

Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas

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The Selling of the Iraq War

Mature democracies such as the United States are generally believed to be better at making foreign policy than other regime types. Especially, the strong civic institutions and robust marketplaces of ideas in mature democracies are thought to substantially protect them from severe threat inflation and “myths of empire” that could promote excessively risky foreign policy adventures and wars. The marketplace of ideas helps to weed out unfounded, mendacious, or self-serving foreign policy arguments because their proponents cannot avoid wide-ranging debate in which their reasoning and evidence are subject to public scrutiny.¹

The marketplace of ideas, however, failed to fulfill this function in the 2002–03 U.S. foreign policy debate over going to war with Iraq. By now there is broad agreement among U.S. foreign policy experts, as well as much of the American public and the international community, that the threat assessments that President George W. Bush and his administration used to justify the war against Iraq were greatly exaggerated, and on some dimensions wholly baseless.

Postwar revelations have made clear that President Bush and top officials of his administration were determined from early 2001 to bring about regime change in Iraq.² It was not until the summer of 2002, however, that they began

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1. Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and Political Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 32–55; Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), pp. 56–66; and Stephen Van Evera, *The Causes of War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), chaps. 2, 5. Much (although not all) of the “democratic peace” literature relies on a version of this argument, as do explanations for why democracies tend to win wars. Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam III, *Democracies at War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

2. Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neill* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 72–75, 83–86; Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 9–16, 21–23; and Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), pp. 231–232.

their public campaign to generate support for preventive war to achieve this objective. They made four main arguments to persuade the public of their case against Saddam Hussein: (1) he was an almost uniquely undeterrable aggressor who would seek any opportunity to kill Americans virtually regardless of risk to himself or his country; (2) he was cooperating with al-Qa'ida and had even assisted in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States; (3) he was close to acquiring nuclear weapons; and (4) he possessed chemical and biological weapons that could be used to devastating effect against American civilians at home or U.S. troops in the Middle East. Virtually none of the administration's claims held up, and the information needed to debunk nearly all of them was available both inside and outside the U.S. government before the war.³ Nevertheless, administration officials persistently repeated only the most extreme threat claims and suppressed contrary evidence.⁴

Most important, the marketplace of ideas failed to correct the administration's misrepresentations or hinder its ability to persuade the American public. The administration succeeded, despite the weakness of the evidence for its claims, in convincing a majority of the public that Iraq posed a threat so extreme and immediate that it could be dealt with only by preventive war. Overall, this policy debate resembles what Stephen Van Evera calls "non-evaluation": that is, a debate in which little real evaluation takes place because those in power ignore or suppress assessments from internal sources that might contradict their preferred policy, and use their ability to influence political and media agendas to focus public attention on their own arguments at the expense of attention to external criticisms.⁵

The question now is, why was this threat inflation so successful? The answer has both theoretical and policy implications. Although the Iraq debate is certainly not the first instance of threat inflation in the United States or other democracies, it matters whether this episode should be considered an uncommon exception to the rule that democratic marketplaces of ideas can usually restrain

3. The best summary and evaluation of administration threat claims is Joseph Cirincione, Jessica T. Mathews, and George Perkovich, with Alexis Orton, *WMD in Iraq: Evidence and Implications* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2004).

4. In addition to inflating the threat posed by Hussein, the administration also dismissed potential costs and risks of preventive war against Iraq, arguing that the postwar occupation would be short and cheap, and would leave behind a pro-American democratic regime and strengthen pro-American sentiments in the region generally. These assertions went virtually unchallenged in the prewar debate, making it difficult to assess whether serious debate would have altered public judgments on these issues.

5. Stephen Van Evera, "Why States Believe Foolish Ideas: Non-Self-Evaluation by Government and Society," 1988.

policies based on dubious claims and rationales, or whether there is a risk of repeated equally severe failures, perhaps with much higher costs for U.S. national security.

Understanding the limits of threat inflation has become especially important because of the Bush administration's adoption of a preventive war doctrine,⁶ which substantially expands the potential, compared with previous U.S. grand strategies, for involving the United States in multiple military adventures. This in turn greatly increases the possible consequences if democratic processes and the marketplace of ideas fail repeatedly to weed out exaggerated threat claims and policy proposals based on them. Although conquering Iraq could not do much to improve U.S. national security because the supposed Iraqi threat was mostly chimerical, the costs have been remarkably serious considering the weakness and unpopularity of the opponent and the short time that has elapsed. These include the direct costs of combating the ongoing resistance, damage to the United States' reputation among publics worldwide, and increased support for Islamist views similar to those of terrorist groups such as al-Qa'ida.⁷ Some observers argue that other major powers, including U.S. allies, are already seeking ways to balance against U.S. power and that further military adventures comparable to Iraq would accelerate this process.⁸

Assessing the risk of future failures of the marketplace of ideas requires an explanation of the causes of the failure in the Iraq case, which is the purpose of this article. Five factors appear critical in having determined the outcome.

First, democratic political systems may be inherently vulnerable to issue manipulation. The logic of the marketplace of ideas in foreign policy is based on the proposition that median voters have strong incentives to scrutinize expansionist arguments and reject those that seem to serve only narrow interests or risk weakening, rather than strengthening, national security.⁹ There is reason to believe, however, that median voter logic can often be bypassed by elite manipulation of how issues are framed in debate.¹⁰ In this case, the critical manipulation involved redefining the threat posed by Hussein from containing

6. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 17, 2002); and Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 3 (Fall 2003), pp. 365–388.

7. Pew Global Attitudes Survey, "Mistrust of America Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists" (Washington, D.C.: Pew Foundation, March 2004).

8. On emerging "soft balancing," see Robert A. Pape, "The World Pushes Back," *Boston Globe*, March 23, 2003.

9. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 49–52. On median voter logic, see Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

10. Kenneth J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, 2d ed. (New York: Wiley, 1963); and William H. Riker, *Liberalism against Populism* (Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland, 1988), pp. 197–212.

regional aggression to deterring direct terrorist attack on the United States. Second, the Bush administration benefited from its control over the government's intelligence apparatus, which it used to distort the public record by selectively publicizing favorable analyses while suppressing contrary information. Third, the White House enjoys great authority in foreign policy debate, which, in the Iraq case, gave it a credibility advantage over independent critical analyses regardless of the strength of the critics' information or analyses. The authority advantage of the presidency also enhanced the administration's ability to manipulate the framing of the issues. Fourth, the countervailing institutions on which the marketplace of ideas theory relies to check the ability of those in power to control foreign policy debate—especially the press, independent experts, and opposition parties—failed to do so, and may generally lack the power to fulfill the functions that the theory expects of them. Finally, the shock of the September 11 atrocities created a crisis atmosphere that may have reduced public skepticism about both diagnoses of threats and proposed solutions.

We cannot predict the future based on a single case. Yet because the first four of these five critical factors are embedded in the structure of the American political system, the implication is that we should not be confident that similar failures will not be repeated in the future.

The remainder of this article is organized into four sections. The first section describes the Bush administration's efforts to inflate alleged threats posed by Iraq and evaluates the validity of their claims. The second section describes the success of the administration's threat inflation in swaying U.S. public opinion, while the third seeks to assess why the marketplace of ideas failed. The final section discusses potential implications for the likelihood and scale of possible future failures.

Threat Inflation in the Iraq Debate

Assessments of threat normally involve some ambiguity. Threat inflation, as opposed to ordinary conservatism, can be defined as (1) claims that go beyond the range of ambiguity that disinterested experts would credit as plausible;¹¹

11. This is essentially the same as Snyder's definition of myths of empire: "Assertions [that support adventurist foreign policies] that would lose credibility if their claim to a basis in fact or logic were exposed to rigorous, disinterested, public evaluation." Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, p. 55 n. 14.

(2) a consistent pattern of worst-case assertions over a range of factual issues that are logically unrelated or only weakly related—an unlikely output of disinterested analysis; (3) use of double standards in evaluating intelligence in a way that favors worst-case threat assessments; or (4) claims based on circular logic, such as Bush administration claims that Hussein’s alleged hostile intentions were evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) whose supposed existence was used as evidence of his intentions.¹²

Administration exaggerations of the Iraqi threat during 2002–03 qualify on all four grounds. The errors did not result from mistakes by U.S. intelligence agencies. Rather, top officials knew what policy they intended to pursue and selected intelligence assessments to promote that policy based on their political usefulness, not their credibility. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz came close to admitting as much in May 2003 when he stated, “We settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on, which was weapons of mass destruction, as the core reason.” An unnamed administration official came still closer when he told an ABC News reporter, “We were not lying [about Iraqi weapons]. But it was just a matter of emphasis.”¹³ As an intelligence official who supported the war described it, “You certainly could have made strong cases that regime change was a logical part of the war on terrorism, given Baghdad’s historic terror ties, but that didn’t have enough resonance. You needed something that inspired fear.”¹⁴

DETECTING HUSSEIN: SADDAM THE MADMAN

Prior to 2002, the main challenge in U.S. policy toward Iraq was framed as containment of potential regional aggression, and a general consensus existed that containment did not require regime change. Few experts doubted that Iraq had been deterred since the 1991 Persian Gulf War, or that the vast military superiority of the United States could deter it, as would be expected for almost any other midsized state. Yet most agreed that Hussein could be contained. This consensus included some Bush administration officials. Condoleezza Rice, who would become Bush’s national security adviser, wrote in 2000, “If they

12. For a more expansive list of threat inflation tactics, see Jane Kellett Cramer, “Sounding the Tocsin Redux: Persistent Patterns of Threat Inflation,” University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, March 2004, pp. 5–7.

13. “Secretary Wolfowitz Interview with Sam Tannenhaus,” *Vanity Fair*, May 10, 2003, <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030509-depsecdef0223.html>; and John Cochran, “Reason for War? White House Officials Say Privately the Sept. 11 Attacks Changed Everything,” *ABCNews.com*, April 25, 2003.

14. Quoted in Jason Vest, “Wrong Target,” *American Prospect*, online edition, April 1, 2004.

[the Iraqis] do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration.”¹⁵ Similarly, in February 2001 Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed confidence that Iraq could be kept contained.¹⁶ Arguments by Iraq hawks that containment would fail, leading to a “destabilizing effect on the entire Middle East,” made almost no impact.¹⁷

As long as the debate was framed in this way, attempts to argue that Iraqi WMD programs required preventive war would have faced an uphill battle. Instead, during 2002–03 administration officials sought to redefine Hussein as not an ordinary regional despot careful to protect his power, but an evil madman bent on the destruction of the United States and willing to run virtually any risk to himself or his country to fulfill this goal.

In September 2002 President Bush declared, “The first time we may be completely certain he has nuclear weapons is when, God forbid, he uses one.” In March 2003 he asserted, “The danger is clear: using chemical, biological, or, one day, nuclear weapons provided by Iraq, the terrorists could one day kill hundreds of thousands of people in our country or any other.”¹⁸ In making the administration’s case for going to war, Secretary of State Powell asked the UN Security Council in a speech on February 5, 2003, “Should we take the risk that he will not someday use [WMD] at a time and a place and in a manner of his choosing? . . . The United States will not and cannot run that risk for the American people. Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option, not in a post-September 11th world.”¹⁹

15. Condoleezza Rice, “Campaign 2000—Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (January/February 2000), pp. 45–62, at p. 61.

16. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, “Briefing for the Press Aboard Aircraft En Route Brussels,” February 26, 2001, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/953.htm>.

17. Letter to President Clinton signed by Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, and 15 others, Project for the New American Century, January 26, 1998. The most they were able to obtain was a small congressional appropriation of (\$97 million) for the Iraqi National Congress, an exile group based in London. Vernon Loeb, “Congress Stokes Visions of War to Oust Saddam; White House Fears Fiasco in Aid to Rebels,” *Washington Post*, October 20, 1998.

18. George W. Bush, “President’s Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly,” September 12, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html>; and President George W. Bush, “Address to the Nation on War with Iraq,” March 17, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/new/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html>; similarly, President George W. Bush, speech at the Cincinnati Museum Center, October 7, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>; Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, “Remarks before the House Armed Services Committee,” September 18, 2002; and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, *CNN Late Edition*, September 8, 2002.

19. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, “Remarks to the United Nations Security Council,” February 5, 2003, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/17300pf.htm>.

The administration's claims about the supposed threat Hussein posed were not backed by evidence. An October 2002 Special National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Hussein was unlikely to initiate an unprovoked WMD attack against the United States.²⁰ Officials did not present a serious rationale for the administration's position: they failed to address the question of why even a nuclear-armed Hussein would be unfazed by the United States' ability to defeat him conventionally or to retaliate for any Iraqi use of WMD.²¹

The administration benefited, however, from parallel claims made by friendly analysts, most important Kenneth Pollack, whose book persuaded numerous moderates and liberals who would not have otherwise trusted threat assessments emanating from the Bush administration.²² Pollack argued that Hussein was "one of the most reckless, aggressive, violence-prone, risk-tolerant, and damage-tolerant leaders of modern history," even "inadvertently suicidal." He also claimed that Hussein believed that "possession of nuclear weapons would deter [the United States] from taking action against him" over any regional aggression, regardless of U.S. military superiority.²³

Pollack infers his model of Hussein's thinking mainly from seven allegedly unwise or risky decisions the Iraqi dictator took between 1974 and 1993. On examination, however, none provide strong support for the idea that Hussein was unusually reckless, and most do not support it at all.²⁴

According to Pollack, Hussein "made his first catastrophic foreign policy

20. Director of Central Intelligence, "Key Judgments from the National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction," October 2002, <http://www.ceip.org/files/projects/npp/pdf/Iraq/declassifiedintelreport.pdf>; and Dana Priest, "Analysts Discount Iraq Attack; Counterattack Is Called Possible," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2002.

