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Foreign Policy Evaluation and the Utility of Intervention

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

FOREIGN POLICY EVALUATION AND THE UTILITY OF INTERVENTION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

by

Graham Slater

2017

To: Dean John Stack, Jr.
Green School of International and Public Affairs

This dissertation, written by Graham Slater, and entitled Foreign Policy Evaluation and the Utility of Intervention, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Florida International University, 2017

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I would like to thank the members of the committee, some of the fellow graduate students off of whom I have bounced suspect contentions and questionable assertions, the illustrious members of my wonderfully fallible family, among whom there exists a Doctor of Philosophy in the Anthropological Sciences, esteemed girlfriend, Valerie Hudson, whose magisterial Foreign Policy Analysis informs this book at many junctures, even if cited only sparingly, and with which I taught FPA at FIU, my dissertation-friend Jim Misencik, decorated veteran of the Iraq War and tireless academician, and dissertation-father Félix Martín, who considers his trade a lifestyle and consistently prioritizes his graduate students far above the meager place they occupy in the international system, thus maximizing their utility-function if not their relative power.

This dissertation is dedicated to my actual dad and others like him who bear the brunt of foreign-policy blunder before ever encountering the opportunity to understand why. It is my hope that its Lilliputian contribution to scholarship can lend a hand in bettering the status quo ante with regard to the motivations for and prosecution of foreign-policy decisionmaking in this, my beautifully flawed state of states, in the further hope that it will make itself great(er) in substance and values (as a continuation of prior greatness) as the sometimes-preeminent exemplar in our anarchical morass of confused nations. I apologize in advance for the quagmire of long-winded sentences contained herein, but a product of my longstanding quarrel with superfluous commas.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION
FOREIGN POLICY EVALUATION AND THE UTILITY OF INTERVENTION

by

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This dissertation identifies and explains the factors contributing to the presence and severity of U.S. foreign-policy blunders, or gross errors in strategic judgment resulting in significant harm to the national interest, since the Second World War. It hypothesizes that the grand strategy of preponderance and the overestimation of military power to transform the politics of other states have precipitated U.S. foreign-policy blunders since 1945. Examining the Vietnam War and Iraq War as case studies, it focuses on underlying conditions in the American national identity and the problematic foreign policy decision-making (FPDM) that corresponds to this bifurcated hypothesis, termed the overestimation/preponderance theoretical model (OPM). Four indicators operationalize the OPM: (1) how U.S. foreign policymakers estimated the capacity of military power to transform the political dynamics of the target state through intervention; (2) and (3) how U.S. actors and institutions affected the capacity of the partner state and hostile state and nonstate actors; and (4) how the foreign policy was justified and rationalized within the leadership of

government and to the general public as it encountered disconfirming information.

In each case, the grand strategy of preponderance instituted a bounded rationality of mission in the FPDM stage and the operationalization stage that precluded the inclusion of an unfavorable outcome. In each case, U.S. foreign policymakers greatly overestimated the capacity of the partner state to establish security and legitimacy and underestimated the capacity of hostile actors to mobilize and threaten the partner state. However, these preference-confirmation biases diametrically contradicted the assessment that victory would be easy to achieve; U.S. foreign policymakers promulgated this corresponding overestimation/underestimation even while inflating the threat far beyond what the actual threat to the national-security element of the national interest represented. The subsequent implementing of this inverted calculation created a national-security national interest where none was extant, then significantly harmed that new interest via intervention. This tactical application of the grand strategy of preponderance facilitated the strategic-tactical gap in U.S. foreign policy by creating monsters in order to have monsters to slay, consistent with the ideological tradition of the imperative of crusade in the modern history of American foreign relations.

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ACRONYMS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Chapter 1.

FPDM: Foreign Policy Decision-Making

FPA: Foreign Policy Analysis

FPE: Foreign Policy Evaluation

OPM: Overestimation/Preponderance Model

IR: International Relations (as a field of social-scientific inquiry)

Chapter 2.

MAD: Mutually Assured Destruction

AUMF: Authorization for the Use of Military Force

Chapter 3.

MID: Militarized Interstate Dispute

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

HST: Hegemonic Stability Theory

DPT: Democratic Peace Theory

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

FY: Fiscal Year

NSS: National Security Statement

EHT: Extraregional Hegemony Theory

JCS: Joint Chiefs of Staff

ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (also referred to as ISIL or IS)

Chapter 4.

No new acronyms introduced.

Chapter 5.

MACV: Military Assistance Command Vietnam

NVA: North Vietnamese Army (also PAVN, or People's Army of the Republic of Vietnam)

VC: Viet Cong (U.S./GVN term for NLF or National Liberation Front)

VCI: Viet Cong Infrastructure

NVN: North Vietnam

GVN: Government of the Republic of Vietnam (the South Vietnam government; sometimes abbreviated as SVN in U.S. government documents)

ARVN: Army of the Republic of Vietnam (the South Vietnamese military)

PRP: People's Revolutionary Party (Communist Party of South Vietnam)

RFPF: Regional Forces/Popular Forces (pro-GVN paramilitary units)

PRU: Provincial Reconnaissance Units

COSVN: Central Office for South Vietnam

OSS: Office of Strategic Services

NSC: National Security Council

MSUG: Michigan State University Group

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

ICEX: Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation Program

CORDS: Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support

Chapter 6.

WMD: Weapons of Mass Destruction

NIE: National Intelligence Estimate

OIF: Operation Iraqi Freedom

ORHA: Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance

IGC: Iraqi Governing Council

CPA: Coalition Provisional Authority

CRS: Congressional Research Service

DoD: Department of Defense

GWOT: Global War on Terror

WHO: World Health Organization

CENTCOM: Central Command

FOIP: Future of Iraq Project

UN: United Nations

Chapter 7.

COIN: Counterinsurgency

FM: Field Manual

CHAPTER 1

The Strategic-Tactical Gap in U.S. Grand Strategy

In Italy for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love—they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.

Harry Lime, *The Third Man*

Imagine a student of international relations were to have fallen asleep in 1945 only to awaken in 2015, and were given only two facts during their debriefing on the happenings of the previous seven decades: that the United States chose to maintain its global military and political presence even after the cessation of the hostilities of the Second World War, and that the United States remained the preeminent power in the international system at the end of the seven decades. How would we suppose the student would respond to the question, "How would you expect the United States to have fared in its most ambitious foreign entanglements?" Even the most cognizant sleepwalker would be dumbfounded to learn that the United States never achieved victory in any of its most notable conflicts: Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan, among others.¹ The student might respond to this counterintuitive scenario by presupposing one of either of two trains of thought: that the outcomes of the conflicts to which the state dedicated its most substantial financial and human foreign-policy resources were not as inextricably linked to the fate of the U.S. position in the international

¹ What constitutes "victory" is one of the key questions the dissertation addresses. In none of these conflicts did U.S. foreign policymakers achieve the objectives that would have been considered "victory" at the outset of hostilities.

system as policymakers had assumed, or that the state managed to excel so tremendously in other areas that this excellence rendered faltering in many of its most costly military engagements relatively superfluous.

Either response would be correct, and both lead to the same two conclusions: the United States maintained its privileged position in the international system *in spite* of its most costly foreign entanglements rather than because of them, and U.S. foreign policymakers could stand to improve their choice and/or prosecution of their most significant foreign policies. The tragic, and perhaps ironic, character of modern U.S. foreign-policy history is that it has managed to maintain its systemic dominance even while faltering in every major war since the Second World War. This confounding puzzle embodies the enigmatic research question of this dissertation: how and why has the most powerful nation in the history of the world managed to perpetuate this paradoxical series of blunders even while maintaining its preeminent position in the international system?

The common adage in the social sciences that the most germane research asks big questions and gives simple answers informs the fundamental objective of this dissertation. It poses a big question: why have many of the most ambitious and costly US foreign policies fallen far short of their objectives since the Second World War? It offers a simple, bifurcated hypothesis: U.S. policymakers overestimate the capacity of the overwhelming material power of the United States to transform the politics of other states, an error operationalized via the grand strategy of *preponderance*. Implicit in this approach

is the dismissal of 'American declinists' that view the United States as a waning power as China and others overtake its preeminence in the international system.² The approach is at once in denial of American declinism and in opposition to some of the most fundamental foreign-policy assumptions and impulses of the American foreign-policy establishment during the previous seven decades. Just as on an individual basis a faulty set of logical assertions can lead a state into a problematic foreign-policy endeavor that results in success, so too can a grand strategy reliant on problematic assertions create great harm to the national interest without significantly altering the overwhelming power endowment of that same state.

In order to evaluate a particular foreign policy or grand strategy as a whole, the researcher must take into account the motivations for action, the foreign policy decision-making (FPDM) process, and the outcome; omission of any of these three fulcra risks evaluative distortion and, subsequently, permits the repeat of like errors in future foreign affairs. If the first lesson of history is that we do not learn from history, such is only given in the absence of effective, progressive historical analysis. The case studies presented are examined not to present new research on what happened, the subject of each having been examined ad nauseum in innumerable scholarly and popular volumes. Rather, they are invoked and dissected through the lens of the overarching research question and the assertions of the hypothesis. While there is always some new

² For a discussion of trends in the balance of power, see Robert Wade, "Emerging World Order? From Multipolarity to Multilateralism in the G20, the World Bank, and the IMF," *Politics & Society* Vol. 39, No. 3 (September 2011): 347-378.

piece of empirical evidence even for a thousand-year-old case study, and thus further research can always reveal a better understanding of it, the primary objective here is not to reinvent the understanding of either case, but instead to situate them in relation to the overall research context and to better understand the *process* of the FPDM that led to each resulting in blunder. Within IR literature, the dissertation contributes primarily to the subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), particularly FPDM. Although it addresses policy first and grand theory only occasionally, it relies on some of the basic realist assumptions in international affairs, especially in relation to the concept of intervention. While the focus is on the United States, the lessons learned from the volume will provide insight into international affairs more broadly.

The overall purpose of the dissertation is to explore foreign policy *blunders* as a dependent variable and present and test the hypothesis, further delineated in Chapter 3. Chapter 2 presents a framework for foreign policy evaluation (FPE), an endeavor largely ignored by both the academic and policymaking communities in spite of its perennial relevance to the scholarly field of IR and to policy practitioners. Chapter 4 details the methodological approach, primarily made up of the case study, of which there are two. The following two chapters examine the case studies, and the concluding chapter lays out the findings of the study. This introductory chapter acquaints the reader, in a general sense, to the research agenda and the justification for its intended significance within IR literature, to which the dissertation makes four original contributions.

First, it formulates a sui generis FPE framework. Second, it presents an archetypal definition of the concept of the foreign policy blunder. Third, it presents a hypothesis to the central research question of what factors have contributed to the prevalence and severity of U.S. foreign policy blunders since the Second World War. Fourth, it empirically explores two blunder case studies designed to answer that question. Each of the four original contributions to the literature builds from the foundation of the others; they are thus designed to function as more than the sum of their parts. No policy can be assessed in a vacuum, neither methodologically nor in the absence of correlated decisions, objectives, and outcomes. Nevertheless, foreign policies tend to be judged in an ad-hoc manner by policymakers, in popular discourse, and, most surprisingly, by IR scholarship.

