, but I’m not going to strike them now. I don’t have evidence at this point.”<sup>69</sup> In order to justify Iraq as another theatre for the war on terror, the Bush Administration “converted the reality of Osama Bin Laden as an avowed enemy of ‘apostate’ secular regimes in the Middle East into the fantasy of bin Laden as an ally of Saddam Hussein.”<sup>70</sup> Despite their being no direct link, war promoters commonly referred to the 9/11 terrorist plot, al-Qaeda, and Saddam Hussein in relation to one another, a mistake that commonly occurs even to this day.<sup>71</sup>

A majority of Americans agreed that Hussein was an issue with his deplorable treatment of the Iraqi people and his problematic influence in the Middle East. However, linking 9/11 to Saddam Hussein in order to cultivate support for war with Iraq misinformed the American

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<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Record, 65.

<sup>68</sup> Jon Western, 111.

<sup>69</sup> Jon Western, “The War over Iraq: Selling War to the American Public,” *Security Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 106.

<sup>70</sup> Record, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Record, 65.

public, taking the focus away from Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda terrorists. The *New York Times* reported in September 2002 that “Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said today that American intelligence had ‘bulletproof’ evidence of links between al-Qaeda and the government of President Saddam Hussein in Iraq.”<sup>72</sup> That same article concluded that “the officials have offered no details to back up the assertions.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the *New York Times* article implied that the administration attempted to connect al-Qaeda and Hussein. This connection came during a time that the administration tried to muster support on Capitol Hill and at the United Nations in order for the United States to engage in military efforts to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

The administration argued, with no concrete evidence, that Saddam Hussein’s weapon of mass destruction (WMD) programs -- chemical, biological and potentially nuclear weapons -- was growing. Therefore, Hussein must be removed in order to prevent him from supplying terrorist organizations in the Middle East with weapons of mass destruction. The threat of Hussein with WMDs paralleled with the Bush administrations implied link between Iraq and 9/11 generated American public support. The Bush administration went through “serious efforts to prove this link in favor of a strategy that focused on what it contends is the threat from Iraq posed by weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>74</sup> Despite no evidence of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s involvement in the disastrous events, President George W. Bush was able to cultivate support for a war with Iraq less than two years following the attack. President Bush’s advisors concluded that they must develop a link between Hussein and al-Qaeda while convincing the public that simply containing Hussein and his WMD program to Iraq would not work. He represented a destabilizing force in the Middle East and he needed to be removed from power.

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<sup>72</sup> Eric Schmitt, “Threats and Responses: Intelligence; Rumsfeld Says U.S. has ‘bulletproof’ Evidence of Iraq’s Links to Al Qaeda,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Schmitt, 2002.

<sup>74</sup> Eric Schmitt, 2002.

A major tactic in demonstrating a link between al-Qaeda and Hussein included specific and intentional presidential rhetoric. The President and his speech writers meticulously chose words and coined phrases that would persuade the public that war with Iraq was the logical second phase in combatting terrorism. President Bush never explicitly said that Hussein and bin Laden were intimately connected with one another. However, the language used in the presidential speeches essentially forced listeners to infer a 9/11-Iraq connection. The way the information was presented in the speeches shaped the way citizens interpreted the war on terror and a country traumatized by the recent terrorist attacks were extremely receptive to this type of dialogue.<sup>75</sup> Several speeches made by the president following the terrorist attacks persuaded the American people to support the second phase in the war which meant regime change in Iraq.

On June 1, 2002, President George W. Bush delivered the commencement speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The speech clearly articulated that the U.S. President believed the second phase of the war on terror should be fought in Iraq. During his speech, President Bush addressed one of the goals of his administration, to convince the public that simply containing Saddam Hussein to Iraq would not be enough to eliminate the threat that he posed to innocent people around the world. President Bush declared that “containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, in order to rally future soldiers as well as the American public to support war with Iraq, Bush convinced Americans that imposing sanctions and relying on the policy of containment to restrain Saddam Hussein would not be enough.