21. Vice President Richard B. Cheney, speech at VFW convention, August 26, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/print/20020826.html>.

22. According to Chris Suellentrop, Pollack's book "turned more doves into hawks than Richard Perle, Laurie Mylroie, and George W. Bush combined." Suellentrop, "Does the 'Invade Iraq' Book Say What You Think It Does?" *MSN Slate Magazine*, March 5, 2003. See also Bill Keller, "The I-Can't-Believe-I'm-a-Hawk Club," *New York Times*, February 8, 2003, p. A17; David Remnick, "Making a Case," *The Talk of the Town*, *New Yorker*, February 3, 2003, p. 31; Jonathan Chait, "False Alarm: Why Liberals Should Support the War," *New Republic*, October 21, 2002, p. 18; Tish Durkin, "A Required Briefing for War Protesters: Pollack on Iraq," *New York Observer*, January 27, 2003, p. 4; and Fareed Zakaria, "Invade Iraq, but Bring Friends," *Newsweek*, August 5, 2002, p. 37. In various hearings, at least ten members of Congress cited Pollack in their reasoning for supporting war.

23. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002), pp. 270–276; and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Why Iraq Can't Be Deterred," *New York Times*, September 26, 2002.

24. Pollack's views in the book are virtually opposite to those he expressed prior to September 11. He used to argue that containment was workable and that Hussein could be expected to react sensibly to threats to his hold on power. In 1999 Pollack wrote, "The real and pressing challenge [is] not whether to abandon containment for a better alternative—there is none—but rather how to shore it up." Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack, and Gideon Rose, "The Rollback Fantasy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (January/February 1999), p. 24.

miscalculation" in 1974 by abrogating the autonomy agreement that had ended the 1969–70 Kurdish rebellion, a foolish move because "Saddam simply assumed that the shah [of Iran] would stay out [of the conflict]." When Iran supported the Kurds, "Saddam panicked." "Fear[ing] that the shah intended to march on Baghdad," he thus had to accept a "humiliating" peace to save the Iraqi regime.²⁵

Iraq, however, was in a hard position not mainly of its own making. Neither Iraq nor the Kurds had honored the 1970 agreement—the rebels because with Iranian backing they did not need to, and the government because it could not surrender to the rebels' demands for control of the oil around Kirkuk and for their own independent army. Iran's involvement was part of a larger campaign to assert influence throughout the region. From 1966 onward Iran, assisted by the United States and Israel, funneled arms to the Kurds to help undermine the Baghdad regime. In 1969 Iran unilaterally abrogated the 1937 treaty that gave Iraq ownership of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway at the head of the Persian Gulf.²⁶ Hussein extricated Iraq from the crisis at relatively low cost; in return for half of the waterway, Iran abandoned the Kurds, whom the Iraqis then crushed.²⁷

Second, Pollack writes that in 1976 Hussein, having made "no assessment of risks or costs," entered a border confrontation with Syria. He was rescued from likely military defeat only when the Arab League ratified Syrian control of Lebanon, allowing him to back down without loss of face.²⁸ Actually, the main dispute concerned Syria's damming of the Euphrates River, and Iraq successfully coerced Syria into releasing the same water flow as before.²⁹

25. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, pp. 257–258.

26. Pollack does not provide evidence on Hussein's expectations about Iranian escalation or which side the main initiator of the 1974 fighting was on. On these events, see David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), p. 337.

27. Efraim Karsh, "Geopolitical Determinism: The Origins of the Iran-Iraq War," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring 1991), pp. 256–268, at pp. 263–265; McDowall, *A History of the Kurds*, pp. 323–339; Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 12–17; Edmund Ghareeb, "The Roots of Crisis: Iraq and Iran," in Christopher C. Joyner, ed., *The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for Strategy, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York: Greenwood, 1990), pp. 21–38, at pp. 28–29. The source cited by Pollack (Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* [New York: Free Press, 1991], pp. 70–81) supports the same interpretation as the others.

28. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, p. 258, writes that Iraqi forces were not "logistically prepared to mount an offensive across the breadth of the Syrian desert to reach Damascus or other Syrian population centers," but he does not provide evidence that Hussein had such plans.

29. Ibrahim Kaya, "The Euphrates-Tigris Basin: An Overview and Opportunities for Cooperation under International Law," *Arid Lands Newsletter*, No. 44 (Fall/Winter 1998); and Aysegül Kibaroglu and I.H. Olcay Ünver, "An Institutional Framework for Facilitating Cooperation in the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin," n.d., <http://www.hidropolitik.hacettepe.edu.tr/KibarogluUnver.doc>, p. 7.

Third, in 1980 when Hussein invaded Iran in the midst of its revolution, he underrated Iran's capacity for resistance, which Pollack deems "another colossal miscalculation that nearly cost him everything."³⁰ This assessment overstates both the error and the risk. Most of the world's major powers made the same misjudgment, and several—including the United States—supported Iraq in the war because they saw Iran as the greater threat to regional peace.³¹

Fourth, Pollack asserts that Hussein probably could not have been deterred from invading Kuwait in August 1990 because he had "made up his mind that he was willing to fight the world's only remaining superpower" and that "he believed he could defeat the expected American response."³² Pollack bases this speculation on interviews given by Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in mid-1991 in which Aziz provided two contradictory arguments as to why the war should be blamed on the United States. Aziz had an obvious motive to blame anyone but his own regime, however, and his claims should not be considered credible.³³ Pollack does not explain why he chooses to believe Aziz on this issue, though not on others such as Aziz's many denials over the years regarding Iraqi WMD and aggressive intentions.

There is no good reason to doubt the conventional understanding of this incident, namely that Hussein was misled by a series of U.S. official statements that the United States did not consider itself obligated to defend the territorial integrity of Kuwait. The most famous was Ambassador to Kuwait April Glaspie's "green light" of July 25, 1991, when she told Hussein just eight days before the invasion that the United States had "no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait."³⁴ On July 31 John Kelly, assistant secretary of state for Middle East affairs, repeated this position to Congress; the same week the State Department spokeswoman, Margaret Tutwiler, echoed these statements.³⁵ The interpretation of this case best sup-

30. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, pp. 258–259.

31. On U.S. aid to Iraq, see Michael Dobbs, "U.S. Had Key Role in Iraq Buildup," *Washington Post*, December 29, 2002.

32. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, pp. 261–262 (emphasis in original).

33. In one interview Aziz claimed that the Kuwait border dispute did not come up in the meeting with Ambassador Glaspie, while in the other he acknowledged the standard account of that meeting, but said that because the United States had decided to crush Iraq, there was nothing to lose. "Aziz Denies Glaspie Gave Green Light," *Washington Times*, May 31, 1991; and Milton Viorst, "Report from Baghdad," *New Yorker*, June 24, 1991, pp. 58–73, at pp. 66–67.

34. Glaspie further told Hussein that "[Secretary of State] James Baker had directed [her] to emphasize this instruction." Quoted in Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf, *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 130.

35. Kelly argued against imposing sanctions. He also blocked the sending of a warning to Iraq over its troop mobilization. Hearing of the Europe and Middle East Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, July 31, 1990; Jim Hoagland, ". . . And the Tale of a Transcript," *Wash-*

ported by the evidence is that deterrence failed not because Hussein was unusually willing to run risks, but because the United States could not declare that it would fight for Kuwait because that decision was not made until after the invasion took place.³⁶

Fifth, Pollack argues that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Hussein was not deterred from using chemical weapons during the 1991 Gulf War by President George H.W. Bush's famous January 1991 warning that if Iraq used such weapons, "the American people would demand the strongest possible response," which was widely understood to mean nuclear retaliation. Pollack says that Bush's threat covered not only chemical attacks on U.S. troops but also sabotage of Kuwait's oil wells and terrorist attacks. Although Iraqi forces did not use chemical weapons, they did set fire to the oil fields. Pollack thus implies that Hussein was willing to risk nuclear retaliation.³⁷

This speculation however, relies on an aggressive and probably wrong reading of the U.S. threat, of which there were two versions: Secretary of State James Baker's verbal presentation to Aziz, which linked U.S. revenge only to chemical attacks on U.S. troops,³⁸ and Bush's January 1991 warning, which can be read as applying the threat to any of the three provocations.³⁹ The best witness on this is Baker himself, who described both Bush's warning and his own remarks as threatening revenge only for chemical attacks on U.S. forces.⁴⁰ Even

ington Post, September 17, 1990; and Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 463–464.

36. Glaspie, Powell, and CENTCOM Commander Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf all state or imply that many in the U.S. government were prepared to live with the limited incursion into northern Kuwait that was expected. Schwarzkopf and Powell say that in meetings they attended during the first three days after the invasion, President George H.W. Bush did not show interest in reversing the conquest by force. Elaine Sciolino, "Deskbound in U.S., the Envoy to Iraq Is Called Scapegoat for a Failed Policy," *New York Times*, September 12, 1990; Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam, 1992), pp. 293–302; and Powell, *My American Journey*, pp. 461–467.

37. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, p. 265.

38. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, NES-92-009, Near East and South Asia Daily Reports, January 14, 1991, p. 27.

39. The key passage of the warning reads: "The United States will not tolerate the use of chemical or biological weapons or the destruction of Kuwaiti oilfields and installations. Further, you will be held directly responsible for terrorist actions against any member of the coalition." It goes on in the next paragraph: "The American people would demand the strongest possible response. You and your country will pay a terrible price if you order unconscionable acts of this sort." Quoted in Sifry and Cerf, *The Gulf War Reader*, p. 179. It is unclear whether this was meant to threaten the same retaliation for any of the three provocations, or some retaliation for any of them.

40. Baker reports, "I purposely left the impression that use of chemical or biological agents by Iraq could lead to nuclear retaliation." He also states, "The President's letter . . . made it very clear that if Iraq used weapons of mass destruction, chemical weapons, against United States forces that the American people would demand vengeance and that we had the means to achieve it." Baker with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York:

without Baker's testimony, it would be unclear why anyone—Bush, Hussein, or anyone else—would treat a threat over damage to inanimate objects as seriously as one over murderous attacks on people. When the oil fields actually were burned, there was no outcry from either the U.S. government or the American public for retaliation.

Sixth, Pollack asserts that Hussein should have realized sooner that Iraq was going to be defeated in the first Gulf War.⁴¹ However, many Western defense experts also underestimated how easily coalition forces would prevail.⁴² Further, as the damage inflicted by coalition air power became apparent by mid-February, Hussein did move to end the war, offering to withdraw from Kuwait unconditionally. No deal was reached because the United States insisted on a schedule that would have forced the Iraqi army to abandon most of its heavy equipment. Hussein calculated that he could save more by a fighting withdrawal, and was proved right.⁴³

Finally, Pollack claims that Hussein gave orders to assassinate former President Bush in Kuwait in 1993, an accusation also made by George W. Bush.⁴⁴ In response to intelligence supporting this claim, President Bill Clinton ordered the launch of retaliatory strikes. The evidence of the plot, however, is weak. It consists mainly of the confessions of two of the seventeen plot suspects, likely under torture,⁴⁵ and an FBI claim that the remote-control firing device of the bomb meant to kill the former president had a "signature" that tied it to Iraqi intelligence, a claim disputed by both internal and independent experts.⁴⁶ A

Putnam, 1995), p. 359; and Baker interview, PBS *Frontline*, January 9, 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/baker/3.html>.

41. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, pp. 262–263.

42. Joel Achenbach, "The Experts, in Retreat: After-the-Fact Explanations for Gloomy Predictions," *Washington Post*, February 28, 1991; Jon Margolis, "War Shoots Professional Pundits to Stardom—Even If They Were Wrong," *Chicago Tribune*, March 17, 1991; and Jacob Weisberg, "Gulfballs," *New Republic*, March 25, 1991, pp. 17–19.

43. Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 214–219.

44. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, pp. 152, 156–157; and George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at John Cornyn for Senate Reception," September 26, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020926-17.html>.

45. In April 1993 the Kuwaitis arrested a known smuggler and his companions who were trying to walk back to Iraq after their car broke down. Following several days of interrogation, one confessed to a plot to assassinate Bush on behalf of Iraqi intelligence and revealed a cache of explosives. The FBI purportedly believed that the confessions were free and truthful, but James Atkins, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, argued, "There is no way the Kuwaitis would not have tortured them, . . . as anybody who knows the Kuwaitis or the Middle East can tell you."

46. An FBI analyst who reported that his analysis showed the explosives did not match known Iraqi designs was fired; later an inspector general's report vindicated his findings. Seven inde-

leaked CIA assessment suggested that the Kuwaitis might have fabricated the story to impress the U.S. government with the continuing Iraqi threat.⁴⁷ It remains unclear whether there was a plot or who might have been behind it. Bush and Pollack took ambiguous evidence and asserted a possible interpretation as a certain fact.