Despite the plethora of literature on the subject of foreign policy, there exists no scientific framework for FPE that even remotely approaches a comprehensive consensus. Instead, studies involving FPE remain plagued by "analytical and conceptual anarchy," as described by David Baldwin.³ Indeed, publications directly addressing the difficulties involved in FPE often exert more energy lamenting the virtual impossibility of it than attempting to build a foundation on which to develop a fungible set of metrics. A framework for FPE will be presented in Chapter 2 to help fill this gap in the literature, to provide an invaluable analytical tool to policy practitioners, and to construct the theoretical

³ David Baldwin, "Success and Failure in Foreign Policy," *Annual Review of Political Science* No. 3, 2000, 167.

and applicable foundation for the subsequent examination of foreign-policy blunders.

The foreign-policy blunder represents one of four general categories into which any given foreign policy's outcome can be classified, along with success, failure, and mixed-result (presumably the most common outcome). While success, failure, and mixed-result outcomes all deal directly with the result of the policy, the blunder represents a type of failure in which the FPDM process suffers from significant biases, oversights, or other decision-making shortcomings. The purpose of establishing criteria by which to assess foreign policy is simple: scholars and policymakers alike will forever find it problematic to understand previous policies, improve upon current policies, and plan for future policies without agreed upon metrics for assessing the utility of different aspects of different policies. Efficacious design and implementation of current and future foreign policies requires recognition of the costs and benefits of current and previous policies, across policies, rather than simply on an ad-hoc, individual basis.

To assess the policy of Containment as successful based solely on the fact that the Berlin Wall eventually fell tells us little about the intricacies of the policy that might have made it more or less effective (or efficient—a nontrivial distinction). The public invocation of President Ronald Reagan as the champion of victory in the Cold War is a regular fixture of the discourse of Republican lawmakers, yet hardly acknowledges the full picture of that enduring conflict. Likewise, the utility of establishing FPE metrics is not to reduce the import of

foreign-policy outcomes into Manichean classifications, but rather to dissolve every aspect of the policy down into criteria that can provide analytical tools for understanding the utility and efficacy of the policy in question.

In the case of the foreign-policy blunder, the investigation focuses heavily on the FPDM process and less so on the outcome, given that we know by default at the outset of our retrospective analysis that the policy was a failure. Beyond providing an essential practical tool to policymakers and theoretical tool to scholars, an FPE framework also permits a conceptual introduction to the idea of the foreign-policy blunder, defined here as a *gross error in strategic judgment resulting in significant harm to the national interest*. This definition, as well as the corresponding two case studies, incorporate problematic foreign-policy impulses (the pursuit of preponderance), faulty strategic decision-making (imprudent estimations of the politically transformative utility of military power), and unfavorable outcomes that significantly harm the national interest (blunder). The dissertation will explore the correlation between these three components.

Since the Second World War, U.S. foreign policy has revolved around an axis of key assumptions that define and perpetuate American exceptionalism by way of the entrenchment and proliferation of U.S. power and interests abroad. For better or worse, the global engenderment of U.S. power has unsurprisingly ensconced these assumptions as the source of that engenderment. More surprising, however, has been the myopic impulse to link grand strategy with the relative position of the state in the international system with seeming disregard for the media through which these assumptions might be most effectively

employed. Whether or not the prevailing grand strategy of American preponderance will best facilitate the maintenance of American power remains an open question, and will remain so as long as the United States can claim the mantle of the preeminent great power in the international system.

Given that the United States appears poised to remain the world's preeminent, if not hegemonic, state for the foreseeable future, the more relevant questions now address not the subtleties of how the overall balance of power will shift in the coming decades, but how to employ whatever American power exists in relation to the problems and opportunities abroad in advance of the national interest. In fact, this should always be any state's paramount preoccupation, from the mightiest Leviathan to the tiniest Lilliputian. For even if the U.S. share of world material and ideational power alters dramatically over the course of the next few presidential administrations, a seemingly unlikely development, the thoroughgoing foreign-policy conundrum will nonetheless remain how to apply whatever power endowed to it. This distinction is far from superficial: the case will be made throughout the course of these chapters that power itself as a tool for affecting the internal dynamics of other states has been greatly overestimated by U.S. policymakers since 1945.

The most intractable foreign-policy outputs tend to be those most associated with the elements of a state's foreign-policy objectives considered by foreign policymakers to be most necessary to advance the grand strategy of the state. A foreign policy *assumption*, or an element of grand strategy that is taken as given, therefore holds an inherently fundamental position in the foreign policy

of a state to the extent that it can be defined as a *necessity*. The unquestionable assumptions embedded in the FPDM process thus form the conduit for any desired foreign-policy outcome. Many of the predominant assumptions taken for granted in U.S. foreign policy distinguish it from that of any other state.

This somewhat self-induced exceptionalism can only be partially attributed to material factors such as the uniqueness of American history or the prevalence of relative American power during the previous two centuries. Much of it, perhaps an immeasurable amount but significant nonetheless, can be attributed to enduring ideational characteristics and preferences. In other words, the United States can be understood as an exceptional state to the extent that it considers itself an exceptional state. As Secretary of State Madeleine Albright declared on television in 1998, "We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries."⁴ Although every state considers itself exceptional, and thus justifies its legitimacy to rule over its citizenry, the United States is the only state since the virtual demise of National Socialism in 1945 to promote its own exceptionalism with such obstinately pervasive intent. This intent can be defined most consummately as manifesting through the grand strategy of *American preponderance*.

The assumptions inherent in the prevailing grand strategy of American preponderance form an amalgam that fixes the United States in an exceptional position in the minds of U.S. foreign policymakers. Several of the most ascendant

⁴ Micah Zenko, "The Myth of the Indispensable Nation," *Foreign Policy*, November 6, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/06/the-myth-of-the-indispensable-nation/>

of these assumptions collectively construct the point of departure for the hypothesis delineated in Chapter 3: 1) The cultural, geographical (resource endowment; distance from competing powers), and historical traditions of American exceptionalism demand an exceptional foreign policy most expediently operationalized via a grand strategy of American preponderance; 2) the persistence of American preeminence signifies the success of the pursuit of American preponderance; 3) the extension of the U.S. security perimeter to a global ambit promotes U.S. interests overseas and defends the nation from attack, 4) maintaining overwhelming military force discourages revisionist powers from attempting to challenge U.S. authority; and 5) this overwhelming military force permits the transformation of the political landscape of other states. The first four assumptions form the bedrock of the hypothesis; the fifth operationalizes the research question. As will come to light, the hypothesis contends that many of the implications of these assumptions precipitate the presence and severity of U.S. foreign-policy blunders.

Foreign-policy blunders are not unique to post-WWII United States. Until the future-perfect global liberal utopia is achieved in consummate totality, the international system shall remain in a sort of adolescence, in which every state will occasionally find blunder seeking glory. However, the case of the modern United States *is* in fact exceptional in several distinguishing ways. Its salience, if we wish to examine foreign-policy blunders as a dependent variable, draws from several significant hallmarks. First, it has dominated the international system since 1945, challenged only by a Soviet Union that we now know was destined

for political-economic catastrophe. Its unrivaled prominence on the world stage thus finds a parallel in its unrivaled relevance to international relations, at least for the foreseeable future. Second, the postwar international order established by the United States, its allies, and its institutions and imposed by the full force of its globally deployed military ordained the most peaceful global environment in modern history, at least in terms of major-power militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). Third, U.S. foreign policy since WWII, in relative-power terms, finds no equal in the history of the world in terms of the rapid rise of its share of the world's power. Fourth, this unprecedented rise came in spite of every major conflict in which the United States has been militarily employed resulting in a stalemate or an outright failure. Contrasted with the unmitigated success of the "total surrender" by the empires of the Third Reich and Imperial Japan, the unmitigated stalemates and failures of subsequent wars since that epic achievement boggle the mind of the IR scholar. What accounts for the discrepancy between the rise of the United States as the unrivaled power in the international system and its recurring foreign-policy blunders constitutes the subject matter of this dissertation?

How can a state maintain such a dramatic disparity of power even while faltering in its most expensive, ambitious foreign conflicts? To address this question, the two case studies focus on the two most costly—in financial, military, and political terms—American wars since the Second World War, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War. The purpose is not to compare the two, but rather as an autopsy on the strategic failure of the FPDM that led to these interventions. The

following chapter situates FPE within IR literature and presents a formula for its functionality. It explores the *what*, or what the blunder consists of and why it should be classified as such. The subsequent chapter presents the OPM, a theoretical model of why U.S. foreign policy has consistently produced blunders of such magnitude since the Second World War. The OPM addresses the *why* and *how*; the theory of what factors contribute to the presence and severity of blunders in U.S. foreign policy since the Second World War.

CHAPTER 2

Toward a Process for Foreign Policy Evaluation

Every foreign policy decision is meant to achieve its aims; however, complete success is extremely rare, and there is a spectrum of achievement ranging from mostly successful to unintentionally provoking the precise opposite reaction to what was anticipated or intended.⁵

Valerie Hudson

The alternative to the status quo is the prospect of repeating the whole anguishing process of arriving at decisions. This explains to some extent the curious phenomenon that decisions taken with enormous doubt and perhaps with a close division become practically sacrosanct once adopted. The whole administrative machinery swings behind their implementation as if activity could still all doubts. Moreover, the reputation, indeed the political survival, of most leaders depends on their ability to realize their goals, however these may have been arrived at. Whether these goals are desirable is relatively less crucial. The time span by which administrative success is measured is considerably shorter than that by which historical achievement is determined. In heavily bureaucratized societies all pressures emphasize the first of these accomplishments.⁶

Henry Kissinger

Valerie Hudson states simply that "every foreign policy is meant to achieve its aims," while acknowledging that the potential of "unintentionally provoking the precise opposite reaction" is a perpetual possibility in the opaque disorder of

⁵ Valerie Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 44.

⁶ Henry Kissinger, "Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy," *Daedalus* Vol. 95, No. 2 (Spring 1966), 503-529.

international relations. In spite of her simplistic characterization that policies are supposedly intended to rationally pursue objectives, Hudson understands as well as anyone that the opposite can just as often be true: "Whether these goals are desirable is relatively less crucial" than the process that produces the goals and the manifold media employed to achieve them, in the words of realpolitik abettor Henry Kissinger, perhaps the most central figure in the modern history of U.S. foreign policy. It goes without saying that foreign-policy tools are employed to achieve foreign-policy objectives. But just as discernible to any observer is the phenomenon that the outputs of the sausage-making factory of FPDM sometimes bear little resemblance to the inputs used in the process. In a state as large and powerful as the United States, in which power is substantially diffused into geographical, corporate, interest-group, and ideological factions, this phenomenon is as evident as in virtually any other state. Kissinger is correct in pointing out that the United States is "heavily bureaucratized," and thus its foreign policymakers are beholden to a multiverse of foreign-policy inputs.