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<sup>75</sup> Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, 526.

<sup>76</sup> George W. Bush, “U.S. Military Academy Commencement Address,” June 1, 2002. <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbushwestpointcommencement.htm>

President Bush's speech at West Point demonstrated the United States shift in foreign policy, the shift between national defense to international law and order. President Bush's patriotic rhetoric inspired the future American soldiers to be ready to act implying that war is once again on the horizon as a necessary component of the war on terror. The President announced that "the war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act."<sup>77</sup> This patriotic rhetoric during the speech highlighted the United States' role of maintaining law and order around the world. Therefore, when speaking to future American soldiers, the rhetoric Bush used inspired the public to support invading Iraq so that the United States military can fulfill their role as global policeman. The president used the opportunity to speak to future military personnel as a tool to cultivate support for war with Iraq.

President Bush gave another speech on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2002 titled "Address to the Nation on the Threat of Iraq" with the sole purpose of inspiring Americans to support military action. The President stated:

We also must never forget the most vivid events of recent history. On September the 11th, 2001, America felt its vulnerability -- even to threats that gather on the other side of the earth. We resolved then, and we are resolved today, to confront every threat, from any source, that could bring sudden terror and suffering to America. The attacks of September the 11th showed our country that vast oceans no longer protect us from danger. Before that tragic date, we had only hints of al Qaeda's plans and designs. Today in Iraq, we see a threat whose outlines are far more clearly defined, and whose consequences could be far more deadly. Saddam Hussein's actions have put us on notice, and there is no refuge from our responsibilities<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> George W. Bush, June 1, 2002.

<sup>78</sup> George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Threat of Iraq," October 7, 2002.  
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbushwariniraqcincinnati.htm>

The rhetoric used in this speech cultivated support for military action in Iraq by harnessing the patriotism and anger Americans felt following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The president does in fact differentiate between Al-Qaeda and Iraq by arguing that the United States are now more informed on Iraq's potential to engage in terrorist activity. However, the reference to 9/11 motivated Americans to support military action in Iraq. Many of President Bush's speeches from the period of September 11, 2001 to May 1, 2003 (almost two months after the U.S. had declared war with Iraq) shared this same pattern of rhetoric. According to a 2005 study published by the American Political Science Association, twelve out of the thirteen speeches examined referred to Iraq and terrorism within the same paragraph. Ten speeches positioned the words Iraq and terrorism within the same sentence. In four out of the thirteen speeches, "a discussion of terrorism preceded the first mention of Iraq, giving the impression that Iraq was a logical extension of the terrorism discussion."<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, this numerical analysis emphasized that Bush's rhetoric forcibly implied a link between Iraq and terrorism encouraging Americans to support a war. Repeatedly creating a link between the words Iraq, terrorism, bin Laden and 9/11 allowed the president to sway public opinion to support the invasion.

Additionally, Bush included hypothetical situations in three speeches that encouraged Americans to imagine what damage could be done if terrorists got their hand on weapons of mass destruction. During a radio broadcast aired on March 8, 2003, days before declaring war with Iraq, Bush stated that "the attacks of September 11, 2001 showed what the enemies of America did with four airplanes. We will not wait to see what terrorists of terror states could do with weapons of mass destruction."<sup>80</sup> This rhetoric powerfully shaped public opinion by relating