Contrary to claims by the Bush administration and other prowar advocates, the record does not show that Saddam Hussein was especially difficult to deter. He was a vicious dictator and had international ambitions, but paid attention to limiting risk and took U.S. power very seriously.⁴⁸ Hussein's behavior since the first Gulf War showed him to have been successfully deterred at almost every turn. After the war, Hussein acquiesced in the loss of part of northern Iraq rather than fight the United States and Britain to retake it. He also acquiesced in the destruction of his nuclear weapons program by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors in 1991–92, and apparently also eventually suspended his chemical and biological weapons programs for fear of the consequences of discovery. After the passage of United Nations Security Council resolution 1441 in November 2002, Iraq cooperated with intrusive inspections to a degree rarely seen in a country not militarily occupied. All of this suggests not a crazed aggressor prone to wild chances, but a ruler profoundly concerned with retaining power and aware that his greatest danger was that the United States might exert itself to remove him. In sum, Bush administration assertions that Hussein might be undeterrable had little foundation.

INVENTING LINKS TO SEPTEMBER 11 AND TO AL-QA'IDA: SADDAM THE TERRORIST

The second main component in the Bush administration's strategy for shifting the issue from containment to deterrence was to persuade Americans that Hussein was cooperating with terrorists who were already attacking American civilians.

pendent experts consulted by the journalist Seymour Hersh all told him that the bomb parts were mass production items used for walkie-talkies and similar devices. Scott Shane, "Ten Years Ago, the World Was Told Iraqi Agents Tried to Kill the President's Father. But Did It Actually Happen?" *Baltimore Sun*, February 23, 2003; and Seymour Hersh, "A Case Not Closed," *New Yorker*, November 1, 1993, pp. 80–92.

47. Paul Quinn-Judge, "CIA Report Casts Doubt on Kuwait Assertion of Plot on Bush; Bid for Tougher US Line on Iraq Seen as Motive," *Boston Globe*, May 27, 1993.

48. For a good summary of the problem and of Hussein's record, see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *Can Saddam Be Contained? History Says Yes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2002).

Administration officials made two main claims in this regard, neither of which was supported by credible evidence. The first was that Hussein was personally responsible for assisting in the September 11 attacks. This assertion was based on an alleged meeting between Mohammed Atta, the pilot of the first plane to hit the Twin Towers, and an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague in April 2001. The source for this was a single Czech informant whom Czech intelligence reported was not credible.⁴⁹ The FBI and the CIA quickly also concluded that no such meeting had taken place. Evidence suggested that Atta had been in Virginia at the time in question.⁵⁰ Administration officials nevertheless continued to repeat the story despite the lack of evidence. Vice President Dick Cheney stated in September 2002, "We have reporting that places [Atta] in Prague with a senior Iraqi intelligence official a few months before September 11. . . . It is credible."⁵¹ In one of the few Iraq threat claims that the administration has retracted, President Bush acknowledged in September 2003, "We've had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with September the 11th."⁵²

The administration's second main claim linking Iraq to al-Qa'ida concerned Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the head of a mainly Jordanian and Palestinian terrorist group called al-Tawhid. In September 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said that he had "bulletproof evidence" of a link between Hussein and al-Qa'ida.⁵³ The fullest version of this claim came in Powell's famous

49. John Tagliabue, "No Evidence Suspect Met Iraqi in Prague," *New York Times*, October 20, 2001; and Michael Isikoff, "The Phantom Link to Iraq: A Spy Story Tying Saddam to 9-11 Is Looking Very Flimsy," *Newsweek*, April 28, 2002, web exclusive.

50. The FBI was initially agnostic on the issue, but by April 2002 both agencies had been telling administration officials "for months" that there was nothing to the story. Patrick E. Tyler, "U.S. Drops Last Link of Iraq to 9/11," *New York Times*, May 2, 2002; Isikoff, "The Phantom Link to Iraq"; and Cam Simpson, "Al Qaeda Allegation Is Weakest Link in Justifying War," *Chicago Tribune*, March 20, 2003.

51. Vice President Richard B. Cheney, NBC *Meet the Press*, September 8, 2002. See also Richard N. Perle, "The U.S. Must Strike at Saddam Hussein," *New York Times*, December 28, 2001; Rice, CNN *Late Edition*, September 8, 2002; David S. Cloud, "Missing Links: Bush Efforts to Tie Hussein to al Qaeda Lack Clear Evidence," *Wall Street Journal*, October 23, 2002; Bob Drogin and Paul Richter, "Bush Backing Atta-Iraq Link," *Houston Chronicle*, August 2, 2002; and Michael Isikoff, "Looking for a Link," *Newsweek*, August 19, 2002, p. 10.

52. Bush, media availability, Federal Document Clearing House, September 17, 2003. The story resurfaced in December 2003, when a British newspaper published what purported to be a memo from the former head of Iraqi intelligence to Hussein reporting on Atta's training for the September 11 attacks in Baghdad in the summer of 2001. U.S. law enforcement and intelligence officials, and an Iraqi document expert, describe the document as inconsistent with Atta's known movements and most likely a forgery. Con Coughlin, "Does This Link Saddam to 9/11?" *Sunday Telegraph*, December 14, 2003; and Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball, "Dubious Link between Atta and Saddam," *Newsweek Online*, December 19, 2003.

53. Eric Schmitt, "Rumsfeld Says U.S. Has 'Bulletproof' Evidence of Iraq's Links to Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, September 28, 2002.

speech to the UN Security Council, where he made three assertions: (1) Iraq was “harboring” Zarqawi, “a collaborator of Osama bin Laden,” and had allowed him to “establish a base of operations [in Baghdad] for al Qaeda affiliates”; (2) “the Zarqawi network helped establish another poison and explosive training center” in a camp belonging to a mainly Kurdish Islamist group called Ansar al-Islam; and (3) “Baghdad has an agent in the most senior levels” of Ansar.⁵⁴

Zarqawi and Ansar al-Islam may indeed have been allied to al-Qa’ida; since the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Zarqawi has sought al-Qa’ida’s help in organizing resistance to the occupation.⁵⁵ There was no evidence, however, that Ansar or Zarqawi was cooperating with Hussein. Ansar al-Islam was formed in 2001 for the purpose of overthrowing Hussein’s regime and transforming Iraq into an Islamic state. It operated in an area of northern Iraq not under Baghdad’s control.⁵⁶ Before Powell’s speech, U.S. intelligence officials had complained both privately and publicly that the evidence did not support administration claims.⁵⁷ Afterward a senior U.S. government official admitted that it was not known whether the Iraqi “agent” in Ansar represented any form of influence or was simply an informer. Meanwhile CIA Director George Tenet told the Senate Intelligence Committee that he could not characterize Iraq’s relationship with Zarqawi as “‘control’ in any way, shape or form.”⁵⁸ Powell retracted the Zarqawi claims in January 2004.⁵⁹

54. Colin L. Powell, “Remarks to the United Nations Security Council,” February 5, 2003, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/17300.html>. Similarly Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, briefing transcript, Federal Information and News Dispatch, August 20, 2002; Bush, speech at the Cincinnati Museum Center, October 7, 2002; and President George W. Bush, press conference, March 6, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/print/20030306-8.html>.

55. Peter Finn and Susan Schmidt, “Al Qaeda Is Trying to Open Iraq Front; Plot Said to Be Hatched in Iran Last February,” *Washington Post*, September 7, 2003. The letter as translated by the Coalition Provisional Authority is available at http://www.cpa-iraq.org/transcripts/20040212_zarqawi_full.html.

56. Ansar’s leader in exile, Najm al-Din Faraj Ahmad, told the Associated Press, “If the United States removed Saddam, it would be a good deed [although] I do not support an invasion of Iraq since that would be a war for oil.” “U.S. Suspicious If Ansar al-Islam Has Ties to al-Qaida,” Associated Press, February 6, 2003; Walter Pincus, “Alleged Al Qaeda Ties Questioned; Experts Scrutinize Details of Accusations against Iraqi Government,” *Washington Post*, February 7, 2003; and Karl Vick, “In Remote Corner of Iraq, an Odd Alliance; Enclave of Militant Kurds and Arabs Tied to Al Qaeda Likely to Be a Target of War,” *Washington Post*, March 12, 2003.

57. Michael Smith, “Spies Force Retreat on ‘al-Qa’eda Link,’” *Telegraph* (London), February 4, 2003.

58. Simpson, “Al Qaeda Allegation Is Weakest Link in Justifying War.” See also Pincus, “Alleged Al Qaeda Ties Questioned.”

59. In contrast to the certainty asserted earlier, Powell stated, “I have not seen smoking-gun, concrete evidence about the connection. But I think the possibility of such connections did exist, and it

Significant cooperation between Hussein and al-Qa'ida was always implausible, because the Iraqi Ba'athists were exactly the sort of secularists that bin Laden blamed for the corruption of Muslim society and for its defeats at the hands of Christians and Jews. Over the years, bin Laden consistently denounced Hussein in the strongest terms. Even the intense American pressure on both individuals after September 2001 failed to drive them together.⁶⁰ As late as February 2003, when bin Laden called on the Iraqi people to resist a U.S. invasion, he still showed only disgust for Hussein's regime: "It is not harmful in such conditions for the Muslims' interests and socialists' interests to come along with each other during the war against the crusade, without changing our faith and our declaration that socialists are infidels. Socialists' leadership had fallen down a long time ago. Socialists are infidels wherever they are, either in Baghdad or Aden."⁶¹ In fact, Hussein provided far less practical support to terrorism than did Syria, Iran, Yemen, or sources in some friendly countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.⁶² During the 1990s, Hussein's material support for terrorism was apparently limited to payments to families of Palestinian suicide bombers, a practice also of donors in other Arab states. There was thus no basis for an expectation that Hussein would give weapons of mass destruction to terrorists who might use them against the United States.⁶³

INFLATING IRAQI WMD THREATS: THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM THAT DID NOT EXIST

In addition to introducing the new issue of the deterrability of Hussein, administration officials sought to persuade Americans that Iraq could not be contained from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, meaning that Hussein would be able to carry out the horrific intentions attributed to him. They

was prudent to consider them." Quoted in Christopher Marquis, "Powell Admits No Hard Proof in Linking Iraq to Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, January 9, 2004.

60. The CIA warned that al-Qa'ida might "capitalize on the chaos created by any military conflict [in Iraq] to strike at American troops," but it did not expect this to be based on "any kind of coordination between [Hussein] and al-Qa'ida operatives." John L. Lumpkin, "CIA Warns of al-Qaida Plot on U.S. Forces," *AP Online*, March 9, 2003.

61. "Transcript of Osama bin Laden Tape Broadcast on al-Jazeera," Associated Press, February 11, 2003.

62. In early 2002, CIA officials reported that they had no evidence that Iraq had engaged in terrorism against Americans for nearly a decade. James Risen, "Terror Acts by Baghdad Have Waned, U.S. Aides Say," *New York Times*, February 6, 2002.

63. The CIA reported to the Senate Armed Services Committee on October 2, 2002, that it judged this possibility unlikely. "CIA Letter on Baghdad's Intentions," *New York Times*, October 9, 2002.

claimed that he possessed large arsenals of chemical and biological weapons and was close to acquiring nuclear weapons.

The allegations about Iraq's nuclear potential were the most important to the administration's case for war because only the prospect of nuclear attack could frighten Americans to a degree qualitatively more terrible than September 11. The administration made four claims about the Iraqi nuclear threat. First, President Bush proclaimed in September 2002 that after the first Gulf War, IAEA inspectors had found that Iraq was just "six months away from developing a [nuclear] weapon."⁶⁴ This claim was of no direct relevance to current threats in 2002–03, but was important because it largely became conventional wisdom and was used by administration officials to discredit IAEA and CIA assessments that Iraq was not close to building a nuclear weapon. According to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, "Some have argued that the nuclear threat from Iraq is not imminent—that Saddam is at least 5–7 years away from having nuclear weapons. I would not be so certain. Before Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the best intelligence estimates were that Iraq was at least 5–7 years away. . . . The experts were flat wrong."⁶⁵ Second, the administration declared that Iraq had continued a productive nuclear weapons program after 1991, despite the inspections designed to dismantle it and the ongoing sanctions. According to Vice President Cheney, "For 12 years [Hussein] has violated [his agreements], pursuing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons even while UN inspectors were in Iraq."⁶⁶ Third, President Bush and other officials argued in 2002 that only immediate war could prevent Iraq from completing a nuclear bomb. Cheney said that Iraq had "reconstituted its nuclear weapons program" and that "many of us are convinced that Saddam Hussein will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon. Just how soon, we cannot really gauge."⁶⁷ Fourth, Bush and other officials contended that because Iraq already possessed a design for

64. "Text of President Bush's News Conference," Associated Press, September 7, 2002.

65. "Rumsfeld's Remarks before the House Armed Services Committee," Federal News Service, September 18, 2002. Similarly, Cheney, speech to VFW convention, August 26, 2002; and Rice, *CNN Late Edition*, September 8, 2002.