What constitutes the national interest—a subject tackled in more detail in Chapter 4—can therefore be far more muddled than our state-for-granted-taking indoctrination into realist intuition would suggest. While this dissertation scarcely cites constructivist literature, instead mostly relying on a tradition of intransigent realist doctrine in its interpretation of international relations, the constructivist creed recurs as often in the ideational battlefield of the pliant conception of the national interest as in any other. Furthermore, compounding the malleable nature of the national interest in the enormous, power-diffused United States is the

inherently ideological nature of the American self-conception and the transnational idea of what constitutes *Americanism*. This subject will be taken up in earnest in Chapter 3. What follows in this chapter is a description of the FPE literature gap in general terms and a prescription for its reinforcement. This bulwark will later inform the evaluation process with particular respect to the United States in the case study chapters.

What Hudson's encyclopedic primer *Foreign Policy Analysis* illuminates is the necessity of the disambiguation of the FPDM sausage-making factory for *any* analysis concerned with the understanding of *any* foreign policy, regardless of the approach taken or the methodological path desired. In other words, to understand how FPDM operates in any scenario, we must apply the "kitchen sink" philosophy to the problem we wish to understand, dissecting it along as many lines of examination as possible. Hudson thus expands the traditional three levels of analysis of the individual, the state, and the international system into more than ten levels of analysis, advocating an FPA that is multidisciplinary, multifactorial, multilevel, and agent-oriented rather than structurally determined. The justification for this dissemination of lenses of analysis is simple: "The single most important contribution of FPA to IR is to identify the point of theoretical intersection between the most important determinants of state behavior: material and ideational factors. The point of intersection is *not* the state, it is human decisionmakers."⁷ FPA does not deny that states are important actors in the international system, but rather seeks to investigate further into the human

⁷ Hudson 2014, 8.

decision-makers states are made of, who follow a whole host of motivations, be they informed by cognitive, bureaucratic, ideological, interest-group, or any other of a long series of input factors. While this dissertation borrows heavily from particular realist tenets, especially in skepticism of attempts at liberalizing other states militarily, it promotes a method of FPA investigation that avoids the theoretically abridged parsimony of realism in favor of multifactor, agent-oriented explanation. As will be further detailed in the methodology section, the research design will not adhere strictly to any one approach or theoretical bent, instead attempting to use useful tools where applicable, whatever paradigm they derive from.

The agent at the center of our inquiry is, of course, the statesman, whom we often view with idolatry, in the case that we admire them, or villainy, in the case that we do not. But attempting to understand leaders as if they were gods or demons all but prohibits prudent scrutiny of FPDM. The point of intersection between material and ideational factors is the *human* decision-maker, rather than a god, demon, or rational-choice automaton—this goes for tyrants in other states as well as our sometimes-adored and sometimes-abhorred elected leaders in democracies. To this end, Philip Tetlock demonstrates that 20 years of commentary and forecasting by the supposed 'expert political judgment' of the punditry and public-intellectual class of leaders and statesmen reveals that those charged with prognosticating future sociopolitical events are no better than the ordinary layperson. Tetlock poses the same question offered in this chapter: "Why should political observers be insulated from the standards of accuracy and

rigor that we demand of professionals in other lines of work?" Just as scholars tend to view with disdain the supposedly subjective nature of FPE, Tetlock was discouraged by academicians who thought he "showed suspect scientific judgment in choosing good political judgment" as his subject of inquiry. In setting out to "objectify good political judgment by identifying standards for judging judgment that would command assent across the spectrum of reasonable opinion," he reaches a paradoxical conclusion: "The net result is a double irony: a perversely inverse relationship between my prime exhibit indicators of good judgment and the qualities the media prizes in pundits—the tenacity required to prevail in ideological combat—and the qualities science prizes in scientists—the tenacity required to reduce superficial complexity to underlying simplicity."⁸

We do well to remember that human beings run states, and human beings are inherently fallible, irrational creatures driven by myriad cognitive and social impulses and cues far beyond the capacity of any one mind or group of minds to control. Are statesmen hedgehogs, foxes, tyrants, or dunces? Do leaders of a democracy consistently, rationally pursue a defined national interest in their interactions with other states and statesmen? Thousands of years of empirical evidence provide four affirmative, somewhat contradictory answers to the first question—they come in all shapes and sizes, and can quickly morph from one to the other under the intense stresses of statecraft. The answer to the second question seems to be either sometimes or most of the time. Most democratic

⁸ Philip Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.

leaders appear to pursue a (somewhat/relatively) clear national interest most of the time. When they veer from this barometer, they invite the possibility of a blunder. Among the multitudinous reasons for this deviation (assuming it is intentional) include domestic political considerations, selfish personal reasons, refusal to incorporate disconfirming information, refusal to admit defeat, or adherence to ideational doctrines, assumptions, or preferences that supersede the reality of the policy. If the deviation is entirely unintentional, the policy can of course still result in blunder, for many of the same reasons. Whether poor judgment results from negligence, ideology, hubris, obstinacy, oligarchical loyalties, domestic political exigencies, or outright despotism is one of the critical questions of understanding foreign policy blunders.

The other, related question is whether the relevant statesmen act wittingly or unwittingly in pursuing a policy that is known to have a low likelihood of success. If leaders lack sufficient information to produce a prudent decision, or if the alternatives available grant them no viable prudence, the decision itself cannot be assessed to be blunder-inducing, and thus the failed policy cannot be assessed to be a blunder. A blunder requires an imprudent decision, or a *gross error in strategic judgment*, whether brought about by ulterior motives, willful ignorance, or the short-term denigration of the national interest as the state is reduced into the most common denominator of political expedience, the currency most valuable to any policymaker, without which they can gain no purchase on any policy, foreign or domestic. Before beginning to explore the hallmarks of foreign-policy blunders, why they occur, and how to predict and avoid them, we

must first assemble an introductory set of guidelines and metrics for how to evaluate foreign policy in general, and thus build a foundation from which to extrapolate the characteristics and processes that lead to their manifestation and define their place in international relations.

The case for foreign policy evaluation

The complications implicit in evaluating foreign policy defy quantification. FPE has therefore been largely avoided in scholarly analysis. In fact, much of the literature on FPE tends to focus on those complications in a manner so as to dismiss the plausibility of the endeavor altogether. In short, the commensurate perspective on the subject seems to be a resignation to the ineluctable fact that the difficulties involved in FPE render it a profligate pursuit and perhaps even anathema to scholarship due to its *assumed* normative and/or counterfactual tendencies. Among the countless apprehensions discouraging scholars from taking up the task exist several legitimate, fundamental hurdles. First, FPE has been approached with skepticism because few policies fall clearly into one category or another, instead tending to exhibit both successful and unsuccessful characteristics. Second, the unpredictable, anarchical global environment in which international relations play out renders decision-making an imperfect science, even when provided with perfect information and an unambiguous understanding of the national interest, which is rarely, if ever, the case. There are sometimes no viable alternatives available to the foreign policymaker, and even the most sagacious decisions may end in utter catastrophe depending on how

circumstances or objectives change, as they invariably do. Third, foreign policymakers may be motivated to distort or conceal the true motivations for a given foreign policy, especially in a democratic society in which the citizenry can vote leaders out of office from the confines of the ballot box, complicating the efforts of the investigator to meander through the rhetoric to unveil veritable motivations for foreign-policy choices.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the dynamics of international relations are so fluid and interconnected that an optimal outcome at one moment in time may transform into a suboptimal or even significantly harmful outcome days, months, or years into the future. Supplying missiles and small arms to the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan was an unmitigated success: the Red Army tucked its tail and withered away into the Soviet Union from the mountains of Afghanistan with nothing to show for it but thousands of combat deaths, a stagnant economy, and a bruised reputation from which the Russian Federation has yet to recover even decades later. That celebrated event precipitated the unmitigated disaster to detect and prevent the most catastrophic terrorist attack in U.S. history, perpetrated by the same Mujahedeen from their same cavernous stronghold. While extreme in its consequences, this example sometimes appears more illustrative of the rule than the exception. The United States allied with China during World War II only to “lose China” (as well as 'Indochina') into Communist hands in its aftermath, resisted colonialism only to assume its guise in the Middle East and elsewhere as the sun began to set on the British Empire and *Pax Britannica* gave way to *Pax Americana*, and allied with Saddam Hussein

against Iran only to fight two wars to contain and then remove the defiant dictator from power. The historical evidence supports the unpredictability factor.

Given these sticking points, the avoidance of focusing on policy evaluation may be understandable. Nevertheless, none of these reasons for trepidation excuse the scholarly community from formulating an adequate framework for FPE. On the contrary, promulgating a unified approach to FPE would take advantage of one of the most perennial opportunities to help bridge the 'theory-policy gap' so many in academia and policy hasten to regret. Policy-related theory can only claim value to the extent that it claims relevance to policy, a prerequisite often lacking in scholarship focused on building theory for the sake of theory building. Disputing Stephen Walt's declaration that "evaluating foreign policy is hard," a contention he found sufficiently revelatory as to merit publishing an essay on the subject with the same phrase as its title, may be an onerous task.⁹ But more onerous still would be the acquiescence that no such endeavor is possible, an omission in the literature that continues to obfuscate the understanding of foreign policy.

Many scholars have danced around the dearth of literature on FPE, problematizing it rather than attempting to de-problematize it. Indeed, the most popular angle from which to breach the subject seems to be a focus on its virtual impossibility to breach. John Clark, while acknowledging FPE's complications, suggests three stages in evaluating the effectiveness of foreign policy: setting

⁹ Stephen M. Walt, "Evaluating Foreign Policy Is Hard," *Foreign Policy*, June 20, 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/20/evaluating-foreign-policy-is-hard/>

standards by which to judge, understanding the impact of policies as they are implemented, and comparing outcomes to standards. Focusing on creating standards, Clark laments the difficulty of overcoming the complexity of even identifying foreign policy goals, let alone judging the efficacy of their implementation and the outcomes, intended or unintended, that result from the interaction between the policy as constructed and its implementation in the target environment. Compounding the difficulty in identifying the intricacies of foreign policies and the convolution of attempting to evaluate them in a standardized fashion is the dilemma of how to assess whether a foreign policy has served the national interest when even that concept proves slippery: “Even traditional realists would have to agree with this position, since they sometimes acknowledge that national leaders do not in fact always adopt policies which they find to be in the national interest.”¹⁰ If this is the case, it precludes the acceptance of the national interest as given, and thus complicates the evaluation of foreign policies as they support or hinder the national interest. While acknowledging that what exactly constitutes the national interest is difficult to ascertain, Chapter 4 examines the concept of the national interest in detail, offering a definition of the term based on a conglomeration of commonly utilized definitions.

David Baldwin takes the baton from Clark’s analysis, regretting that although “specifying conditions for success or failure of foreign policy behavior is

¹⁰ John F. Clark, “Evaluating the Efficacy of Foreign Policy: An Essay on the Complexity of Foreign Policy Goals,” *Southeastern Political Review* Vol. 23, No. 4 (December 1995), 571.

arguably one of the most, if not the most, important topic to be studied," scholarly attention to it "is not commensurate with its importance."¹¹ Baldwin exposes shortcomings in some of the common assumptions about statecraft, such as the assumption that military force tends to be effective, and proposes a preliminary set of FPE criteria. Featured most prominently among them are costs to the user, which are often overlooked in evaluative analysis; costs to the target; stakes for the user; stakes for the target; the question of "adequacy," or whether the cost incurred relates optimally to whatever is achieved; inclusion of a scaled approach to degrees of success or failure as opposed to a dichotomous (success/failure) approach; and the magnitude of stakes in question, from the most obscure policy initiative to an existential total war to guard against the destruction of the nation-state. Like Clark, one of Baldwin's main preoccupations is how to set standards for what exactly constitutes an "effective" foreign policy. Clark's and Baldwin's analyses construct a fruitful foundation from which to begin a more optimistic vision for FPE. Delineating the difficulties of the task provides a helpful point of departure for an examination of how to limit these difficulties and develop corresponding solutions.