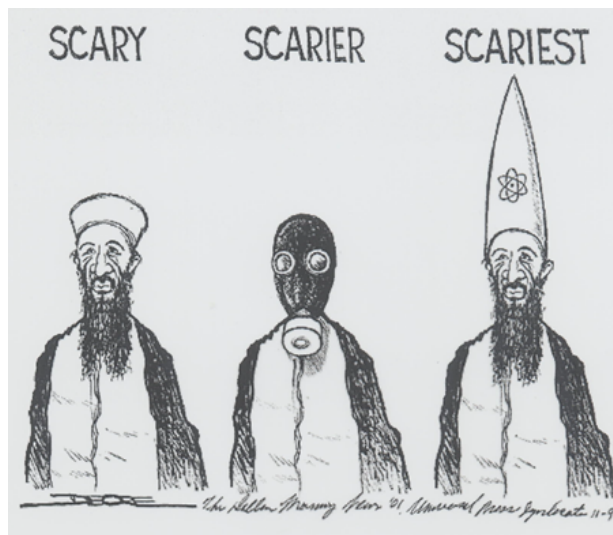
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<sup>79</sup> Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, 527.

<sup>80</sup> George W. Bush, "War on Terror: President's Radio Address," March 8, 2003. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030308-1.html>

Iraq and terrorism, with the added fear tactic of including the extensive destructive power of WMD's in the conversation.

Figure 1



The 9/11 terrorist attacks caused a surge of islamaphobia and many Americans feared the instability in the Middle East. This fearful feeling made some Americans easily receptive to the idea that the United States needed to militarily invade Iraq in hope that regime change would bring democracy and stability to the region. The political cartoon labeled as Figure 1 conveys the increase in islamaphobia felt by many Americans following the September 11 terrorist attacks. President Bush's inclusion of hypothetical scenarios played into those anxieties and heightened fears. The first figure in the political cartoon displays a Middle Eastern man labeled "scary." The second figure shows a person wearing a gas mask inferring the presence of weapons of mass destruction. This figure is labeled "scarier" demonstrating that something many Americans fear even more than the Middle East was WMD capabilities. Lastly, the third figure, labeled "scariest," essentially combines the first two pictures into one creating the combination that many Americans feared the most, an Islamic terrorist with weapons of mass destruction. The hypothetical situations conveyed in President Bush's speeches relate to the political cartoon

above. He forced Americans to imagine the damage that could be done if harmful terrorists possessed these weapons, a terrifying thought for many Americans living in the post-9/11 era.

Therefore, the framing of the speeches implied that United States enemies are “indistinguishable and allied by the use of terror.”<sup>81</sup> The language shaped public opinion in a way that would support military action with Iraq as the necessary second phase of the war on terror. The rhetoric successfully harnessed the strong feelings of patriotism and anger felt by many Americans post-9/11 which cultivated support for war. President Bush’s National Security Strategy (NSS) published on September 20, 2002 laid out the specifics of the United States foreign policy. The NSS emphasized the goals of the global war on terror including that the U.S. must invade Iraq to attempt to bring stability to the region and reduce the spread of terrorism.

Figure 2



Figure 2, a political cartoon titled 9/11 Memorial Year Two, demonstrates just how misinformed many Americans became due to the strategic rhetoric of the Bush Administration. The person in the cartoon looks quizzically at the monument that reads “70

<sup>81</sup> Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, 527.



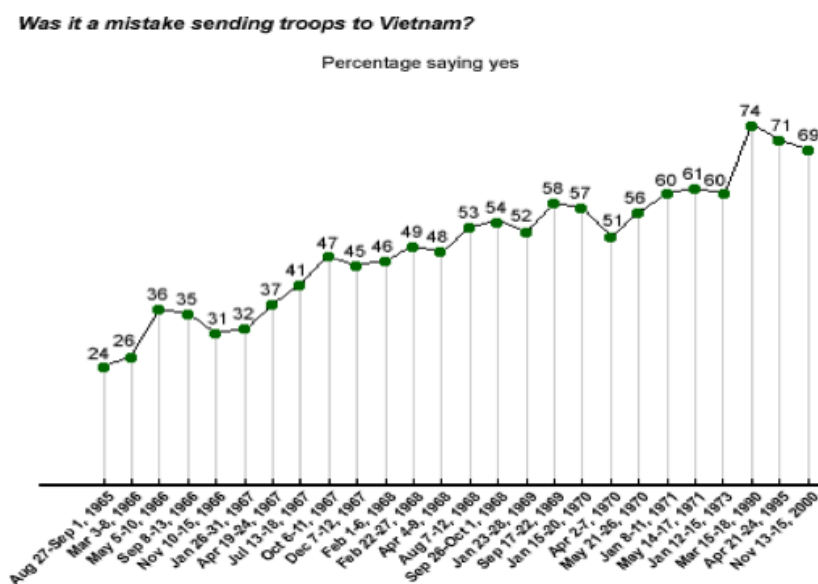
percent of Americans now mistakenly believe Saddam was involved.” Essentially this political cartoon indicates just how successful the Bush Administration was in conveying the invasion of Iraq as a necessary phase two of the war on terror. Due to the intentional presidential rhetoric, President Bush led most Americans to infer an Iraqi-9/11 connection which was fundamental in cultivating the massive amount of support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