66. "Vice President's Remarks at 30th Political Action Conference," January 30, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/print/20030130-16.html>. See also *A Decade of Deception and Defiance* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 12, 2002), pp. 9–10; and Bush, speech at the Cincinnati Museum Center, October 7, 2002.

67. Cheney, *NBC Meet the Press*, September 8, 2002; and Cheney, speech to VFW convention, August 26, 2002. Richard N. Perle claimed that Iraq already had a functioning uranium enrichment capacity: "Saddam is not using nuclear reactors any more to make fissile material. . . . He is using centrifuge[s] in other facilities that can be relatively small." Testimony before the House International Relations Committee, Federal Document Clearing House, September 19, 2002.

a nuclear weapon, “with [imported] fissile material [it] could build [a bomb] within a year.”⁶⁸

The first three claims were wholly inaccurate. Although Hussein may still have been interested in acquiring nuclear weapons, evidence available both inside and outside the U.S. government throughout the mid-1990s as well as the first two years of the Bush administration showed beyond reasonable doubt that by 2002 Iraq had not had an active nuclear weapons program for more than a decade. It also almost certainly could not have reconstituted an indigenous program as long as sanctions remained in place. The fourth claim, concerning nuclear smuggling, was not impossible, but unlikely. The only evidence that Iraq was seeking to acquire fissile material turned out to be fabricated. Moreover, by 2002 Iraq lacked the capability to enrich imported uranium or to manufacture a weapon even if it could have acquired weapons-grade material.

Contrary to later Bush administration claims, pre-1991 assessments of Iraq’s nuclear weapons programs were basically accurate. IAEA inspections after the first Gulf War found that—based on optimistic assumptions for Iraq—it was at least eighteen months and probably four to five years away from producing enough U-235 to build a nuclear weapon.

Would-be nuclear proliferators confront three main challenges: design; “weaponization,” or actual fabrication of a weapon; and acquisition of the necessary fissile material—either plutonium or U-235—for the bomb core. Basic design is today considered only a moderate technical challenge, and Iraq probably had a viable design. It probably had not succeeded in weaponization by 1991. The IAEA concluded, however, that it was “prudent to assume” that Iraq might achieve weaponization by the time it produced enough fissile material for a bomb.⁶⁹ The most difficult challenge is obtaining the fissile material that forms the weapon core. The easiest method is extraction of plutonium from

68. “Transcript of President’s Remarks on Iraq Resolution,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2002; and Cheney, *NBC Meet the Press*, September 8, 2002. This claim also appears in *Iraq’s Weapon of Mass Destruction Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, October 4, 2002), p. 1; and *Proliferation: Threat and Response* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, January 2001), p. 40.

69. “Report on the 7th IAEA On-site Inspection in Iraq under Security Council Resolution 687,” UN Security Council S/23215, November 14, 1991; and “Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051,” S/1997/779, October 8, 1997, pp. 56, 59. Most of the IAEA reports are available at <http://www.iaea.org/worldatom/Programmes/ActionTeam/nwp2.html>. See also David Albright and Mark Hibbs, “Iraq’s Bomb: Blueprints and Artifacts,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (January/February 1992), pp. 30–40, at p. 35.

spent reactor fuel, but Israel's destruction of the incomplete Osiraq reactor in 1981 eliminated this option for Iraq.⁷⁰ Starting in 1982, Iraq attempted uranium enrichment efforts using electromagnetic isotope separation (EMIS) and gas centrifuge cascades, but both programs were plagued by difficulties involving the import of critical components, materials shortages, and quality control.⁷¹

By 1991, Iraq had completed only eight of ninety separators for the first of two planned EMIS facilities, and these achieved only about 20 percent of the expected efficiency. Maintenance and malfunction problems were also serious. The IAEA's ultimate conclusion on Iraq's EMIS effort was that it "would have required extraordinary good fortune" to enrich enough enrichment for one-half to one weapon per year by 1994.⁷²

Iraq began its gas centrifuge effort in 1987. The program was hampered by difficulties in importing duraluminum for cylinders, maraging steel for rotors, carbon-fiber winding machines, frequency converters, balancing machinery, and other items. Quality-control problems were also serious.⁷³ Only one of 120 centrifuges for a pilot cascade was completed, and no progress was made toward a 1,000-unit production facility planned to yield material for half a weapon per year by 1994. The IAEA assessed that Iraq's program was "behind schedule and it is doubtful whether the lost time could have been made up."

70. Plutonium can be separated from uranium chemically, but U-235 can be separated from the more common U-238 only by physical processes that have high technical demands and low efficiency. On requirements for different approaches, see Allan S. Krass, Peter Boskma, Boelie Elzen, and Wim A. Smit, *Uranium Enrichment and Nuclear Weapons Proliferation* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1983); and Robert F. Mozley, *Uranium Enrichment and Other Technical Problems Relating to Nuclear Weapons Proliferation* (Stanford, Calif.: Center for International Security and Arms Control, Stanford University, 1994).

71. Iraq's two small research reactors at Tuwaiha yielded only about 5 grams of plutonium before they were destroyed during the first Gulf War. "Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051," pp. 15, 19, 35–38, 53–54, 74.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36, 45; David Albright, Frans Berkhout, and William Walker, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium, 1996: World Inventories, Capabilities, and Policies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 320–321, 326. A pilot facility that operated from 1985 to 1991 produced 640 grams of material enriched to an average of 7.2 percent, or somewhat less than 1/1,000 of the separative work needed to produce a weapon.

73. "Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051," pp. 38–42, 46–47; "Report on the 4th On-site Inspection," S/22986, August 28, 1991; Albright, Berkhout, and Walker, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium, 1996*, pp. 331–335; Albright and Hibbs, "Iraq's Bomb," p. 39; and David Albright and Mark Hibbs, "Iraq's Shop-Till-You-Drop Nuclear Program," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (April 1992), pp. 27–37.

Assuming no further delays,⁷⁴ this rate might have been achieved by 1995, with expansion after that. The most thorough independent analyses confirm the IAEA findings.⁷⁵ The 1995 date was not impossible, but given the known delays and roadblocks in both enrichment programs, it appears optimistic. Fabrication of an actual weapon would likely have taken a year or less, so Iraq might have been able to produce one by 1996.

Separate from the two main programs, in August 1990 Hussein ordered a “crash program” to divert the highly enriched uranium (HEU) cores of Iraq’s two small research reactors to quickly build a single crude weapon. Inspections immediately after the war showed that all this fuel was still accounted for, meaning that no work beyond planning was actually done.⁷⁶ It is unclear whether the plan was even feasible; estimates of time scales if it did succeed range between one and a half and four years.⁷⁷

During the debate before the second Gulf War, the Bush administration used the 1990–91 crash program to argue that Iraq might have been able to produce a nuclear weapon suddenly and unexpectedly. This was an unreasonable conclusion, since such an effort would have required a substantial stock of high-grade HEU, which Iraq no longer possessed because it had all been removed after the first war.

Iraq’s nuclear weapons program was wholly dismantled by IAEA inspections after the first Gulf War. By November 1992 the IAEA had removed, destroyed, or confirmed Iraqi destruction of all uranium handling, reprocessing, enrichment, weapons fabrication, and research facilities and equipment, as

74. The Iraqis also still faced the challenge of learning to operate centrifuges in cascades, “which is a complex task requiring considerable time-consuming development work.” “Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051,” pp. 42, 45–46.

75. Albright, Berkhout, and Walker, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium*, 1996, pp. 341–342.

76. “Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051,” pp. 48–52. Debriefing of Gen. Hussein Kamel, former director of the Iraqi ministry of industry and military industrialization, Amman, Jordan, August 22, 1995, <http://www.casi.org.uk/info/unscom950822.pdf>.

77. There may not have been sufficient fissile material given inevitable process losses, nor was Iraq ready to produce the 50 centrifuges needed for further enrichment of the material, or to operate multiunit centrifuge cascades. “Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051,” pp. 48–49, 51–52; David Albright and Robert Kelley, “Has Iraq Come Clean at Last?” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 51, No. 6 (November/December 1995), pp. 53–64. A CIA assessment in the fall of 1990 came to the same conclusion, as did an (unnamed) Arab country intelligence service, which reported, “[Hussein’s] people are telling him it’s close to impossible, but he is pushing for it.” Patrick E. Tyler, “Specialists See Iraq Unlikely to Build A-Bomb in Near Future,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1990.

well as all plutonium, enriched uranium, and centrifuge feed material. In 1996–97 IAEA inspectors recovered some additional equipment that the Iraqis had tried to destroy or had hidden in 1991.⁷⁸

Unlike chemical and biological weapons production facilities, which can be small and mobile, uranium enrichment and nuclear weapons fabrication installations are substantial and immobile. Thus the IAEA was eventually able to rate the possibility of undetected duplicate facilities as “remote.”⁷⁹ Before the IAEA suspended inspections in December 1998,⁸⁰ it was able to report, “There are no indications that there remains in Iraq any physical capability for the production of amounts of weapons-usable nuclear material of any practical significance.”⁸¹

Administration claims in 2002–03 that Iraq had “reconstituted its nuclear weapons program” ignored the lack of evidence that Iraq had any uranium enrichment capability or the means of reconstituting any for the foreseeable future. In the fall of 2002, U.S. and allied intelligence agencies agreed that Iraq would need at least four to eight years to produce enough fissile material for a weapon (CIA); “five or more years and key foreign assistance” (Defense Department);⁸² or between five years and never, depending on whether sanctions continued (the “British Report” of September 2002): “While sanctions remain effective,” the report stated, “Iraq would not be able to produce a nuclear weapon. If they were removed or proved ineffective, it would take Iraq at least five years to produce sufficient fissile material for a weapon indigenously.”⁸³

The only significant claim that the Bush administration was able to make

78. Some less sensitive material remained in storage under IAEA seal and continued to be verified during 1998–2002, while other inspections were suspended. “Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051,” pp. 5–10, 15–16, 19, 25, 29, 31–34; and “IAEA Update Report for the Security Council Pursuant to Resolution 1441,” January 27, 2003, p. A05.

79. “Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051,” p. 21.

80. The suspension was mainly a response to the Iraqis’ obstruction of searches for chemical, biological, and ballistic missile programs; the nuclear issues were largely settled by 1996–97.

81. “Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the IAEA under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051,” p. 21; and “Fact Sheet: Iraq’s Nuclear Weapon Programme,” December 27, 2002. CIA assessments agreed; between 1997 and 2000, its annual reports to Congress on nuclear proliferation worldwide either do not mention Iraq or describe Iraqi efforts as limited to “low-level theoretical R&D.” Knut Royce, “Was CIA Pressured? Tone of Reports on Iraq Shifted under Bush,” *Newsday*, July 18, 2003, p. A05.

82. British Foreign Ministry, *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction: An Assessment of the British Government*, September 24, 2002, <http://www.pm.gov.uk/files/pdf/iraqdossier.pdf>, p. 1; and *Proliferation: Threat and Response*, p. 40.

83. British Foreign Ministry, *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction*, pp. 26–27.

alleging Iraqi attempts to reconstitute its indigenous nuclear weapons program was discredited by internal analyses before it was made public. Starting in September 2002, administration officials asserted that Iraq was trying to import “high-quality aluminum [tubes] that are only really suited for nuclear weapons programs, centrifuge programs.”⁸⁴ CIA, Department of Energy, and State Department analysts, however, had already concluded that the evidence did not support that interpretation.⁸⁵ Further, independent experts as well as the IAEA pointed out that Iraq’s centrifuge program had abandoned the use of the alloy in question before 1991; that the tubes had coatings suitable for use in rockets but not for centrifuges; and that they were consistent with parts for mortar shell casings of a type that Iraq had been using for fifteen years. The number ordered—120,000—was wildly excessive for uranium enrichment but consistent with artillery use. IAEA analysts who examined the tubes determined that it was “highly unlikely” they could be used in centrifuges.⁸⁶ Moreover, even had the accusation been valid, centrifuge casings would have comprised only a tiny portion of the high-technology equipment Iraq would have needed to resume uranium enrichment.

Before the war, four months of unrestricted, essentially unhindered IAEA inspections from December 2002 to March 2003 eliminated virtually all remaining doubt. The inspectors were able to establish that there was “no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq.”⁸⁷ The IAEA further determined that it was feasible, “particularly with an intrusive verification system, to assess the presence or absence of a nuclear weapons programme in a state even without the full co-operation of the inspected state.”⁸⁸ Any resumed effort would have faced tall barriers, including Iraq’s in-

84. Rice, CNN *Late Edition*, September 8, 2002; Cheney, NBC *Meet the Press*, September 8, 2002; Director of Central Intelligence, “Key Judgments from National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq”; President George W. Bush, “State of the Union,” January 28, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>; and Powell, “Remarks to Security Council,” February 5, 2003.

85. Judith Miller, “White House Lists Iraq Steps to Build Banned Weapons,” *New York Times*, September 13, 2002; Cirincione et al., *WMD in Iraq*, pp. 16–18, 66; and Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), “Memorandum for the President,” May 1, 2003.

86. Joby Warrick, “U.S. Claim on Iraqi Nuclear Program Is Called Into Question,” *Washington Post*, January 24, 2003; and IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, “The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: Statement to the United Nations Security Council,” in Statements to the Director General, March 7, 2003, <http://iaea.org/NewsCenter/Statements/2003/ebsp2003n.006.shtml>.