John Vasquez proposes a few points of axis around which FPE can revolve, envisioning common social-science techniques as a conduit for understanding and evaluating foreign policy in two ways: producing general knowledge of how international relations function with respect to the foreign

¹¹ David A. Baldwin, "Success and Failure in Foreign Policy," *Annual Review of Political Science* 3: 2000, 167.

policies of states and analyzing the consequences of foreign policies once they are decided upon and carried out. The former informs how an analyst might extract from the conduct of international relations which foreign policies can be viable, while the latter facilitates evaluating the efficacy of any given foreign policy.¹² Like others, Vazquez has difficulty transcending the temporal factor: a good decision may lead to a bad outcome, and even a good outcome can become bad with time. Although useful as another step on the path toward FPE, the reader volume edited by Vazquez focuses only on one administration, President Reagan's, limiting its scope. Furthermore, the various authors presenting chapters in the book do not follow consistent criteria, precluding the utility of the volume as more than the sum of its parts. The disparate investigations thus result in a series of disconnected studies that are useful in evaluating particular policies of the era, but not in establishing an overarching vision of how to evaluate foreign policy with a coherent formula. This individualistic approach to FPE is characteristic of the literature on the topic. The first objective of the dissertation is to address that gap in the literature. The following section offers a basic framework for FPE. This framework will be utilized to evaluate each case study.

The two case studies, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, evaluate the decision and execution of an extensive military intervention. While there is no limit to the amount of evaluations available to the researcher on military *conflicts*, the evaluation of the utility of military *conflict* is an underdeveloped science.

¹² John Vazquez, *Evaluating U.S. Foreign Policy* (Praeger, 1986).

Baldwin describes the scarcity of literature on the varying applications of military power and coercion: While "many studies address the question of whether economic sanctions work, very few address such questions as the following: Does military force work? Does diplomacy work? Does propaganda work? Despite the paucity of such studies, conventional wisdom holds that military force usually works." Despite this perception, "the literature on military force contains few discussions of the meaning of success."¹³ If there is a shortage of literature on the efficacy of military force, why does conventional wisdom hold that it usually works? This seems a surprising conclusion given that there must be a loser in every war, and sometimes (perhaps often) even two losers, in the case that neither party achieves its aims and the conflict ends in stalemate.

By the same token, if there is not even an adequate literature on what success in a military engagement consists of, how can the scholarly community come to any conclusion as to its general efficacy, much less the definitive conclusion that it is decidedly efficacious most of the time? This sort of scholarly lacuna goes beyond the hypocritical to the irresponsible. Especially in the nuclear age, determining what success is made of becomes even more problematic. If both the United States and the Soviet Union can reduce the enemy into the apocalyptic rubble of nuclear Armageddon in a number of hours, what would success look like? If the United States had five functioning cities left at the end, and the Soviets one, would that constitute victory? In more current terms, if the United States were to go to war with China, and remain more or less intact while

¹³ Baldwin 2000, 177.

destroying every major Chinese city, and thus its largest import market, could the United States be considered victorious? Can you win a conflict and yet be far worse off at the end of it? Baldwin's tongue-in-cheek quip, "The operation was successful, but the patient died," rings true here. As soon as a conflict commences, the standards for success immediately change. The new set of interactions resulting from "the fog of war" presents challenges and opportunities that can only be completely known in the presence of war. Even a strike against an enemy, designed specifically to be limited in scope, will likely provoke some type of response by the enemy. Thus, any act of conflict almost automatically entails an immediate upping of the ante, even if designed to be easily diffusible. Many wars have begun in such fashion. Look no further than the Gulf of Tonkin. Robert Jervis describes the illogical mentality involved in the mutually assured destruction (MAD) of Cold War calculations:

First, it is zero-sum. One side must come out ahead of the other; one or the other must retain more military power and be less slow to recover. Thus every war must have a winner. Second, the judgment involved is a relative one—the position of each side is being compared with that of the other. This stress on relative advantage fits nicely with the normal conception of power in international politics. Starting with Thucydides, scholars have argued that power makes no sense when viewed in absolute terms because the outcome of the conflict, especially military conflict, will be determined not by the absolute size of the armies involved but by their relative capabilities. When deterrence by punishment is crucial however, it is the absolute level of destruction that a state faces and can inflict that controls its behavior. While the conclusion that military victory is possible follows from the definition employed, such a conclusion is remarkably apolitical. It does not relate the costs of the war to the objectives and thus ignores the question of whether the destruction would be so great that the winner, as well

as the loser, would regret having fought it. Holders of this view, then, fall into the trap that Clausewitz warned about of seeing war as an end in itself instead of as a means to national goals.¹⁴

When Hans Morgenthau published an essay in 1976 entitled "The Fallacy of Thinking Conventionally About Nuclear Weapons," he was unwittingly making a case for FPE by suggesting that a) metrics for success are unclear and often change and thus b) scientific discussion about what metrics ought to consist of and where their confines ought to be parsed is needed.¹⁵ Jervis performs the same task. If a way of thinking about conflict "does not relate the costs of the war to the objectives and thus ignores the question of whether the destruction would be so great that the winner, as well as the loser, would regret having fought it," then that way of thinking will find little value in praxis, condemned forever to the frivolity of theoretical abstraction. Though IR literature has long been concerned with whether and to what extent nuclear weapons turn traditional balance-of-power calculations inside-out, similar theoretical problems would also arise from a discussion of other weapons that question traditional power calculations, such as the modern (globally oriented) application of the ancient weapon of terrorism, which can rely on globalization's vulnerabilities and technology's (including the potential use of nuclear weapons) opportunities. If we are to accept Clausewitz's contention that war is but "the continuation of policy by other means," then it

¹⁴ Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Cornell University Press, 1989), 18.

¹⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Fallacy of Thinking Conventionally About Nuclear Weapons," in David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf, eds., *Arms Control and Technological Innovation* (New York: Wiley, 1976), 256-264.

follows that it must be held to standardized interpretations of successful and unsuccessful policies, whatever the means used to achieve foreign-policy ends may be, military or otherwise.

In the same way that there exist countless studies on particular military engagements but not enough on the efficacy of military power in general, many studies examine a particular event, time period, administration, institution, or any other single line of analysis without taking into account the broader picture or utilizing consistent criteria of evaluation. There is no shortage of examples to illustrate this deficiency. Some revolve around a particular time period or branch of government. *U.S. Presidents and Foreign Policy Mistakes*, for example, examines “mistakes, in the form of bad decisions” made by presidents. Although it covers the literature from the past 50 years, it admits that “this research has not explicitly identified a vantage point around which the answers to these questions revolve.”¹⁶ This observation confirms one of the main purposes of the dissertation, pursuing a vantage point for exploring the causation of blunders across time in U.S. foreign policy. Tim Weiner’s *Legacy of Ashes*, though somewhat biased and non-scholarly, exemplifies some of the popular vitriol against U.S. intervention overseas by looking at overzealous OSS and CIA operations.¹⁷ Willard Matthias takes a similar line in *America’s Strategic Blunders*, surveying flawed or absent intelligence and its impact on strategic

¹⁶ Stephen Walker and Akan Malici, *U.S. Presidents and Foreign Policy Mistakes* (Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Random House, 2007).

blunders from 1936-1991.¹⁸ Many books focus on the normative, institutional, or utilitarian motives for hegemony, or whether or not the United States is indeed imperialistic.

Some analyses attempt to position poor decisions made by leaders on particular dependent variables, such as groupthink, financial considerations, domestic political pressures, regions, or ideology. Some focus on two particular variables, such as Michael Grow's presidential/regional *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions*.¹⁹ The same literature gap applies to blunders in foreign policy. The strategic-tactical gap cuts both ways: sometimes, tactical moxie becomes entirely undermined by strategic ineptitude, as with Thomas Ricks' characterization of the Iraq War: "Unsurpassed tactical success combined with unsurpassed strategic failure."²⁰ Tactical failures can just as easily accompany strategic success. The broader problem has been compounded by the fact that even individual assessment operations have achieved neither general adequacy nor coherence across missions. The military's ability to assess ongoing operations is so poor that in 2010, nine years into the Afghanistan War, the head of the International Security Assistance Force Afghan Assessments Group simply

¹⁸ Willard Matthias, *America's Strategic Blunders: Intelligence Analysis and National Security Policy* (Pennsylvania State University, 2001).

¹⁹ Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions* (University Press of Kansas, 2008).

²⁰ Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

stated “our metrics suck.”²¹ In the interest of better metrics, the following section presents a rubric for FPE. This rubric will be operationalized in the two case studies to follow.

Criteria for evaluating foreign policy

Criterion I. Degree of *fruition* of primary and secondary objectives

The degree to which objectives are met should be the point of departure for any FPE metrics. As previously stated, what constitutes the national interest defies consensus, problematizing whether it even exists ontologically, and whether it is even knowable epistemologically if it does in fact exist ontologically. If states, at least in their intention, act rationally to maximize their utility function, then the objectives of any foreign policy can be said to be employed to pursue the national interest, at least in theory, and the attainment of a given set of objectives can be evaluated in conjunction with that national interest. The fact that not all foreign policies further the national interest—and there is no doubt that they do not—does not dictate the assertion that policymakers are not at least attempting to pursue the national interest, at least a majority of the time.

This is not to suggest that foreign policymakers invariably pursue the national interest. Decisions are often arrived at via parochial, bureaucratic, interest-group, or personal/groupthink pressures that circumvent or otherwise trammel the national interest. In short, objectives will be evaluated according to

²¹ Jonathan Schroden, “Why Operations Assessments Fail: It’s Not Just the Metrics,” *Naval College War Review* Vol. 64, No. 4 (Autumn 2011), 90.

their fulfillment and their correlation to the promotion of a relatively knowable, stable, and clearly enunciated national interest, in addition to being evaluated according to their official stated goals. This distinction is important because it is assumed that there sometimes exist goals beyond what the official stated goals enunciate. Likewise, it will be assumed that the objectives of a given foreign policy are knowable, even if they carry the potential to change according to the needs of the state, the political preferences of statesmen, or complications in the target environment.

Quite often the objectives of a given foreign policy and how they correlate to the grand strategy of the state are clearly pronounced in policy documents such as a National Security Statement, which tends to deal with grand strategy more broadly, or more specific foreign-policy documents, such as foreign-policy bills sponsored by an administration and authorized by Congress with regard to a particular problem (for example, terrorism and the Patriot Act) or state (for example, Iraq and other AUMFs). Sometimes, however, the genuine thinking in the minds of foreign policymakers proves mercurial to the researcher, and documents such as declassified transcripts of presidential cabinet or advisor meetings must be employed where possible. Even assuming perfect information for the researcher, which is impossible, President John F. Kennedy's quote on the confusion of statecraft illustrates how even the policymaker can get lost in his own thoughts: "The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer—often, indeed, to the decider himself... There will always be the dark and tangled stretches in the decision-making process—mysterious even to those

who may be most intimately involved."²² If the esteemed decision-maker finds difficulty explaining his own thoughts to himself, imagine the complications involved in the bumbling scholar pouring through fields of documents whose content the theory-practice gap renders alien absent any real-world experience in high-stakes policymaking.