### **An Iraq Syndrome?**

Despite the initial support for the invasion of Iraq, The Iraq War resulted in immense suffering. The United States endured a military campaign in the country for approximately eight years that proved to be a staggering strategic failure. In that time, the U.S. suffered numerous casualties and high economic costs. The neoconservatives and the Bush Administration failed to plan for the aftermath of the invasion. They neglected to come up with a plan for Iraq once Hussein had been removed. The removal of the Iraqi dictator essentially led to ongoing instability in the oil-rich region. Additionally, many Americans felt that there was a credibility gap between American citizens and politicians, similar to what was felt during the struggle in the Vietnam War. In order to gain support for the Iraq invasion, many Americans believed they were misled, misinformed and essentially lied to by the American government and U.S. intelligence agencies. The Bush Administration deliberately created a link between al-Qaeda and the Hussein’s regime without any evidence that a link existed. Intelligence agencies exaggerated Iraq’s interest in developing nuclear capabilities and claimed that the Iraqi’s possessed WMDs. A claim that insinuated Iraq was violating the United Nations Security Council Sanctions imposed after the Persian Gulf War. Additionally, the Iraq War was every bit as costly as the Vietnam War, arguably more so. The phenomenal strategic catastrophe beginning in 2003

completely destabilized the oil-rich region leading to ongoing instability. The combination of a U.S. military strategic failure and many Americans feeling as though they were deliberately misinformed reinstated a widespread reluctance to rely on exerting military force, previously experienced after the Vietnam War. Once again many Americans no longer depended on the military to exert its power in order to adhere to American foreign policy aims. Thus, the United States has potentially found themselves in the midst of a so-called “Iraq Syndrome.”

Figure 3



Similar to the Vietnam War, support for the Iraq invasion declined as U.S. casualties and the financial cost of the war increased. Gallup asked the American public, during both wars, to assess how the presidents handled their respective conflict and to evaluate whether engaging in war was a mistake. Figure 3 shows the results of the Gallup Poll that asked: “Was it a mistake sending troops to Vietnam?” When this question was first asked in 1965, only 24 percent of respondents believed that it was a mistake to deploy Americans to Vietnam. When asked in January of 1973, after the American military had been involved for eight years, approximately 60

percent of respondents agreed that it was a mistake. The Gallup Poll asked again decades later in 2000 with a staggering 69 percent of respondents declaring U.S. involvement in the war to be a mistake.