87. ElBaradei, “Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq.” By March 7, 141 sites had been inspected, including 21 new sites suggested by “member states” (presumably mainly the United States), and 10 to 20 more by March 17. “Chronology of IAEA Inspections & Key Events, March 2003,” n.d.

88. ElBaradei, “The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: 14 February 2003 Update”; and ElBaradei, “Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq,” March 7, 2003. Some sites had been turned to

ability to produce many of the types of required equipment and intense international scrutiny.⁸⁹ The failure of U.S. search teams to find evidence of a reconstituted Iraqi nuclear weapons program since the second Gulf War have validated the IAEA findings. In October 2003 David Kay, the first head of the Iraq Survey Group, concluded that while “Saddam Husayn remained firmly committed to acquiring nuclear weapons,” the ISG has “not uncovered evidence that Iraq undertook significant post-1998 steps to actually build nuclear weapons or produce fissile material.” Further, “the evidence does not tie any activity directly to centrifuge research or development.”⁹⁰

The administration’s final claim—that with imported fissile material Iraq could quickly produce a nuclear weapon—was not impossible, but unlikely. In his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush claimed that Iraq was attempting to import uranium from Niger,⁹¹ even though the CIA had investigated the story in February 2002 and informed the White House that it was not credible and that the documents were forgeries.⁹² Two documents contained blatant anachronisms—one supposedly signed by a minister who had been out of power for eleven years. When the documents were provided to the IAEA, it too determined that they were “not authentic.”⁹³

Even if the Niger claim had been accurate, the nuclear smuggling argument

nonnuclear uses, but most “had deteriorated to such a degree that the resumption of nuclear activities would require substantial renovation.” There was an “absence of indications of resumed nuclear activities in buildings that had been identified through the use of satellite imagery as having been reconstructed or newly erected since 1998, [and an] absence of any indication of nuclear-related prohibited activities at any inspected sites.” “IAEA Update Report for the Security Council Pursuant to Resolution 1441,” January 27, 2003; and “The Work Programme of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Iraq Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1284 (1999),” March 19, 2003.

89. ElBaradei, “Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq,” March 7, 2003.

90. “Statement by David Kay on the Interim Progress Report on the Activities of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense, and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” October 2, 2003, http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2003/david_kay_10022003.html.

91. Bush, “State of the Union,” January 28, 2003; and “State Department Cites Gaps in Iraq Weapons Declaration,” State Department press release, Federal Information and News Dispatch, December 19, 2002. Secretary of State Powell and CIA Director Tenet had earlier told the story to closed sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

92. James Risen, “CIA Aides Feel Pressure in Preparing Iraqi Reports,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2003; and Dana Priest and Karen DeYoung, “CIA Questioned Documents Linking Iraq, Uranium Ore,” *Washington Post*, March 22, 2003.

93. ElBaradei, “Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq”; Louis Charbonneau, “Crude Fakes Back Iraq Nuclear Arms Claim—UN Source,” Reuters, March 25, 2003. The State Department eventually admitted that the documents were fakes. State Department press release, Federal Information and News Dispatch, March 14, 2003.

omitted three important points. First, uranium ore or any material of less than weapons grade would have been useless to Iraq because it did not possess enrichment capacity. Second, while Iraq might have solved the weaponization problems in principle, it never possessed all of the complex industrial capacities necessary to convert fissile material for use in an actual weapon; in addition, it no longer possessed many of those it once had.⁹⁴ Third, there was no evidence that Iraq was actively seeking fissile material. The administration's failure to assert that Iraq was actively pursuing weapons-grade material—which would have been far more threatening than the unenriched Niger uranium—can be taken as evidence that Bush officials had no such intelligence, even of the low quality of the Niger story.⁹⁵ The only relevant story in the open literature is an unverified claim that Iraq might have offered \$16,000 per kilogram for HEU (of unspecified enrichment level) to a source in Kazakhstan in 1992. There seems to be no record of any follow-up investigation.⁹⁶ The literature on “loose nukes” records efforts to seek fissile material by the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo, al-Qa'ida, and possibly the Taliban and Iran, but very little on Iraq after the first Gulf War.⁹⁷

Iraq's chances of acquiring weapons-grade material if it made a serious effort are difficult to estimate. Although there have been hundreds of reports of nuclear theft or smuggling since 1991, few have been verified, and most of the confirmed events involved low-grade radioactive materials.⁹⁸ Proliferation ex-

94. No estimate is available of how long it might have taken Iraq to build and rebuild these capacities. Fabrication is a lesser challenge than uranium enrichment, so it could likely have been done in some time frame, although this cannot be said certainly of a country that by 2002 could not produce its own tubes for mortar shell casings.

95. Until the 2001 annual report, CIA reports on nuclear proliferation did not mention the possibility that Iraq “may be attempting to acquire [nuclear] materials.” Royce, “Was CIA Pressured?”. The IAEA investigated all allegations brought to it of Iraqi uranium imports since 1990 and found none to be credible. “The Work Programme of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Iraq Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1284 (1999).”

96. Jeffrey Starr, quoted in Chris Flores, “Project Sapphire: A Nuclear Odyssey: Defusing a Lethal Legacy,” *News & Advance* (Lynchburg, Virginia), December 29, 2002. Contemporary press accounts say the U.S. government accused Iran, but not Iraq, of attempting to acquire Kazakh HEU. Center for Nonproliferation Studies, “Kazakhstan: Project Sapphire” (Monterey, Calif.: Monterey Institute for International Studies, September 28, 2001).

97. Matthew Bunn, Anthony Weir, and John P. Holdren, *Controlling Nuclear Warheads and Materials: A Report Card and Action Plan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, March 2003), pp. 179–186; Gavin Cameron, “Multi-Track Micro-Proliferation Lessons from Aum Shinrikyo and Al Qaeda,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (October–December 1999), pp. 277–309; and David Albright, “Al Qaeda's Nuclear Program: Through the Window of Seized Documents,” *Special Forum*, No. 47 (Berkeley, Calif.: Nautilus Institute, November 6, 2002).

98. In the worst confirmed incident, some 2 kilograms of weapons-grade HEU, less than one-fifth the amount required for a weapon, disappeared from a research center in Georgia in 1993. In

perts do consider “loose nukes” to be a serious problem, however, especially in Russia and some other former Soviet states, so the possibility cannot be ruled out.⁹⁹

INFLATING IRAQ’S CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL THREATS

Bush administration officials claimed that Iraq possessed large stocks of chemical and biological weapons and was continuing to produce more. Given the assertion that Iraq was close to acquiring nuclear weapons, charges about chemical and biological threats were not important in terms of the maximum damage that Americans might suffer. Also, the administration did not explain how invading Iraq could do much to reduce overall chemical or biological threats to the United States, since dozens of countries (including several that have done more than Iraq to assist terrorists) either possess such weapons or could develop them quickly.¹⁰⁰ Rather, these claims were important, especially given the weakness of the evidence of nuclear threats, to support the administration’s assertion that containment could not prevent Hussein from building weapons of mass destruction. They also served as an additional method of accusing Hussein of hostile intentions.

U.S. inspections after the second Gulf War showed that it was unlikely that Iraq had chemical or biological weapons or active weapons programs. In January 2004 David Kay stated, “I don’t think they existed.”¹⁰¹ However, because chemical and biological facilities are so much easier to hide than nuclear programs, this could not be known with certainty before the war. Iraq had possessed chemical and biological weapons before the first Gulf War and had not cooperated with UN inspectors between 1991 and 1998. Prior to the resump-

twelve more incidents, most involving smaller amounts of nonweapons-grade material, the material was recovered. *Trafficking in the Newly Independent States, 1991–2001* (Monterey, Calif.: Center for Nonproliferation Studies, December 30, 2001).

99. For instance, Egypt is said to have turned down offers to sell nuclear materials. Uri Benziman, “Mubarak Turns Down Bomb Offer,” *Ha’aretz*, June 19, 1998; see also Bunn, Weir, and Holdren, *Controlling Nuclear Warheads and Materials*; and Howard Baker and Lloyd Cutler, *A Report Card on the Department of Energy’s Non-proliferation Programs with Russia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Energy, 2001).

100. For instance, in 1999 a South African bioweapons specialist admitted that he had approached Libya, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Israel, and North Korea; in 2002 another attempted to sell FBI agents a genetically altered bacteria that causes gangrene, and promised anthrax, plague, salmonella, and botulism. Joby Warrick and John Mintz, “U.S. Declined South African Scientist’s Offer on Man-Made Pathogens,” *Washington Post*, April 20, 2003; and Joby Warrick, “Biotoxins Fall into Private Hands,” *Washington Post*, April 21, 2003.

101. “Ex-Arms Hunter Says Iraq Had No Banned Stockpiles,” Reuters, January 24, 2004. Kay told the U.S. Senate that some anthrax produced before 1991 was not accounted for, but that the Iraq Survey Group had not found evidence of WMD production since 1991. Kay, testimony before Senate Armed Services Committee, January 28, 2004.

tion of inspections in November 2002, many experts believed it likely that Iraq might have had active chemical and biological weapons programs.¹⁰²

Bush administration officials, however, did not admit to any uncertainty. Instead they asserted that they knew for certain that Iraq already possessed large stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. Secretary of State Powell declared, "We know that Saddam Hussein is determined to keep his weapons of mass destruction, is determined to make more." Meanwhile Vice President Cheney claimed, "[Hussein] has indeed stepped up his capacity to produce and deliver biological weapons [including smallpox]."¹⁰³ In March 2003 President Bush said that Iraq was moving "biological and chemical agents . . . every 12 to 24 hours."¹⁰⁴ Rumsfeld went further, maintaining that "we know where they are. They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south and north somewhat."¹⁰⁵

The administration did not produce credible evidence in support of these claims. Its most important public effort was Secretary of State Powell's February 5 presentation of a set of photographs to the Security Council that purportedly showed mobile biological weapons laboratories in trucks. Experts doubted these claims. Two trucks fitting the description that were found after the war turned out to be gas generators for filling weather balloons.¹⁰⁶ Administration claims were also inconsistent with the report in early March 2003 by Hans Blix, the UN's chief weapons inspector, who stated that no weapons had been found;¹⁰⁷ that after initial resistance, Iraq was now providing "proactive" cooperation; and that disarmament of Iraq could be completed in "not years, nor weeks, but months."¹⁰⁸ In retrospect, it appears probable that none of Iraq's WMD programs operated at more than a planning level after 1991.¹⁰⁹

102. Cirincione, Mathews, and Perkovich, *WMD in Iraq*, p. 15.

103. Powell, "Remarks to Security Council," February 5, 2003; and Cheney, *NBC Meet the Press*, September 8, 2002.

104. Bush, press conference, March 6, 2003; similarly President George W. Bush, speech to General Assembly, September 12, 2002; President George W. Bush, radio address, February 8, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030208.html>; and President George W. Bush, address to the nation, March 17, 2003.

105. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*, March 30, 2003, http://www.dod.gov/news/Mar2003/t03302003_t0330sdabcsteph.html.

106. Joby Warrick, "Despite Defectors' Accounts, Evidence Remains Anecdotal," *Washington Post*, February 6, 2003; and Judith Miller and William J. Broad, "Some Analysts of Iraq Trailers Reject Germ Use," *New York Times*, June 7, 2003.

107. The only exception was some short-range ballistic missiles, which were destroyed.

108. "Oral Introduction of the Twelfth Quarterly Report of UNMOVIC," March 7, 2003; and "UNMOVIC Twelfth Quarterly Report," S/2003/232, March 7, 2003, both at <http://www.unmovic.org>.

109. Barton Gellman, "Iraq's Arsenal Was Only on Paper," *Washington Post*, January 7, 2004; and Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2004), pp. 256–257.

Bush Administration Success in Swaying U.S. Public Opinion

The debate in the United States over the second Gulf War qualifies as a failure of the democratic marketplace of ideas. Numerous internal experts, independent experts, some media outlets and opposition politicians, and responsible international agencies all pointed out before the war that the Bush administration's claims concerning the Iraqi threat were not based on credible evidence. Nevertheless, the administration had succeeded in persuading most Americans, if not many foreigners, to accept its assessments.

The Bush administration's effort to shift the main issue in the Iraq debate from containment of potential regional aggression to deterrence of direct attacks on the United States was more or less completely successful, so much so that public debate in the months before the war includes few dissents from the proposition that Hussein was intensely motivated to attack Americans if he could. Polls in late 2002 showed that 70–90 percent of the American public believed that Hussein would sooner or later attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction.¹¹⁰ Between 45 percent and 66 percent also believed that he had assisted the September 11 attackers.¹¹¹ The administration's WMD claims were also widely accepted. Prewar polls showed that 55–69 percent of Americans believed that Hussein already possessed WMD, and better than 95 percent believed that he was building them.¹¹² In one poll, 69 percent believed that Iraq already had nuclear weapons, and in another, 80 percent thought this likely.¹¹³

These beliefs translated directly into American support for preventive war. There was a brief blip in support for invading Iraq immediately after September 11, 2001, with as high as 74 percent supporting this in November.¹¹⁴ Sup-

110. Gallup polls, September 13–16 and December 10–11, 2002; and Fox News polls, September 24–25 and December 3–4, 2002. No poll seems to have asked whether Hussein could be deterred.