Criterion II. Corollary strategic *consequences*

Unforeseen, unintended, ignored, or neglected consequences are distinguished from objectives in order to differentiate the achievements a policy seeks to fulfill from the ramifications the implementation of that policy can effect. The Criterion of consequences takes a broader perspective than the Criterion of objective fulfillment. Although it is unlikely that a policy can achieve none of its objectives and still positively affect the national interest, it is quite feasible that a policy can achieve all of its objectives and still be harmful to the national interest. For example, support for Saddam Hussein against Iran during the Iran-Iraq War accomplished the objective of draining resources from the Iranian state, but by default strengthened a dangerous dictator that would eventually turn his Soviet tanks on American ally Kuwait. Likewise, in both the Gulf War and the Iraq War the primary military objectives were achieved swiftly and comprehensively, but far-reaching complications leading to further entanglements arose in the form of first leaving the Saddam Hussein regime in power and later the development of

²² Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Little, Brown, and Company, 1971), iv.

the insurgency and influx of jihadists after March 2003. These examples illustrate that this Criterion not only paints with a broader brush in scope, but also in time: today's foreign-policy success may prove to be the harbinger of foreign-policy disaster in later years. The consequences of a given foreign-policy action, be they positive, negative, or neutral, provide context to the evaluation of how effective a given foreign policy is in terms of objective fulfillment and impact on the national interest.

Criterion III. Political, financial, and military *cost*

Political *cost* in this analysis specifically refers to political capital as it relates to a state's reputation and position of prestige in the international system, distinct from a strategic *consequence* that may be inherently political. For example, one of the undesired consequences of the decision by the Bush administration and the U.S. Congress to remove Saddam Hussein from power by force in 2003 was the eventual enablement of Iran to take the helm of Iraq's security infrastructure and leadership in the battle to expel ISIS from Mosul, Tikrit and other Iraqi cities and towns, itself a product of the Shia solidarity between the countries the invasion reinforced, even despite the recent brutal war between them on the interstate level. This effect was compounded by the fact that invading Iraq in the first place and disbanding the army left no force capable of protecting the country from itself or its neighbors.

The damage done to the U.S. reputation in the Gulf region and internationally can be assessed as part of the political cost of the campaign, as

can the empowerment of Iran and other political adversaries that would benefit from the action. The utility of distinguishing cost from consequences is the ability to measure political resources, such as leverage with partnering actors and favorability among the public in the region, expended from the actual policy events and processes that result, either directly or indirectly, from the foreign policy. The key distinction is that cost is intended to measure a fungible resource, in this case political capital, while consequences intend to measure the actual strategic results of an action. The former largely addresses perception, while the latter functionally addresses actual policy events and processes that can be heavily influenced by perception.

The first step in measuring financial cost is the level of resources and assets expended in terms of implementing the policy. This could include the operating cost of sending an army to invade and occupy a foreign country in the case of a military intervention or the cost foregone in terms of reduced trade or exports due to sanctions on a target state. The second step is to account for the economic effect of the results of the action. For example, the first step carried astronomical costs for the United States during the Second World War, while the second step resulted in pulling the country out of depression and forming the political and military foundation for an institutional framework that would establish it as the world's foremost industrial and military power, perhaps even to the point of hegemony. In other words, the economic benefits of the Second World War far outweighed even the enormous cost of the conflict for the United States. The same could not be said of the Vietnam War, which damaged the U.S. economy

and brought about virtually no economic benefit, other than to U.S. defense contractors, the interests of whom clearly did not overlap with the national interest in that particular case. The financial burden to the taxpayer of the Iraq War is staggering and still being incurred more than a decade later.

Military cost refers specifically to the cost of military operations in terms of military capabilities. Soldiers, tanks, aircraft carriers, fighter jets, and so forth require enormous financial resources to equip, maintain, and replenish. Contrary to strict economic or financial resources, military resources cannot always be replaced. When the armies, navies, and air forces of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan were all but destroyed by the Allies in the Second World War, they were never replaced, as both countries were occupied by the victors and pursued a pacific, non-military (corporate) path to restoration of their former glory. However, both countries rebuilt and eventually surpassed prewar economic productivity, illustrating the fungibility of financial resources as opposed to military hardware. Another example with a different result that illustrates the same principle was the U.S. ability to rebuild its armed forces after the Vietnam War due to its robust economic capabilities, the location of the war at a great distance from the homeland, and the continued desire (after a brief respite) on the part of citizens and policymakers to maintain the nation's global military presence. Great military resources come at great financial expense for every nation, but financial resources can sometimes be replenished where there exists economic productivity, as they are a necessary but insufficient condition for the creation or replenishment of military resources.

Criterion IV. Availability and consideration of *alternatives*

Even during the most instantaneous threat developments, policy alternatives are always considered. Just as no individual policy can be evaluated with total disregard for other related policies, an alternative cannot be evaluated without taking into consideration the attractiveness of other alternatives. Policymakers must confront a staggering array of dynamic threats to national security, making up policy as they go along while attempting to follow a unified grand strategy, itself a difficult task even assuming that a unified grand strategy indeed exists. Although alternatives that were never chosen are counterfactual, this does not prevent us from estimating what the consequences of a different alternative may have been. Economists make a steady habit of this and there is little reason to think the same procedure would be useless in terms of foreign policymaking. Colin Dueck's *Reluctant Crusaders* describes the utility of counterfactual analysis:

Each case study will be framed in terms of broad strategic options or alternatives: not only those that were in fact chosen, but also those that could have been. For example, after 1945 the United States adopted a strategy of containment, and most of the literature on the period has tried to explain why that alternative was chosen. But any attempt to explain the adoption of containment is at least implicitly a claim as to why another alternative—such as neoisolationism—was rejected. Counterfactuals simply make explicit the causal claims that are already implicit in any such study. There is, of course, good reason to be skeptical of farfetched counterfactuals; this is a method that must be used with care and precision. One way to ensure such precision is to refer only to policy alternatives that were credible or plausible at the time.

Another is to apply generalizable theories to the historical case, and then deduce what sort of outcomes each theory would predict. These two restrictions bring both historical plausibility and theoretical rigor to our investigation. With these restrictions, the careful and theoretically informed use of counterfactuals actually adds to our search for a generalizable theory, and to the effective number of observations in a given case study.²³

Nevertheless, when policymakers shuffle through different options in their search for the foreign policy most likely to induce an optimal outcome, they must do so without knowing with certainty what its ramifications will be, just as the scholar cannot produce with absolute certainty a picture of what another alternative would have resulted in. Even as some scholars specifically concerned with the limitations of FPE characterize retroactive FPE as anathema to rigorous social-scientific procedure, countless others engage in exactly that endeavor with regard to specific policies. That there is no consensus on how to address the problem holistically signifies neither that it has not already been done in innumerable essays nor that no such consensus can be developed. It merely represents yet another oversight in the literature characteristic of the 'theory-policy gap.'

We can safely assume that Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons program would not have posed a threat to the United States had the dictator not been overthrown, since we now know with absolute certainty that no such program existed. Although the intelligence presented to the Bush Administration on the subject turned out to be faulty, this may have had as much to do with preference

²³ Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 55.

biases in cherry-picking intelligence as with the actual intelligence gathered. Indeed, these biases have now been well documented, and are highlighted throughout the chapter on the Iraq War. Thus the argument that this factor ought not be incorporated into an analysis of the efficacy of the decision to invade Iraq falls flat. In retrospect, as before the ill-fated decision, the policy failed, and was destined for failure given that the war was launched on false pretenses, rendering any cost-benefit analysis on that aspect of the policy superfluous. That the prosecution of the war was riddled with tactical deficiencies does little to veil its strategic ineptitude. Thus, using this particular example, an analysis of the policy informs its evaluation in such a way as to obviate its assessment as a failure and, more specifically, a blunder. The cost—estimated by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz to be neutral or negative due to Iraqi oil revenue—as well as the consequences of empowering Iran, inciting Islamist fundamentalism in a country in which it had been wholly suppressed, and stoking national and regional sectarian tensions were far from impossible to predict. FPDM cannot be imagined as an exact science, nor can its evaluation. But this does not justify its evasion in the foreign policy literature.

Criterion V. *Context*, scope, and stakes

No foreign policy is ever pursued in a vacuum. Thus every policy, even to the extent that it is distinguishable from another, must be evaluated in the context of other policies. 'Inter-subjectivity,' to borrow a constructivist term, is one of the fundamental underpinnings of international relations. U.S. interventions in Latin

America and Africa during the Cold War were not so much geared to affect local political battles per se as they were to affect the broader ideological and political war against Communism and balance-of-power competition with the Soviet Union (whether they actually performed this function is a matter of conjecture). The extent to which a particular policy, such as support for the removal of Salvador Allende from power in Chile, can be thought to have been efficacious directly relates to how that particular political battle affected the overall Cold War landscape.

Scope can be delineated along three main levels: the grand-strategic level, with an axis point of the overarching national interest of the state vis-à-vis other states in the international system; the intermediary level, through which a policy toward a given state or region is developed and applied; and the tactical level, whose lens focuses on the particularities of the implementation of the intermediary policy. For example, the decision to escalate the Vietnam War, initiated during the JFK Administration and indoctrinated during the LBJ Administration, addressed an intermediary problem contextualized by the grand strategy of Containment Policy, settled upon years earlier by the Truman Administration. The tactical pitfalls of the war, such as the alliance with an unpopular government, a war plan innocuous in its pursuit of a determined, well-trained, well-equipped, and experienced guerilla fighting force, the pollution and manipulation of battlefield information up the chain of command, and the myopic application of traditional military weaponry to an insurgent battlefield laden with canopy jungle, represented the impotence of the strategy's viability.

Though the grand-strategic, intermediary, and tactical levels of analysis intertwine, their delineation permits the disambiguation of a foreign policy by stipulating its context relative to its target environment. The Vietnam case demonstrates the relevance of stakes: although the United States dropped more ordnance on Vietnam than during the entire Second World War, there was very little at stake in the country in terms of strategic value. In other words, the nation paid an enormous price for a war with relatively insignificant stakes, illustrating a mad logic that incentivized a way of thinking about the conflict that only scarcely utilized percipience. Strategy and tactics can transcend various levels of scope: the latter is by definition the means to the ends of the former, regardless of the scope involved. The grand strategy of Containment, for example, employed the tactic of intervention; intervention itself was a strategy that employed the tactics of attrition and pacification in Vietnam.