Figure 4

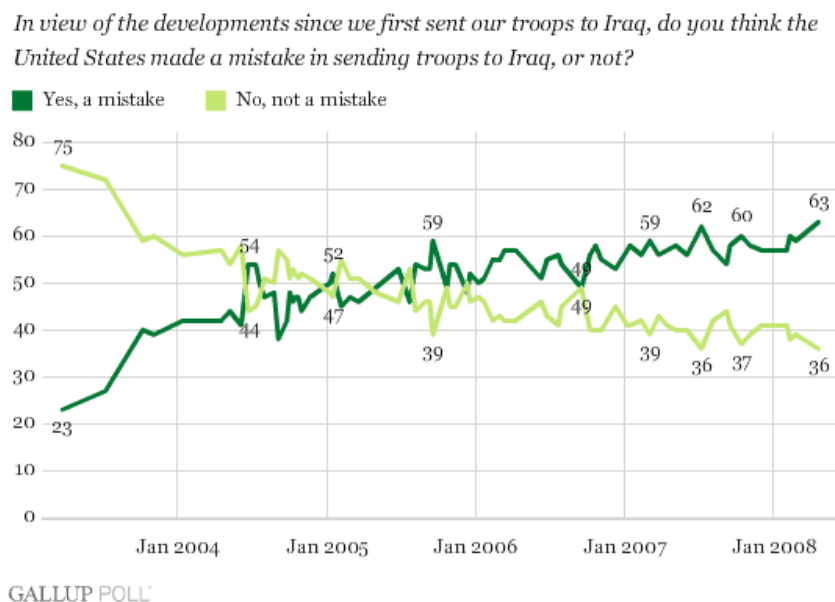


Figure 4 represents the response of Americans being questioned about the necessity of the 2003 Iraq invasion. The Gallup Poll asked: “Was it a mistake for the U.S. to send troops to Iraq?” When asked in 2003, 23 percent of respondents determined that deploying U.S. troops to invade Iraq was a mistake. In 2008 Gallup conducted the same poll by surveying 1,016 adults in a telephone interview asking the same question.<sup>82</sup> As casualties increased along with the financial burden of the war, 63 percent of the respondents declared that the invasion of Iraq was a mistake. This 2008 statistic represented the highest “mistake” percentage that Gallup had ever recorded involving a war the United States was actively still engaged. This percentage surpassed the previous high of 61 percent, a statistic recorded in 1971 when the U.S. military was still at

<sup>82</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “Opposition to Iraq War Reaches a New High,” *Gallup*, April 24, 2008. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/106783/opposition-iraq-war-reaches-new-high.aspx>

war in Vietnam.<sup>83</sup> Both the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, experienced a similar trend in support. Support was high in the beginning. A majority of Americans believed that the U.S. military was the best way to achieve its American foreign policy goals. As the wars continued with more casualties and limited success, American public support rapidly declined. Thus, the similarities between American public support during the Vietnam and Iraq wars suggests that an Iraq syndrome has emerged in the United States.

Representative Walter Jones (R-NC) exemplified the emergence of an Iraq syndrome with his changing views on the Iraq invasion, from supporting to condemning the use of military force. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, Representative Walter Jones suggested using a side dish to make an obvious statement condemning France's lack of support for the Iraq invasion. With backing from Representative Bob Ney (R-Ohio), the chairman of the Committee on House Administration, "freedom-fries" replaced the term french-fries on cafeteria menus in all three of the House of Representative office buildings. Prior to the name change that took place in March of 2003, France opposed the United States' foreign policy in the Middle East and Washington's decision to invade Iraq.<sup>84</sup> Later in his life, the same representative wrote over 12,000 letters to families of fallen Americans apologizing for his support for the Iraq War.<sup>85</sup> This story exemplifies and reflects how many Americans felt during the course of the Iraq war which evidently is similar to the progression of public opinion during the Vietnam war. Thus, the United States may be in the midst of an Iraq syndrome.

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<sup>83</sup> Jones, April 24, 2008.

<sup>84</sup> Sean Loughlin, "House Cafeterias Change Names for 'French' Fries and 'French' Toast" *CNN Washington Bureau*. March 12, 2003. Accessed March 5, 2003. <http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/03/11/sprj.iq.fries/>

<sup>85</sup> Katherine Q. Seelye, "Walter B. Jones, 76, Dies; Republican Turned Against Iraq War." *The New York Times*, February 13, 2019.

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