111. Gallup poll, August 19–21, 2002; Pew polls, October 2–6, 2002 and February 12–18, 2003; and *New York Times* poll, March 11, 2003. One poll that allowed a choice between “directly involved in 9/11” and “working closely with Al Qaeda” found 20 percent and 56 percent agreeing, respectively. PIPA poll, February 12–18, 2003.

112. Gallup polls, February 8–10 and August 19–21, 2002; February 5 and February 7–9, 2003; and *Washington Post* polls, February 5 and February 6–9, 2003. Sixty-one percent to 90 percent of respondents believed Iraq was developing nuclear weapons.

113. Fox News poll, September 8–9, 2002; and *Time/CNN* poll, January 15–16, 2003.

114. Some support at this time may have been softer than it appeared, because many had not yet taken seriously the possibility of a full-scale invasion. In one poll in March 2002, 67 percent favored air strikes, but only 46 percent supported use of U.S. ground troops. Gallup polls, November 26–27, 2001, and March 22–24, 2002.

port for war then declined steadily, to about 50 percent in August 2002, when the administration began to ramp up its public campaign for removing Hussein by force. From this point onward, support for invasion rose gradually and more or less steadily to 66 percent in March 2003. The percentage favoring invasion even without UN sanction or allied cooperation rose from 20 percent in June 2002 to 45 percent in August 2002 and to 55 percent in March 2003, matching the evolution of the administration's public positions.¹¹⁵

The political class was also either persuaded or intimidated. Not one of the more than 30 senators and 100 representatives who attended hearings in July–October 2002 questioned administration claims concerning Hussein's intentions or the supposed Iraqi nuclear threat.¹¹⁶ Many of the 77 senators and 296 representatives who voted in October 2002 to authorize the president to use force against Iraq gave the nuclear threat as the main or one of the main reasons for their votes.

This failure of the marketplace of ideas was probably necessary to obtain political support for invading Iraq. If the public and opposition politicians had understood the weakness of the evidence of Hussein's determination to attack the United States, links to September 11 or al-Qa'ida, or nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons programs, the administration probably could not have made a persuasive case for war.¹¹⁷

The marketplace also has not operated to correct these misperceptions since the invasion. Although postwar searches failed to find evidence of Iraqi WMD or al-Qa'ida connections, a year after the March 2003 invasion, public belief in the administration's prewar threat claims had declined only slightly. According to polls taken between February and April 2004, 57 percent of Americans still believed that Iraq had possessed weapons of mass destruction, while 52 percent believed that Iraq still had WMD that have not yet been found.¹¹⁸ Forty-seven percent thought that "clear evidence that Iraq was supporting Al

115. Gallup polls, June 17–19 and August 19–21, 2002; March 14–15, 2003; and *New York Times* poll, March 11, 2003. For further analysis, see Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, "Misperceptions, Media, and the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 4 (Winter 2003–04), pp. 569–599.

116. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, July 31–August 1 and September 25–26, 2002; Senate Armed Services Committee, September 19, 2002; House International Relations Committee, September 19 and October 2–3, 2002; House Armed Services Committee, September 10, September 18, October 2, 2002; and House Government Reform Committee, September 24, 2002.

117. The few polls that asked respondents whether they would favor invading Iraq for objectives such as saving the Iraqi people from Hussein, promoting democracy, or safeguarding oil showed only small minorities in favor.

118. NBC News poll, March 6–8, 2004; and CBS News poll, February 24–27, 2004.

Qaeda has been found in Iraq,” while 36 percent believed that Hussein was personally involved in the September 11 attacks,¹¹⁹ and 55 percent that the U.S. invasion had been the right thing to do.¹²⁰ In one poll, 45 percent of Americans said that they would be as likely as before to accept such claims by President Bush, while 50 percent said they would be less likely.¹²¹

Public approval of President Bush’s conduct of the Iraq war and of his overall job performance did decline between March 2003 and April 2004, from 71 percent to 41–46 percent and from 71 percent to 46–52 percent, respectively.¹²² However, given the perseverance of public belief in the original rationales for the war, this probably represents dissatisfaction with the continuing armed resistance in Iraq and mounting U.S. casualties. If, however, rising costs in Iraq were to lead not only to reduced public support for the war itself but also to reduced receptiveness to foreign military adventures for a substantial length of time, that would count in favor of the marketplace of ideas theory.

Why the Marketplace Failed

Five factors were crucial in determining the outcome of the debate prior to the second Gulf War: (1) the administration’s ability to shift the framing of the issue from containment of potential Iraqi regional aggression to the question of whether Hussein could be deterred from direct attacks on Americans; (2) the ability of the White House to control the release of intelligence information; (3) the authority advantage of the presidency in national security policy debates; (4) the failure of countervailing institutions—mainly the press, independent experts, and opposition parties—on which the marketplace of ideas theory relies to combat threat inflation; and (5) the crisis atmosphere created by the shock of September 11.

POLITICAL MANIPULATION IN DEMOCRACIES

There is reason to doubt that the democratic marketplace of ideas can enforce policy accountability in the manner generally attributed to it. The argument for the relative superiority of democratic foreign policymaking is based on the

119. Harris poll, February 9–16, 2004; and CBS News poll, March 20–April 1, 2004. See also PIPA polls, June 2003; July 11–20, 2003; October 29–November 10, 2003; and March 16–22, 2004; and Gallup poll, December 19, 2003.

120. PIPA poll, March 16–22, 2004.

121. PIPA poll, July 11–20, 2003.

122. CNN/Harris polls March 29–30, 2003, and April 8, 2004; and CBS polls March 30, 2003, and April 23–27, 2004.

logic of the median voter, developed by Anthony Downs.¹²³ The potential costs of war give median voters strong incentives to scrutinize expansionist arguments. This logic allows relatively little scope for elite manipulation, at least when the marketplace of ideas functions well. A robust marketplace of ideas ensures thorough policy debate, making it unlikely that median voters will be persuaded by arguments that cannot withstand independent evaluation.¹²⁴

Median voter logic, however, applies primarily to situations in which voters are confronted with trade-offs between just two important values arrayed along a single value dimension. It also assumes that voters have fairly good understandings of the implications of different policy choices for their own interests, which in turn may require that the policy debate be framed in much the same way for a considerable time.

There is, however, another logic of public choice in democracies, based on Kenneth Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, which allows more scope for elite manipulation. Arrow showed that whenever there are three or more policy choices involving two or more value dimensions, no majoritarian system can reliably integrate preferences to produce something that can meaningfully be called the "will of the majority."¹²⁵ Regardless of institutional arrangements, all democracies are vulnerable to manipulation of outcomes by means such as agenda control, strategic voting, or manipulation of issue dimensions.¹²⁶ Of these, manipulation of issue dimensions best explains why the marketplace of ideas failed in the Iraq debate.¹²⁷

The motive for this type of manipulation arises when a policy question has become defined in terms of a single dominant issue dimension. Over time,

123. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*.

124. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 49–52. Snyder's actual claim is less than this, only that errors should be quickly self-correcting in response to experience, not that errors generally should be inhibited. But the Downsian logic on which he relies implies the stronger claim as well. Neither claim—how quickly errors should be corrected or how much they should be inhibited compared with nondemocracies—can be meaningfully quantified. For an argument that democracies' decisionmaking is not generally more effective than decisionmaking in other regime types, see Michael C. Desch, "Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Fall 2002), pp. 5–47. Jane Kellett Cramer documents several instances of intentional threat inflation by U.S. elites. Cramer, "National Security Panics: Overestimating Threats to National Security," Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002.

125. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, pp. 26–33.

126. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31, 118–120.

127. One could make more room for issue manipulation in a Downsian model by downgrading the ability of the public to interpret information, but this would ignore the core logic of the marketplace of ideas and make it more difficult to disentangle the mechanisms that led to its failure in the Iraq debate.

Figure 1. Original Alignment of Preferences

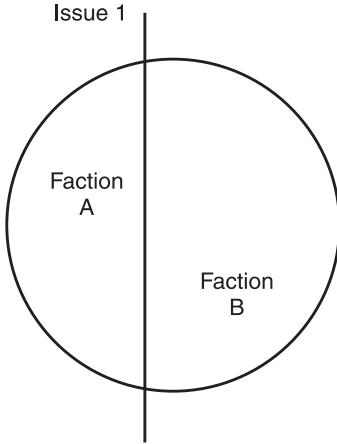
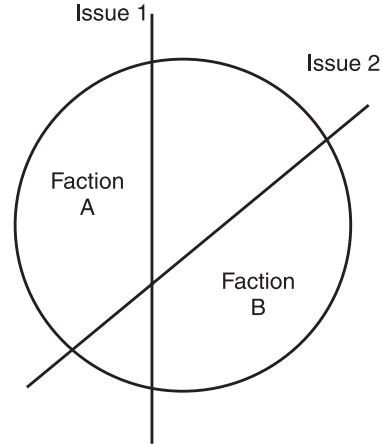


Figure 2. New Alignment with Second Issue



median voters may develop settled preferences for one policy, so that the opposing political faction finds itself consistently in the minority (faction A in Figure 1). The minority may be able to reverse its fortunes, however, if it can introduce a second issue and make it the dominant issue in the debate. The newly introduced issue need not be literally new or invented, as long as its political salience was previously low compared with the first issue but can still increase. If the second issue dimension is cleverly chosen to crosscut preferences on the old main issue, many of those who opposed the minority faction on the old issue may now support it.¹²⁸ If enough do, the former minority can form a new majority around the new issue dimension (the area above the line labeled issue 2 in Figure 2) and thereby gain power.¹²⁹ This technique can work even when those who are being manipulated understand what is happening.

128. Riker, *Liberalism against Populism*, pp. 197–212.

129. Issue 2 must be chosen so that faction A will lose few of its original supporters because they do not support the position adopted on the new issue (the lower-left quadrant in Figure 2), while preventing faction B, the old majority, from simply adopting A's position on issue 2 without undergoing an even worse split (as illustrated by the two right-side quadrants in Figure 2). Figures 1 and 2 generally follow E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (Hinsdale, Ill: Dryden, 1975), pp. 62–64.

Once persuaded that the second issue is at least as important as the first one, they have little choice but to vote their real preferences on it, regardless of the consequences for their interest in the first issue.¹³⁰

Arrovian issue manipulation usually has better prospects of success than direct attempts to shift views on a long-standing issue, which would have to overcome what may be deeply settled views of most people, not only elites. Although voters must be persuaded to treat the new issue as much more important than they did previously, this task is made easier by the previous low salience of the new issue, so that many people, especially nonexperts, may not have settled views on it.

A classic example of Arrovian issue manipulation is the realignment of American politics around slavery in the late 1850s.¹³¹ From 1800 to 1856, the faction that represented commercial and industrial interests (successively called Federalists, National Republicans, Whigs, and Republicans) won only two of fifteen presidential elections, because it faced a stable opposing majority favoring agrarian interests, represented by the Democratic Party. The Republicans eventually gained power by shifting the main issue in national politics from economic policy to slavery, an issue on which Northern and Southern Democrats were badly divided.¹³² In 1860 the Democrats split, and from this point the civil war cleavage became the dominant one in American politics, allowing the Republicans to dominate presidential and congressional politics for most of the next seventy years. The dominance of the Republicans in this new era further enabled them to implement their pro-commercial agenda, even though it is unclear whether this ever had the support of a majority of Americans.¹³³

This situation best describes what happened in the 2002–03 debate on U.S. policy toward Iraq. The Bush administration and like-minded advocates transformed the debate in a manner strikingly consistent with the dynamics of political manipulation identified by Arrow and William Riker.¹³⁴ To bypass the

130. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 150–151.

131. Riker, *Liberalism against Populism*, pp. 213–232.

132. This is not to imply that the Republican Party was the dominant actor in raising the salience of the slavery issue; Northern Protestant churches and independent abolitionists were at least as important.

133. Note that in Figure 2 there is still a majority against faction A's preference on issue 1.

134. We do not have evidence that administration strategy for promoting the second Gulf War was thought out specifically in terms of Arrovian manipulation, but neither do we for many other in-

existing consensus that Iraqi regional aggression could be contained, they introduced the new issue of potential direct Iraqi attack on the United States.

This manipulation of the issue dimensions was relatively easy for the administration to carry out, for two reasons. First, the fact that Iraq was a foreign policy issue helped by concentrating debate on issues that were largely unfamiliar to most Americans, reducing the burden of arguing uphill against settled views. Had Iraq received as much public attention over several years before 2002 as, say, abortion, the administration could not so easily have persuaded so many people to adopt a changed formulation of the issue. One reason why median voter logic accounts better for domestic than for foreign policy outcomes is that it implicitly assumes that no one has any great authority advantage in political debate; without this assumption, voters' issue judgments would always be vulnerable to elite manipulation in Arrovian fashion.