The foreign-policy blunder

What constitutes a blunder in foreign policy? Dictionaries define the word "blunder" to signify a careless mistake often caused by confusion or lack of sufficient forethought.²⁴ As mentioned in the previous section, a blunder is defined here as *a gross error in strategic judgment resulting in significant harm to the national interest*. It implies both an unfavorable outcome for the state in question and poor decision-making on the part of the foreign policymakers involved. This definition is predicated on four foundational necessary but

²⁴ Collins English Dictionary, for example, defines a "blunder" as "a stupid or clumsy mistake."

singularly insufficient conditions: (1) failure to meet objectives; (2) significant harm to the national interest; (3) cost; and (4) predictable fallacy (based on the available alternatives and extant information at the time of the decision). These correspond to four of the five criteria for FPE, omitting context, which is relevant but not essential to the classification of a blunder. In the dangerous and unpredictable bedlam of international relations, even the most astute, cautious, prudent, and isolationist statesmen invariably encounter foreign-policy failures at some point during their tenure as caretaker of the national interest at the international level. The kaleidoscopic potential hindrances to a state achieving its international objectives defy quantification.

Nonetheless, these can be divided into dichotomous categories: miscalculation or other misuse of state capabilities by foreign policymakers, and surprises or resistance from foreign states or nonstate actors in the application of those capabilities abroad. In the former case, even the most well intended statesmen may fall victim to the urge to ostentatiously assert the objectives of the state and imprudently pursue the national interest in such a fashion as to invite misfortune. Some of the most obvious and commonplace pitfalls in the latter case include unforeseen challenges such as foreign alliance formation, sudden shifts in the objectives of other states, hostile regimes assuming power in newly antagonistic states, and either incremental or rapid disturbances in the distribution of power in the international system. All instances of the latter case relate to an overarching theme in the study of interstate relations: that of change in the international system. This is a phenomenon that has unfortunately been

largely ignored by realism and only haphazardly explained, if enthusiastically embraced, by liberal theory.²⁵

Foreign-policy failures of the first order can be further divided into two types: an invention or distortion of the foreign threat confronted, and a miscalculation of the capabilities of the state to carry out its objectives. Perhaps the most catastrophic foreign-policy failures of a state combine both mistakes into a compounded chain of decision-making errors that maximize the response of hostile actors in the target environment while minimizing the influence the originator state may have on them. For example, Operation Barbarossa overestimated Nazi capability to overtake the whole of Russia, mighty though the war machine of the Third Reich had proven to be up to that point in hostilities. At the same time, it underestimated the will of the Soviet soldier to fight and, once it found its momentum, the ingenuity of Soviet industry to produce military technology that would challenge Nazi experimentation in modern weaponry, as the Soviet T-34 tank did to the German Panzer. During the same conflict, Imperial Japan overestimated the capability of the Japanese Navy and Air Force to rule the Pacific, even while emulating Nazi hubris in underestimating the will of the “decadent” American populace to withstand hardship and the eventually overwhelming juggernaut that U.S. military industry became once it hit full stride. Though Nazi war planners were aware of the existential threat opening a second front would undoubtedly invite, just as Japanese war planners knew that they

²⁵ K.J. Holsti, “The Problem of Change in International Relations Theory,” *Institute of International Relations* (University of British Columbia, 1998), 2.

would probably not be able to dominate the United States in the Pacific on a long-term basis, foreign policymakers in each state coalesced around the impetus to proceed disregarding these known admonitions.

The fact that careful calculations as to the capabilities of the originator state and the target environment were made, many of them accurate, does not absolve war planners from the folly of their strategy. In fact, the wisdom of knowing the substantial potential for failure clearly provided little foil against which to counterbalance the strategic hubris involved in these two particular cases. Knowing that failure of state objectives was a likely outcome and lacking the judgment to pursue other policy alternatives formed the inept bedrock of botched decision-making that allows us to now consider these miscalculated actions as quintessential foreign-policy blunders, as opposed to simple mistakes or sound policies that unpredictably failed. In developing a sui generis conceptual framework of blunders, subsequent analysis will use the preordainment of extant knowledge as to the high probability of foreign-policy fallacy as an essential tool in blunder classification.

Those of the "hindsight is 20-20" camp who would characterize utilizing the predictability factor in defining blunders as normative and/or irresponsibly counterfactual omit a key factor in its operationalization: many instances of foreign policy exist in which the primary protagonists fully grasp the high probability of consequences detrimental to the national interest and pursue the preponderant course of action in spite of this awareness. Empirical evidence abounds as to the existence of policymakers consciously formulating and

subsequently implementing a foreign policy known to have a high probability of failure, for a variety of reasons, in both democracies and totalitarian regimes alike. The dissertation seeks out those reasons, but before launching into a quest to understand why blunders occur, we must first agree upon a rubric for what blunders consist of. We can characterize the aforementioned awareness of a high probability of failure in the pursuit of a foreign policy as the first of four necessary but insufficient conditions of a blunder. The phenomenon of why policymakers continue policies already proven to fall short of objectives permits an especially intriguing line of research.

Foreign-policy outcomes therefore define both the extent to which a foreign policy achieves its objectives and the consequences to the national interest, as even the most obtuse decisions can result in a favorable outcome, and even the most prudent decisions can land a state in disastrous circumstances. To this end, the “hindsight is 20-20” school has quite rightly instituted the necessity to account for the decision, the outcome, and the relation between the two. To be classified as a blunder, a foreign-policy decision must produce an outcome in which both a) the majority of the primary objectives are never met and b) the action clearly leads to a chain of events that undermine the national interest as it relates to the policy chosen.

The outcome must be in discordance with the objectives decision-makers sought, not only those sold to the public (especially in a democracy) or those commonly or popularly accepted as the policy’s muse. Second, as with the case of most of the chief protagonists of the Iraq War insisting to this day that it was

the right decision, we should take neither the rallying cries nor the post facto public words of policymakers as synonymous with their analysis. Instead, public justifications for the policy should be used as one of a number of determinants in qualifying what exactly the objectives of the protagonists were, some of which will inevitably contradict their own justifying words, a schism sometimes detectable through psychoanalytic and discursive techniques promoted by the FPA literature that attempt to split through public rhetoric.

Obstacles to implementation can also come from the home state. For example, in pursuing the League of Nations, President Woodrow Wilson presented his case to the world and to his nation that only an international community of interdependent, pacific states could ensure the peace and prosperity of every individual state. It took another generation and more than 50,000,000 lives lost for that dream to take one step closer toward becoming a reality. Whether the ineptitude of the formation of the League of Nations was a failure or not depends on whom you ask and whether you attribute it to the president who promoted it or the Congress that prevented it, but it certainly was not a blunder. Even in some blatant cases of policy failure, such as the U.S. embargo on Cuba over the last several decades, if we are to assume that regime change in Havana was the overarching objective, we find the classification of blunder evasive given the low cost on the part of the home state. Although costs were incurred in prestige, inter-American relations, and loss from trade, few U.S. dollars and lives were expended.

The third necessary but insufficient condition for the classification of a blunder is therefore substantial *cost* involved in implementing the policy as well as the results of the policy. As stated in the previous section, costs can be divided into political, military, and financial. Political cost refers to political capital as it relates to a state's reputation and position in the world. In general terms, for example, the Vietnam War displayed to the world that the American military, even when fully applied, could be defeated by a peasantry of insurgents in a peripheral state, and the Iraq War provoked a strongly negative reaction among U.S. allies and among most citizens of the region. As mentioned in the previous section, financial cost can be measured in terms of the financial resources expended to implement a policy, i.e. the operating cost of sending an army to invade and occupy a foreign country in the case of military intervention. An expensive policy can still be cost-effective if it provides access to markets or other economic opportunities to the state, just as a less expensive policy that induces limited economic growth can be cost-ineffective.

The fourth necessary but insufficient condition for the classification of a blunder is predictable fallacy, based on the available *alternatives* and extant information at the time of the decision. The mettle and judiciousness of any given statesman are forged by their ability to select the sagest in a series of inevitably imperfect alternatives. While it is easy to denounce a decision once it has failed, it is equally easy to absolve policymakers of any wrongdoing as a result of the decision having been difficult. In any other profession other than statecraft, be it corporate, professional sports, or otherwise, leaders are evaluated based on their

performance, not based on their intent. Far too often in the social sciences we exculpate leaders from their blunders because we *assume* that they create decisions based on a desire to serve the national interest and an exhaustive, objective examination of the facts. However, this is a dramatic oversimplification of how leaders behave.

Chapter 3, which offers a model for a way of thinking that precipitates and exacerbates U.S. foreign policy blunders since the Second World War, contends that U.S. leaders often stray from the national interest, either because of an unwitting distorted understanding of it or because of an intentional manipulation of it. A description of what constitutes the national interest is found in the methodology chapter. The OPM model and the discussion of the national interest further address the problem of how to evaluate the selection of alternatives in FPDM. Let us hope that our elected officials, who ostensibly often resemble the parsimonious hedgehog rather than the adaptable fox, can be trained from their own errors with increasing adroitness. Until then, however, we must develop a variety of approaches for evaluating their decisions and the subsequent outcomes of those decisions.

The scarcity of literature on FPE and the avoidance and skepticism of its merits is not an isolated occurrence in the IR literature. Dismissal of practical scholarship and adherence to paradigmatic zealotry represent a way of thinking in the social sciences that deviates from its supposed purpose of bettering society through a more complete understanding of how social processes tend to work and thus how they can be improved upon through self-reflection and social

progression. Miles Kahler repined in a 1997 article that "the environment of postwar professionalization and demand for research from government consumers virtually eliminated any search for an audience beyond one's colleagues and the modern prince and dampened normative inquiry," chastising a 1953 academic conference which promoted the elitist perspective that "the primary tasks of the institutes must be to influence the minority that shapes public opinion."²⁶ Similarly, Paul H. Nitze rues that "most of what has been written and taught" on political science since WWII has been "of limited value if not counterproductive."²⁷

Ask any realist to defend their austere interpretation of international relations, and the inevitable refrain echoes, "I do not pretend to suggest that this is the way *it ought to be*. I only claim to accurately *describe* how it *is*." While this is indeed a fair description of realist theory, and this dissertation relies heavily upon many of its assertions, this adulatory capitulation to the indefatigable confines of reality as it *has been* absolves the researcher of any obligation to contribute to society by taking part in it. Furthermore, adherence to non-normative academic doctrine has not prevented policy practitioners from incorporating realist philosophy, if there is such a thing, into their political calculations. Richard Ned Lebow, for example, asserts that, "realism is not just another arcane academic doctrine," but rather has been used by American

²⁶ Miles Kahler, "Inventing International Relations: International Relations Theory After 1945," in Michael Doyle and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *New Thinking in International Relations Theory* (Westview, 1997).

²⁷ Jonathan Rosen, *The Losing War: Plan Colombia and Beyond* (SUNY, 2014), 6.

policymakers of all sorts “to defend their least palatable policies: coups, bombings, interventions, and support of oppressive dictatorships,” even while admitting that, “international relations theory is ignored by most policymakers.”²⁸

The perception of academics as sycophants of esoteric circularism has been painstakingly earned at every juncture over the previous seven decades: a full 80% of IR literature is paradigmatic, regardless of whether it falls into realism, liberalism, constructivism, Marxism or other of the 'critical' perspectives.²⁹ During the Cold War, dozens of schools and paradigmatic approaches resulted from the thermonuclear explosion of scholarship that characterized the postwar years. Parochial terms in academe the laity would never recognize began to blossom. Behavioralism, neofunctionalism, the English School, game theory and rational-choice modeling, structuralism and historical materialism, the neorealist synthesis, phenomenism, transrationalism; the list of paradigms grew to become virtually infinite, one theoretical scion sprouting from the other, but one thing remained constant: they spoke mostly unto themselves. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's separation of the mind-world dualism of neopositivism and critical realism from the mind-world monism of analyticism and reflexivity illustrate the mind-bending complications involved in IR social-scientific simplification.³⁰

²⁸ Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16.