Second, the new issue that administration officials introduced—Hussein's supposed terrorist intentions—was one on which it was politically difficult for opponents to challenge their claims. Although the administration failed to make a strong case that Hussein had particularly extreme intentions, it was still successful in persuading most Americans, in part because the ordinary human tendency toward patriotism makes it too hard to publicly defend the proposition that foreign opponents may not have hostile intentions or may be justified in some of their actions. Neither politicians, mainstream media, nor most public intellectuals can afford to be painted as soft on national security. This probably explains why, compared with the administration's other three major threat claims, there was so little debate on the hostility or deterrability of Hussein, and why there seem to be no polls directly on these issues.

The administration's introduction of this new issue dimension reduced barriers to making arguments for preventive war in three ways. First, reformulating the issue as the possibility of an Iraqi terrorist attack on the United States crosscut the previously dominant framing of the debate as regional containment versus regime change, in which the most serious possible consequence of containment failure was considered to be regional aggression by Iraq. This created a new rationale for war that split the previous consensus; many policy elites who had supported containment were persuaded to support preventive war once the issue was framed as direct defense of the United States. This in turn removed a major barrier to persuading the public. Second, it indirectly

stances where other politicians have made use of the same principles; rather, these tactics are the natural ones for attempting to overturn a previously settled policy decision.

supported administration claims about Iraqi WMD, even if it did not logically imply them. Allegations that Hussein intended to attack American civilians were not evidence about the state of his WMD programs, but they did supply an additional reason why he might try. This likely lowered the standards of proof needed to persuade many Americans that Iraq's WMD programs were making dangerous progress. Finally, by accusing Hussein of having supported the September 11 terrorist attacks, the administration created a new rationale for war—retaliation for actual harm—unrelated to forestalling future threats.

This issue manipulation was probably a necessary condition for building public support for the second Gulf War. As long as the Iraq issue remained framed as regional containment versus regime change, the administration would face the uphill battle of overturning a settled consensus, at least among elites. The only obvious argument that it could have made would have been that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Iraqi WMD capabilities could be expected to grow enough to overturn the regional balance of power. The administration, however, lacked credible new evidence of such a change, and few experts doubted that Iraq could be deterred even then. An effort to persuade experts, political elites, and the public to change policy would likely have met considerable opposition.

CONTROL OF INFORMATION

Only the White House has direct access to all national intelligence resources, giving it a unique ability to shape public perceptions through selective release—or suppression—of analyses and information. The Bush administration used this control to present to the public and the world a false picture of U.S. information about Iraqi threats. Analyses that supported the administration's inflated claims were publicized, while those that contradicted prowar claims remained classified. Further, at least some of the favorable analyses were produced by coercion of intelligence agencies and analysts. This control was probably a necessary condition for the war because the administration built much of its case around release of intelligence documents.

The administration used its control of intelligence information in four ways. First, it consistently published or leaked intelligence analyses that favored its threat claims while suppressing contrary analyses. For instance, shortly before the congressional votes in October 2002 giving President Bush the authority to go to war against Iraq, the administration released part of a Special National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq to support its claims about nuclear, chemical, and biological programs, but kept secret forty distinct caveats or official dissents.

Some of these were on critically important matters, such as one from the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) that read in part, "INR is unwilling to speculate that a [nuclear weapons] effort began soon after the departure of UN inspectors or to project a timeline for the completion of activities it does not now see happening. . . . In INR's view Iraq's efforts to acquire aluminum tubes is central to the argument that Baghdad is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program [but] INR conclude[s] that the tubes are not intended for [nuclear] use."¹³⁵ The dissents were not declassified until July 2003.¹³⁶

In September 2002 Bush stated as a fact that "the Iraqi regime possesses biological and chemical weapons," even though a Defense Intelligence Agency report in circulation at the time maintained that there was "no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing or stockpiling chemical weapons."¹³⁷ White House officials also continued to repeat the Niger uranium story at least through January 2003, even though the CIA had informed them nearly a year before that it was baseless. They also repeated the story about Mohammed Atta in Prague for months after the FBI and CIA reported that there was no basis for it.

Second, important intelligence information tending to undermine administration claims was suppressed or distorted. For instance, statements taken from the UN debriefing of Gen. Hussein Kamel, the head of Iraq's WMD programs until his defection in 1995, were used to support claims that after the 1991 Gulf War Iraq had continued to lie to UN inspectors about prewar programs. However, his additional statements that Iraq's biological weapons were destroyed after the war, and that Iraq had ended chemical weapons production before that war for fear of U.S. nuclear retaliation, were not released.¹³⁸ Similarly, the fact that Abu Zubaydah, an al-Qa'ida planner and recruiter captured in March 2002, had told his questioners that al-Qa'ida leaders had discussed working with Hussein but had rejected the idea was also kept secret.¹³⁹

135. October 2002 Special National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq, p. 24.

136. Cirincione et al., *WMD in Iraq*, pp. 16, 23, 66.

137. Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, "Bush Certainty on Iraq Arms Went Beyond Analysts' Views," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2003.

138. Debriefing of Kamel, August 22, 1995. The transcript was leaked to a Cambridge University professor in February 2003. See also "Star Witness on Iraq Said Weapons Were Destroyed," February 27, 2003 <http://www.fair.org/press-releases/kamel.html>. For administration uses of Kamel's information, see Cheney, speech to VFW convention, August 26, 2002; Bush, speech at the Cincinnati Museum Center, October 7, 2002; and Powell, "Remarks to Security Council," February 5, 2003.

139. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, al-Qa'ida chief of operations until his capture on March 1, 2003,

Third, administration officials publicized claims provided by Iraqi exiles linked to Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress (INC), which stood to benefit from the overthrow of Hussein. In addition to other funding to the INC, at the beginning of the Bush administration, the U.S. government began funding an "Information Collection Program" to pay for intelligence from INC defectors. The practical effect was that the United States paid for intelligence that would promote a preventive war policy.¹⁴⁰ At least two of the administration's major claims about the Iraqi threat—the aluminum tubes and the mobile bioweapons laboratories—were derived from defectors.¹⁴¹

CIA and DIA analysts pointed out repeatedly that such sources could not be rated as reliable, prompting Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld to set up an ad hoc agency known as the Office of Special Plans (OSP) that would be willing to validate INC-based claims.¹⁴² OSP also collected raw, unverified intelligence data from the CIA and other agencies and passed it directly to top decisionmakers, bypassing the regular intelligence agencies.¹⁴³

Fourth, administration officials coerced intelligence agencies and analysts to provide politically useful conclusions. Numerous serving and retired analysts from the CIA, DIA, State Department, and FBI reported pressure from administration officials including Vice President Cheney, I. Lewis Libby, (Cheney's chief of staff), National Security Adviser Rice, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, and Undersecretary of State John Bolton.

In August 2002, Wolfowitz pressed two FBI agents working on the Mohammed Atta case to admit that they could not prove that Atta had not gone to Prague. On several occasions in 2001–02, Wolfowitz pressured CIA and DIA analysts to validate a claim in a book by Laurie Mylroie that Hussein had been

in Pakistan, told his interrogators the same thing. James Risen, "Captives Deny Qaeda Worked with Baghdad," *New York Times*, June 9, 2003.

140. Eli J. Lake, "Is Bush Getting the Whole Story on Iraq?" *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 22, 2002, p. B1; and "Truth, War, and Consequences," *PBS Frontline*, October 9, 2003.

141. Judith Miller, "Iraqi Tells of Renovations at Sites for Chemical and Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, December 20, 2001; Paul Martin, "Iraq Operates Nuclear Weapons Assembly Line, Defector Claims," *Times* (London), September 16, 2002; Seymour Hersh, "Selective Intelligence," *New Yorker*, May 12, 2003, pp. 44–51; and Jimmy Burns et al., "Did Intelligence Agencies Rely Too Much on Unreliable Data from Iraqi Exiles?" *Financial Times*, June 4, 2003.

142. Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "A CIA Rival; Pentagon Sets Up Intelligence Unit," *New York Times*, October 24, 2002; VIPS, "Memorandum for the President"; Hersh, "Selective Intelligence"; and Kenneth Pollack, "Spies, Lies, and Weapons," *Atlantic*, January/February 2004, pp. 78–92, at p. 88.

143. Bradley Graham and Dana Priest, "Pentagon Team Told to Seek Details of Iraq-Al Qaeda Ties; Effort Bypasses Regular Intelligence Channels," *Washington Post*, October 25, 2002.

behind the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. Both agencies had studied the book long before and considered it meritless.¹⁴⁴

For Bush's 2003 State of the Union address, a member of Rice's staff, Robert Joseph, pressed CIA proliferation expert Alan Foley to validate the Niger uranium story. When Foley replied that the story was not credible, Joseph asked if it could be attributed to British intelligence. Foley pointed out that the CIA had informed the British that the United States did not consider the story credible. Joseph finally pressed Foley to agree that the British had reported the information at one time, which he did.¹⁴⁵

In addition, intelligence officials, who have declined to be identified, have lodged dozens of complaints saying that Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Feith routinely intervened in analysts' work, pressing them to conform their reports to the White House line. According to one intelligence official, "Analysts at the working level in the intelligence community are feeling very strong pressure from the Pentagon to cook the intelligence books."¹⁴⁶

Vincent Cannistraro, a former senior CIA official, said that the pressure had a chilling effect: "You start focusing on one thing instead of the other thing, because you know that's what your political masters want to hear." Another, Melvin Goodman, said that CIA Director Tenet was not protecting the agency's analysts: "There's a lot of anger and questions about whether Tenet will hold off this pressure. [The analysts are] worried, and they don't have a lot of confidence in him."¹⁴⁷ The most succinct description came from Pollack, who said that Bush officials "dismantle[d] the existing filtering process that for fifty years had been preventing the policymakers from getting bad information. They created 'stovepipes' to get the information they wanted directly to the top leadership. Their position is that the professional bureaucracy is deliberately and maliciously keeping information from them. . . . They were forcing the intelligence community to defend its good information so aggressively that the intelligence analysts didn't have the time or the energy to go after the bad information."¹⁴⁸

144. Isikoff, "Looking for a Link"; and Walter Pincus and Dana Priest, "Some Iraq Analysts Felt Pressure from Cheney Visits," *Washington Post*, June 5, 2003.

145. David E. Sanger and James Risen, "CIA Chief Takes Blame in Assertion on Iraqi Uranium," *New York Times*, July 12, 2003.

146. A dozen others interviewed echoed this view, while none disagreed. Warren P. Strobel, Jonathan S. Landay, and John Walcott, "Some in Government Doubt Iraq Evidence," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 9, 2002.

147. Both quoted in Robert Dreyfuss, "The Pentagon Muzzles the CIA," *American Prospect*, online edition, December 16, 2002.

148. Quoted in Seymour Hersh, "The Stovepipe," *New Yorker*, October 27, 2003, p. 77. See also Schmitt and Shanker, "A CIA Rival"; Pincus and Priest, "Some Iraq Analysts Felt Pressure from

In one instance, U.S. administration officials went much further. When retired ambassador Joseph Wilson stated publicly that he had investigated the Niger uranium claim for the CIA and found it baseless, the identity of his wife as a covert CIA agent was leaked to the media as punishment, potentially putting her and her contacts' lives at risk.¹⁴⁹

The main counter that intelligence agencies have against such distortions is individual leaks, but serving analysts are inhibited by the danger of retaliation, while retired ones may not be listened to. For these reasons, we will probably never know the full extent of the information tending to discredit administration claims about Iraq.

AUTHORITY IN FOREIGN POLICY

Government agencies usually have a large authority advantage in debate with anyone else. This is especially so in realms where they have an information advantage and do not face competing authorities of comparable stature, which is the White House's normal situation in national security policy.¹⁵⁰ The situation is unlike that of domestic policy, where authority is more widely spread among the executive, Congress, the courts, and in some circumstances non-governmental institutions such as political parties, unions, and churches.

The White House's authority advantage facilitated the administration's campaign for preventive war in five ways. First, it helped the administration control the agenda for debate, which in turn assisted the effort to redefine the Iraq policy problem from regional containment to homeland defense. Although Arrovian issue manipulation is routinely used in domestic politics—for instance, the competing efforts to define the 2000 presidential election as being about the economic performance of the Clinton administration versus about the moral character of Bill Clinton—in domestic settings, normally no side has a great advantage in controlling which issue formulation becomes dominant. In national security policy, the executive branch does have such an advantage, at least in the United States; once the administration decided to redefine the issue as one of deterrence rather than containment, there was no equally prestigious institution that could contest this shift.

Cheney Visits"; Greg Miller and Bob Drogin, "CIA Feels Heat on Iraq Data," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2002; Risen, "CIA Aides Feel Pressure"; Hersh, "Selective Intelligence"; VIPS, "Memorandum for the President," May 1, 2003; William J. Broad, "The Impossible Task for America's Spies," *New York Times*, May 11, 2003; and James Risen and Douglas Jehl, "Expert Said to Tell Legislators He Was Pressed to Distort Some Evidence," *New York Times*, June 25, 2003.