²⁹ Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 40.

³⁰ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 37.

This convoluted parochialism leads many to the conclusion that “the Ivory Tower exists for a good reason,” but “the separation from the world of decisions and consequences has gone too far in international relations,” in the words of Joseph Leggold and Miroslav Nincic. The “good reason” they cite is the creation of knowledge for knowledge's sake, objectively and without bias; the “too far” is the aloof detachment of that knowledge to practitioners and the laity. As an alternative, they propose four lines of “policy-relevant research:” general theory, most commonly appearing in the annals of *International Organization*, *World Politics*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *American Political Science Review*; empirically focused theoretical analysis, broken further into area studies and theory-driven empirical puzzles; case-specific analysis; and direct policy analysis and advice. Noting that few theories of significant value have arisen since the Cold War, with the notable exception of Democratic Peace Theory, Leggold and Nincic echo others in eschewing “deep, often ritualized rivalry among theoretical schools” in favor of embracing the concept that “relevant scholarship implies no necessary compromise of professional scholarly standards.”³¹

To be clear, there must be a ‘theory-policy gap.’ Without one, honest scholarship proves impossible as its links to governments, think tanks, corporate interests, or other interest groups preclude its objectivity. Joseph Nye, invoking Machiavelli’s remembrance that “it is risky to try to speak truth to power when you are in the midst of the struggle for power,” states simply: “There is much to

³¹ Joseph Leggold and Miroslav Nincic, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: International Relations Theory and the Issue of Policy Relevance* (Columbia University Press, 2001), 4.

be said for the view that universities are unique institutions, but the imagined trade-off between corruption and relevance need not be so acute."³² Stephen Walt calls this the "rigor-relevance trade-off," cautioning specifically against the wholesale embrace of rational-choice modeling, noting that, "rational choice theory has yet to produce a substantial number of important new hypotheses or well-verified empirical predictions."³³ It seems a fair conclusion that many of the old paradigmatic debates simply resurface in new formulations, as advocates of particular schools and viewpoints attempt to attach their approach to the definition of the term "scientific" as concomitantly as others will believe and accept. Pedantic didacticism, from this point of view, consists of the potpourri of epistemological regionalism that blurs the parameters of the ontological frontiers we rely upon to formulate a coherent language currency, without which we are left bankrupt to grasp at straws.

In reality, no approach holds a monopoly on what we define as scientific, and as with most intellectual inquiries, adding them all up and dividing them by the number of inputs can reliably produce something as near as possible to the truth. Many a dissertation has been published on the philosophy of science and the metatheoretical developments of IR literature, and this is not one of them; however, this truncated foray into the doctrinaire is required in order to situate the

³² Joseph S. Nye, "The Relevance of Theory to Practice," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* eds. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford University Press, 2008), 650.

³³ Stephen M. Walt, "Rigor or Rigor Mortis?" *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), 5.

research agenda into the IR literature and justify the policy-driven advent of its accession. Little theory is engaged in this work, although it is relied upon implicitly; likewise, it intends to inform IR theory by presenting secondary empirical evidence in the light of original analysis. This omission of course excludes the argumentation herein, which is described as a model and a theory in its own right, and constitutes the subject of the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Historical Progenitors of Preponderance and the OPM Model

It is better to be alone than in bad company.³⁴

George Washington

He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster... for when you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.³⁵

Nietzsche

Grand strategy and American preponderance

Since the Second World War, U.S. foreign policy has revolved around an axis of key assumptions that define and perpetuate American exceptionalism by way of the entrenchment and proliferation of U.S. power and interests abroad. The engenderment of U.S. power has unsurprisingly ensconced these assumptions as the source of that engenderment. If the United States has continued to dominate the international system, so the thinking goes, then whatever strategy has been employed during that time must be succeeding. More surprising, however, has been the myopic impulse to link grand strategy with the relative position of the United States in the international system with seeming disregard for the media through which these assumptions might be most effectively employed. To what extent a great power should exert itself on an

³⁴ Mark Chidester, *George Washington's Rules for Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation* (Silverwing, 2014), 25.

³⁵ Harvey Kline, *Fighting Monsters in the Abyss: The Second Administration of Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez* (University of Alabama Press, 2015), x.

international level remains an open question, and will remain so as long as the United States can claim the mantle of the preeminent state in the international system. Indeed, one of the great debates in IR literature is where exactly the point of utility maximization falls on the isolationism-imperialism spectrum. A superpower's downfall in overextension can just as easily come about by way of isolationism, especially in the era of globalization. Given that the United States appears poised to remain the world's preeminent, if not hegemonic, state for the foreseeable future, the more compelling question is not whether but *how* to employ and deploy American power.³⁶

This research makes no claim as to the merits or demerits of offensive or defensive realism, nor does it take serious interest in the debate over how U.S. power has changed relative to other international powers in the last seven decades. It accepts that international relations are still largely nested within the basic realist principles of the zero-sum game and the quest to maximize the utility function in order to pursue a relatively fixed national interest, and it asserts that the national interest has been pursued imprudently by U.S. policymakers since the Second World War due to the continued adherence to the grand strategy of American preponderance after 1945. The methodological implications of the term 'American preponderance' are detailed in the next chapter, which addresses the research design. The term is here defined as *the grand strategy that assumes a global scale for the U.S. national interest, considers potential threats anywhere in*

³⁶ Robert Wade, "Emerging World Order? From Multipolarity to Multilateralism in the G20, the World Bank, and the IMF," *Politics & Society* Vol. 39, No. 3 (September 2011), 347-378.

the world as potential existential threats to U.S. national security, and attempts to proliferate American interests, security, and institutions globally so as to engender U.S. power and prevent the engenderment of potentially hostile powers. Inherent in the hypotheses of this dissertation is the implication that this grand strategy negatively affects the national interest, in simplistic terms because it pursues trouble rather than avoiding it. The term shares much in common with the grand strategy referred to as American primacy, which focuses primarily on maintaining the privileged relative power position of the U.S. state in the international system. "American preponderance" explicitly avoids the problematic terms "empire" and "hegemony," the former too vague and its literature often too vitriolic; the latter describing a slightly more aggressive (perhaps imperialistic) foreign policy than that which American preponderance means to presuppose.

The most intractable foreign-policy outputs tend to be those most associated with the elements of a state's foreign-policy objectives considered by foreign policymakers to be most necessary to advance the grand strategy of the state. A foreign policy *assumption*, or an element of grand strategy that is taken as given, therefore holds an inherently fundamental position in the foreign policy of a state to the extent that it can be defined as a *necessity*. The unquestionable assumptions embedded in the FPDM process thus form the conduit of any desired foreign-policy outcome. In a state as large, powerful, and decentralized as the United States, these assumptions become even more significant, because the state's foreign-policy institutions cannot easily be reversed by a sudden

change in leadership or public opinion.³⁷ Further compounding the significance of U.S. foreign-policy assumptions is the phenomenon that many of the paramount assumptions taken for granted in U.S. foreign policy distinguish it from that of any other state. The United States can therefore be understood as an exceptional state to the extent that it considers itself an exceptional state in that a state is what its citizenry and leaders believe it is, at least to the extent that it is powerful enough to exert those beliefs on the international system.

The idea of innate American exceptionalism, proliferated throughout the American zeitgeist since the inception of the U.S. nation-state in the 18th century, represents a notion common among policymakers and the citizenry alike. Throughout the centuries, but particularly since the Second World War, innumerable quotes by statesmen similar to that of Albright's "indispensible nation" declaration have solidified the concept in the collective American milieu. Although every state considers itself exceptional in some fashion or another, and thus justifies its legitimacy to rule over its citizenry and sometimes even the citizenry of other states, the United States is the only state since the virtual demise of National Socialism in 1945 to promote its own exceptionalism with such obstinately pervasive intent. The galvanization of this intent has been manifested by way of the grand strategy of American preponderance since the

³⁷ The United States is a 'weak state' due to its republican decentralization of power relative to more authoritarian or otherwise centralized states. Although the executive branch has exerted itself more forcefully in recent decades, especially in foreign policy, the power of the purse still resides in the Congress, a branch whose members must answer directly to their local (parochial) constituencies. For example, Congress regularly forces the military to purchase products and services it does not want, largely because of the entrenched local interests of the military-industrial complex (military bases and hardware-production facilities that benefit local economies).

Second World War. This research contends that American preponderance has served as the grand-strategic fulcrum around which all other grand-strategic options have been considered since the Second World War.

We can begin to extrapolate the key facets of this particular grand strategy by defining it in terms of the definition of grand strategy itself, which some have disambiguated to the point of arguing that no grand strategy exists in the United States, if in any state at all. This research assumes that an identifiable grand strategy exists in every prominent state, and takes the commonly utilized definition of the term put forth by Barry Posen: "A political-military, means-end chain, a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself."³⁸ This security can be military or economic, material or ideational, but is always related to the *perception* of the citizenry that its material interests and ideational ambitions are being pursued by their leaders in concert with the national interest (a citizen must *feel* secure in order to achieve security, a feeling pervasively mercurial in the heart and mind of the modern American). Christopher Layne provides a slightly more detailed definition, defining it as "a three-step process: determining a state's vital security interests; identifying the threats to those interests; and deciding how best to employ the state's political, military, and economic resources to protect those interests."³⁹

³⁸ Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 14.

³⁹ Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security* Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997): 86-124.

A third definition by John Lewis Gaddis envisions "the process by which a state relates long-term strategic ends to means under the rubric of an overarching and enduring vision to advance the national interest."⁴⁰ Distinguishing between the prewar origins of American preponderance and its postwar evolution permits an understanding of the ideational motivations for its ossification in American political-military doctrine during the Second World War and its perpetuation through the cessation of hostilities in 1945, the Fall of the Berlin Wall, and the post-9/11 world. Each of these landmarks signifies the beginning of an era in which U.S. foreign policymakers might have pulled back from a hyper-vigilant foreign policy, but instead decided to remain entrenched in its monistically preponderant commitments and ambitions overseas.