149. Douglas Jehl, "Iraq Arms Critic Reacts to Report on Wife," *New York Times*, August 8, 2003.

150. Although in law Congress has various oversight powers, it is rarely united enough to use them effectively.

Second, the White House's authority concentrated attention on the administration's claims, compelling critics to counterpunch point by point with limited if any opportunity to present a coherent opposing narrative. In addition, throughout the Iraq debate mainstream press and even opposition politicians often simply accepted administration claims uncritically, while even those criticisms most compelling on logic or facts were rarely reported without simultaneously granting administration claims at least equal respect. Internal critics, who were important because of the centrality of intelligence analyses in the debate, were at a special disadvantage. Internal opponents of government policy generally lack independent authority and can make their dissents public only by way of leaks, which are often delayed until after the critical decisions have been made. There have been far more anti-Iraq war leaks since the invasion than there were during the invasion debate. Further, leaks—except those by the White House itself—necessarily lack governmental authority and are treated as less credible by most of the public and the press.

Third, the administration's authority advantage allowed it to attack the credibility of independent experts. This was important in discrediting IAEA inspection findings that Iraq did not have an active nuclear weapons program. For instance, Vice President Cheney stated in March 2003, "I think Mr. ElBaradei [director general of the IAEA] frankly is wrong. And I think if you look at the track record of the International Atomic Energy Agency and this kind of issue, especially where Iraq's concerned, they have consistently underestimated or missed what it was Saddam Hussein was doing."¹⁵¹ In fact, the IAEA's track record on Iraq from the 1980s onward consistently demonstrated better accuracy than more alarmist critics, as U.S. intelligence agreed until the Bush administration took office. Such attacks on independent experts achieved some success; public confidence in the existence of Iraq's nuclear program did decline during the inspection period, but only marginally. Ordinary nationalist suspicion of foreign sources of authority probably helped; in a December 2002 poll, Americans said they would trust the administration over international inspectors by a margin of 52 percent to 36 percent.¹⁵²

Fourth, careful phrasing of official rhetoric can allow even claims with especially weak evidentiary bases to be persuasive to the public, because often only experts are in a position to parse what certain official statements did and did

151. Vice President Richard B. Cheney, *NBC Meet the Press*, March 16, 2003. Similarly Rice, *ABC News: This Week*, March 9, 2003.

152. Gallup poll, December 10–11, 2002.

not say. As noted above, Bush's 2003 State of the Union address attributed the Niger uranium story to British intelligence to avoid having to state in so many words something known to be false.

The most important use of this tactic was in encouraging public belief that Hussein had been involved in the September 11 atrocities. Without quite saying so, President Bush and other officials routinely used carefully juxtaposed formulations that placed the September 11 attacks and the alleged threat from Hussein within a few words of each other, giving the impression that there was a causal link without actually saying so. In his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush said: "Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans—this time armed by Saddam Hussein." In January 2003, Wolfowitz declared, "As terrible as the attacks of September 11th were, however, we now know that the terrorists are plotting still more and greater catastrophes. . . . Iraq's weapons of mass terror and the terror networks to which the Iraqi regime are linked are not two separate themes—not two separate threats."¹⁵³ Use of such rhetorical jujitsu undoubtedly accounts for why so many Americans believed that Hussein had supported the September 11 attacks.

Fifth, the authority of the White House allows even discredited claims to be repeated with some persuasive effect. Administration officials made use of this frequently during the prewar debate, and some continued to do so after the invasion. For instance, the same week the Iraq Survey Group reported that evidence of Iraqi WMD had not been found, Vice President Cheney declared that there was "conclusive evidence [that Hussein did] have programs for weapons of mass destruction" as well as "overwhelming evidence that there was a connection between al-Qaeda and the Iraqi government."¹⁵⁴

THE WEAKNESS OF COUNTERVAILING FORCES

One of the main institutions that the marketplace of ideas theory counts on to counter myths of empire—political opposition—was largely unavailable in the Iraq case and probably cannot be counted on reliably in foreign policy debates, more generally. The other two—the press and independent experts—did not and probably cannot do much independently to contain threat inflation.

153. Bush, "State of the Union," January 28, 2003; Deputy Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz, speech at Council on Foreign Relations, January 23, 2003. See also President George W. Bush, "State of the Union," January 29, 2002; Bush, "Remarks by the President at John Cornyn for Senate Reception," September 26, 2002; and Bush, speech at the Cincinnati Museum Center, October 7, 2002.

154. Cheney, NPR *Morning Edition*, January 22, 2004.

Part of the reason that the Bush administration encountered minimal organized political opposition was that the Democrats faced the classic dilemma of a faction faced with a well-designed Arrovian issue manipulation—they were split. Many prominent Democrats were persuaded that the possibility of direct attack on the United States trumped any confidence they might have had in containment as well as their qualms about regime change, while those who were not persuaded had no options. Just as slavery split the Democrats of 1860, Democratic die-hards in 2002 could not oppose the administration's march to war and still carry the rest of their party with them.

Nonevaluation can also benefit from political opponents' fears of seeming weak in the face of an external threat, which makes it difficult to organize unified opposition to foreign policies with muscular symbolism. In the Iraq case, more prominent Democratic politicians, especially presidential candidates, preferred to criticize administration policy from the right rather than the left. Robust opposition is typically seen only after costly policy failures, and even then with considerable delay, as in the example of congressional opposition to Vietnam in 1973–75.

Throughout the prewar debate on Iraq, the media were relatively supine, tending to report administration claims credulously, while devoting much lesser effort to investigating the validity of those claims or to reporting the views of experts who were doing so.¹⁵⁵ Administration and prowar advocates also simply got disproportionate distribution. A study of network television news stories on Iraq over two weeks in January–February 2003 found that more than half of the 393 sources quoted were U.S. officials. Only 17 percent of sources quoted expressed skepticism about administration policy, most of whom were Iraqi or other foreign government officials. Only 4 percent were skeptical expressions by Americans, and only half of these had any affiliation to advocacy or expert organizations.¹⁵⁶ In part, options for critical reporting were limited by the relative absence of organized political opposition, depriving the media of prominent figures around whom to center controversy.

Second, reporters may have feared loss of access to official sources if they published critical stories; during the war, numerous reporters signed agree-

155. Michael Massing, "Now They Tell Us," *New York Review of Books*, February 26, 2004, pp. 43–49.

156. The other skeptical expressions came in "person in the street" interviews. The study covered the nightly news broadcasts of ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS from January 30 through February 12. FAIR. "In Iraq Crisis, Networks Are Megaphones for Official Views," March 18, 2003, <http://www.fair.org/reports/iraq-sources.html>.

ments allowing the military to vet their stories. The impact of this on the content of reporting is uncertain.

Third, news organizations may judge that Americans do not want to be confronted with complex information or criticism of national policy. Such a judgment was reflected in CNN's decision to provide two separate versions of war coverage—a "cheerleading" version for U.S. audiences, and a more balanced and complex version for the rest of the world.¹⁵⁷

Fourth, a number of authors have proposed that conservative bias in the media favors Republican presidents and policies.¹⁵⁸ During the 1990s most radio and television talk shows adopted conservative orientations, as has one mainstream news network, Fox. Polls show that viewers who got their news primarily from Fox were more likely than others to accept inaccurate prowar statements.¹⁵⁹ Moderate and liberal outlets, however, are by no means excluded. The attitudes of Fox viewers could be more a self-selection effect than anything else.

Whether or not the mainstream news media are characterized by conservative bias on average, one effect of ideological fragmentation is that even the most egregious administration-promoted myths will receive support from friendly media. This in turn undermines the credibility of the media as an independent source of authority, reducing it from Walter Cronkite's "That's the way it is" to the staccato "I say, you say" exchanges of *Crossfire*.

Independent experts, mainly think tank analysts and university academics, also could not carry out the functions the marketplace of ideas assigns to them for many of the same reasons that the media could not. Academic experts are normally divided in their views and rarely present consensus opposition to administration claims. Relatively few presented comprehensive critiques, and fewer of those received wide media attention.

Further, as with the media, ideologically committed conservative think tanks

157. Michael Massing, "The Unseen War," *New York Review of Books*, May 29, 2003, pp. 16–19, at p. 17.

158. Michael Tomasky, *Whispers and Screams: The Partisan Nature of Editorial Pages* (Cambridge, Mass.: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, July 2003); Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, 2d ed. (New York: Seven Stories, 2002); Eric Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias in the News* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2003); and Joe Conason, *Big Lies: The Right-Wing Propaganda Machine and How It Distorts the Truth* (New York: St. Martin's, 2003).

159. Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis, "Misperceptions, Media, and the Iraq War," pp. 581–585.

such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute made it possible to confuse debate by contradicting any expert criticism with experts of apparently equal authority. Since most of the public lacks the ability to evaluate experts' qualifications or disinterestedness, this undermined the possibility that any criticisms might be seen as authoritative or have much persuasive effect.

THE IMPACT OF SEPTEMBER 11

The World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorist attacks helped to support the Bush administration's case for war in two ways. First, it assisted the transformation of the Iraq issue from containment to deterrence of terrorism. The attack by one enemy on American civilians made it more plausible that others might also attack, and the authority advantage of the executive branch helped to focus that fear on Iraq, rather than on proposals to concentrate first on al-Qa'ida. Second, as Robert Jervis has suggested, elevated fears of terrorism reduced Americans' skepticism about almost any promises to decrease their personal security fears.¹⁶⁰

It is more difficult to assess, however, whether September 11 was a necessary condition for the second Gulf War. The uniqueness of the events of September 11 makes it impossible to specify all the categories of external shocks that could have been used to promote the administration's policy goals, if not necessarily in the same way. It is even more difficult to imagine all the possible stimuli that could be used to support other, future adventures. The successful use of September 11 to promote a preventive war against an opponent unrelated to the original provocation suggests that there may often be flexibility in the use of external events to promote preferred policies.

Prospects and Risks for the Future

Should we expect the marketplace of ideas to fail again, either in the United States or other democracies, possibly with worse consequences? Some dimensions of the failure in the Iraq case appear especially egregious, but a study of a single case cannot determine whether it is an outlier or part of a pattern of more or less normal market failures. It is not even clear which interpretation

160. Robert L. Jervis, "The Confrontation between Iraq and the U.S.: Implications for the Theory and Practice of Deterrence," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 315–337, at pp. 317–318.

should be cause for more concern: if Iraq is an outlier, that could mean either that we should have relatively little concern for the future or that the robustness of the marketplace in the United States is deteriorating in a way not yet understood. If, however, the Iraq case is a relatively normal example, then we must fear equally severe failures, which could be especially dangerous if combined with a preventive war doctrine. What can be said is that most of the dynamics that appear to explain the Iraq outcome—the effectiveness of Arrovian issue manipulation, the information control and authority advantages of the executive in national security policy, and the fragmentation of countervailing institutions—are normally present in democracies, at least those with strong executives such as the United States.

How much danger this poses of further military adventures based on equally weak justifications is unclear, but there is some evidence that the Bush administration, at least, views preventive war as a foreign policy tool that could be used repeatedly. According to one senior official, “Iraq is not just about Iraq. [It was] a unique case,” but in Mr. Bush’s mind, “it is of a type.”¹⁶¹ According to Bush’s *National Security Strategy*, the United States “possesses unprecedented—and unequalled—strength and influence” and will seek “to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”¹⁶²

HOW COMMON ARE THREAT INFLATION AND FAILURES OF THE MARKETPLACE?

No depth of investigation of the Iraq case alone can provide confident predictions about future risks. That will require systematic testing across cases that vary on the key factors suggested both by the marketplace of ideas theory and by my explanation of this case. Three categories of cases must be examined: previous instances of successful (or unsuccessful) threat inflation in the United States or other democracies with strong executives; instances in democracies with weaker executives, such as Britain in the Iraq case, and assessments such as that in 1955–56 of the threat posed by President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt; and nondemocratic cases.¹⁶³ Across all cases, scholars should seek to

161. David E. Sanger, “Viewing the War as a Lesson to the World,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2003. See also “President Discusses the Future of Iraq,” February 26, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html>; and “Rumsfeld Says U.S. Victory Will Serve as Powerful Message,” Reuters, May 4, 2003. Wolfowitz, Perle, and Cheney have also made the domino argument.

162. *National Security Strategy of the United States*, pp. 7, 33.

163. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, studies Wilhelmine Germany, imperial Japan, and the Soviet Union.

evaluate the robustness of the institutions making up the marketplace of ideas, the power of the executive to manipulate issues and control information, the methods used to bypass or suppress the functioning of the marketplace, and the apparent reasons why the marketplace succeeded or failed as far as it did in each case.

A START AT REFORMS

Even in advance of more systematic study, what we know about the Iraq case already suggests one institutional reform, namely reducing top executives' ability to intervene in intelligence analysis. Several methods are possible, such as lowering the number of political appointees in intelligence agencies, along the lines of the British permanent undersecretary system, and increasing the terms of service of the heads of the CIA and possibly other intelligence agencies closer to the ten years of the director of the FBI. Such measures would address only one dimension of the problem, but could be a useful start. The Bush administration, however, has proposed to move in the opposite direction by creating a new post of director of national intelligence to coordinate the work of all of the intelligence agencies, which could have the effect of increasing responsiveness to political direction.¹⁶⁴ Judging from the Iraq case, this could reduce the quality of foreign policy decisionmaking.

164. Douglas Jehl, "White House Eyes a Powerful Post for Intelligence," *New York Times*, April 16, 2004.