The origins and evolution of American preponderance

The territory and idea of *America* and what it means to be *American* has been proliferating since long before the forces of human civilization managed to combine the two into a nation-state. From their outset, the American colonies had no choice but to expand into the frontier in search of land to conquer and resources to exploit if they aspired to establish a foothold on the North American continent. This instilled a spirit of expansionism into the American soul by linking survival with territorial and material enlargement. This phenomenon strengthened rather than withered as the eventual United States prospered and defended its

⁴⁰ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro et. al., *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the Wars* (Cambridge University Press: 2012), 14.

national claim against the theretofore-impenetrable British Empire. Between the Civil War and the First World War, U.S. grand strategy evolved and shifted between differing objectives and various levels of intervention in foreign affairs. Constituencies began to emerge in the Democratic and Republican bases, separated initially between northeastern manufacturers that favored selective interventionism in the periphery to protect markets, primarily represented by Republicans, and southern farmers who traded with core countries and were disinterested in expansionism, primarily represented by Democrats. While late 18th century Democrats did not pursue expansionism to the same extent as their Republican counterparts, they did not oppose it enough to provide a sufficient political fissure that would have precluded it.⁴¹ In the last three decades of the 19th century, even as domestic territorial and industrial expansion took place at an unprecedented rate, the state began consolidating its bureaucratic institutions for expansion abroad. The civil services, Foreign Service, and military were all professionalized and strengthened. While Europeans carved up colonies in Africa and Asia, America participated to a degree but was reluctant to take such an exuberant role in colonial plunder, an American-European discrepancy that would cause tensions between the allies during both World Wars (as well as within American identity itself). 'Imperial isolationism' balanced against 'collective

⁴¹ Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).

internationalism' in American politics, and ultimately melded into a continual tug-of-war between expansionism and isolationism.⁴²

Attempting to corral both the impulse to expand abroad and the reluctance to become mired in the troubles of the world, the United States at the turn of the 20th century developed what has been described as 'reticent expansionism,' by which the nation would delve into foreign entanglements and markets discriminately and wherever an opportunity seemed politically and economically viable.⁴³ As material expansion moved westward and ultimately overseas, ideological expansion inevitably accompanied it, most demonstrably in the conceptualization of "Manifest Destiny." This idea, perhaps the most defining of late 19th century America, planted the seeds of global expansionism in the American mind: "It meant expansion, prearranged by Heaven, over an area not clearly defined," and consolidated previously disparate ideological predispositions into an enlarging America, advocated to some degree by every early prominent American leader by nature of the frontier borders of the country, into a neatly packaged justification to proliferate the nation and thus the state.⁴⁴

Still in the lull of a relatively isolationist stance in the interwar period after an (albeit successful) intervention in Europe that many Americans nonetheless came to regret, the American public was unwittingly stirred into a global conflict

⁴² Charles Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization: America in Midpassage*, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 442-458.

⁴³ John Dobson, *Reticent Expansionism: The Foreign Policy of William McKinley* (Duchesne University Press, 1988).

⁴⁴ Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Harvard University Press, 1963).

once again with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The 'sleeping giant' that awoke on December 7, 1941 has yet to go back to sleep. A relatively small and outdated standing army was hurriedly whipped into service and enlarged, accompanied by an immediate and truly transformative astronomical increase in industrial military hardware production. As a result of the unprecedented rise of American power overseas in the destruction and subsequent occupation of Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany, US leaders decided that the need to remain in fixed positions abroad to preclude another foreign attack was paramount, especially in order to counterbalance against the Soviet Union's impending rival expansion.

While the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Second World War more broadly provided the catalyst for militarization and the formation of a global defense system, the threat from wartime ally Soviet Union cemented the need to employ a more active role in international politics. According to Melvyn Leffler, postwar planning "always presupposed American hegemony over the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans," and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff asserted that "the further away from our own vital areas we can hold our enemy through the possession of advanced bases," the greater the opportunity to prevent it from violating American sovereignty.⁴⁵ Leffler further explicates that the standard postwar attitude among U.S. foreign policymakers was one in which "given their country's overwhelming power, they now expected to refashion the world in America's

⁴⁵ Melvyn Leffler, "The American Conception of National Security and the Beginning of the Cold War, 1945-48," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 89, No. 2 (April 1984), 346-381.

image and create the American century."⁴⁶ The roots of American preponderance began to bear trunks.

By the time the United States entered hostilities in earnest in the aftermath of the attack at Pearl Harbor, the historical, political, ideational, economic, bureaucratic, institutional, interest-group, and military-industrial seeds of American preponderance had been sufficiently sewn so as to permit the flourishing of an American superpower. Though ideology, "much like imperialism and liberalism, other protean concepts frequently bandied about in serious historical and political discourse, is hard to pin down," it is nevertheless too important to be ignored; the same must be said of culture, a distinct concept with some similar traits.⁴⁷ One ambitious attempt at literary conglomeration of the panoply of discordant factors colluding to formulate the overarching objective of American preponderance takes form in Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*.⁴⁸ This sociological approach to *Americanness* and Americanism pieces together causes and consequences of what Hartz describes as an American faith, a liberal tradition so ingrained that it formed "one of the most powerful absolutisms in the world." According to Hartz, the "American way" consolidated a political homogeneity that led to "a messianism in the traditional American liberal," depicting foreign cultures as apostasy and consistently begging for

⁴⁶ Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 1992).

⁴⁷ Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Yale University Press, 1987), xi.

⁴⁸ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955).

Americanization: “Americanism, when it does not retreat, goes abroad.” The United States, “governed by an irrational Lockianism,” alienates outsiders and non-conformists so much as to “transform eccentricity into sin.” Tocqueville likewise observed that “the main value of political democracy is that it generates restless activity and superabundant energy in society and thereby makes it more prosperous.”⁴⁹ This “superabundant energy” can perhaps become problematic when applied internationally to an anarchical environment. Exuberance in oneself carries with it an inherent impulse to project it onto others so that they also may revel in that zealous rapture.

The significance of Hartz’s book rests within its description of a distinct Americanism that interacts with trepidation and often hostility with contending ways of life. His discussion of an American absolutism, based though it may be on liberal principles, segues into other works that have taken the baton in a different direction. If there is a ‘liberal tradition’ or ‘liberal absolutism’ in America, what Ikenberry describes as a ‘liberal Leviathan,’ one of the media for carrying that tradition through differing historical circumstances, popular preferences, and presidential and Congressional regimes inevitably becomes ideology, the ever-fungible most common denominator in the construction of the national self-image and the institutional preferences through which that image is advanced in foreign affairs. Although many consider the ‘national interest’ the most fungible variable in delineating foreign policy, opportunities to mold the perception of what

⁴⁹ Tocqueville is being paraphrased here by Jon Elster in *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 24.

constitutes the national interest abound, especially in a nation with a gargantuan international presence, and that malleability is where ideology takes flight, as evasive as its measurability may be. Christopher Layne argues that ideology creates an aggressive U.S. foreign policy more than any other factor, dictating an inward-outward imposition of American will internationally rather than waiting to respond to events as they form and affect the national interest, quoting officials such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who believed that the country could only be safe “to the extent that its total environment is safe.” But rather than expediting American security and prosperity, this ideology actually invites danger. In Layne's words, “Each new defensive perimeter is menaced by turmoil on the other side of the line.”⁵⁰

The change-continuity debate and grand strategy in the postwar years

Two overarching questions on U.S. grand strategy have lingered among scholars since 1945. First, did the United States build the postwar order on standard national-interest grounds or ideational liberal grounds? And second, to what extent has U.S. grand strategy shifted and evolved in response to the global environment between 1945 and the present day? The answer to the former is both, and the answer to the latter is very little. Even if the United States indeed erred on the side of isolationism up until 1941, it abandoned that prescription for foreign-policy ailment almost entirely after the Second World War. And even if

⁵⁰ Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Cornell University Press: 2006), 128.

that event did permanently transform U.S. foreign policy in a substantially more outward trajectory, it nonetheless did so with all the trappings of preponderance having been already extant in the solipsistic American identity, if mostly in a dormant sense, for at least a century. Regardless, what emerged in 1945 was a nation eager to exert its power on a scale never before seen in history; that is to say, a truly global scale. Although more has been written about U.S. foreign policy than any other topic in the history of IR literature, the postwar consensus of the grand strategy of preponderance has remained relatively consistent throughout the previous seven decades. The debate over U.S. grand strategy has therefore devolved into the particularities of that settlement (*when* and under what circumstances policy tools such as 'regime change' should be pursued, rather than *if*) and whether the United States built the postwar order on standard national-interest grounds or ideational liberal grounds. In some ways, both arguments descend to semantics. Fortunately, IR scholarship excels in that endeavor.

John Ikenberry propounds the viewpoint that although the United States of course never drifted too far away from its national interests when constructing the postwar liberal order, it indeed built that order on the liberal principles of democracy, free markets, and adherence to international laws, rules, and norms that protected the weak and legitimized the strong. Citing enduring features of American political culture that provided a foundation for the multilateral liberal world order, such as a universalist creed, a strong belief in institutions and the rule of law, the multiculturalism of American society, and a nationalism built upon

civic rather than ethnic foundations, Ikenberry envisions a United States that got less than it bargained for and offered more leadership than it wanted in the postwar years.⁵¹ Having done so, it still managed to successfully employ both Containment policy and the creation of a "democratic club" that alienated outsiders and provided incentives to its members.⁵² Ikenberry recognizes that the Cold War reinforced the solidarity of the Western world order, but denies that it was entirely dependent on it. The United States simply offered inclusion into its 'club' of security alliances, open markets, multilateral institutions, capitalism, and democracy, and in exchange for relinquishing dominance to the United States other powers gained access, partnerships, and legitimacy. As such, the Fall of the Berlin Wall did little to change that international institutional bargain, and the post-Cold War global environment should therefore have been just as receptive to the liberal hegemon as it had been for the previous five decades.

Those with a more critical perspective on the postwar order, such as David Skidmore, offer a contending train of thought that accepts many of the pretenses of Ikenberry's analysis but takes issue with "the depth of America's postwar commitment to multilateralism, the role that the Cold War and its passing played in shaping U.S. attitudes toward international institutions, and the sources

⁵¹ John Ikenberry, "Rethinking the Origins of American Hegemony," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 104, No. 3 (Autumn 1989), 375-400.

⁵² John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

and prospects for America's recent unilateralist turn." ⁵³ Some observers, including Ikenberry, link the "unilateralist turn" of the Bush Administration to the neoconservative progenitors of the Bush Doctrine, calling it a "radical" shift away from the traditional constraints of the multilateral postwar order, eventually heralding "the end of the neoconservative movement" when the Iraq War descended into chaos in 2004.⁵⁴ Timothy Lynch and Robert Singh, in defending the Bush Doctrine, present it as in line with decades of U.S. foreign policy rather than a momentary aberration in it.⁵⁵

In contrast to Ikenberry, Skidmore contends that without the strategic necessities of the Cold War, the 'institutional bargain' that held the postwar order together evaporated, leaving the United States "less willing to provide collective goods through strong international institutions" and other states "less likely to defer to U.S. demands for special privileges that exempt the U.S. from normal multilateral constraints."⁵⁶ Bruce Cronin summarizes the inherent paradox of balancing the national interest with facilitating global order: "The leading state serves to insure systemic stability by creating universal rules and institutions and by providing collective goods. Yet, the hegemon is also concerned with its narrower, self-regarding interests that may require the exercise of power outside

⁵³ David Skidmore, "Understanding the Unilateralist Turn in Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis* Vol. 1 No. 2 (July 2005), 207-228.

⁵⁴ John Ikenberry, "The End of the Neoconservative Movement," *Survival* 46: 10.

⁵⁵ Timothy Lynch and Robert Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ David Skidmore, "Understanding the Unilateralist Turn in Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis* Vol. 1 No. 2 (July 2005), 207-228.

of multilateral constraints."⁵⁷ Joseph Nye envisions this paradox as the existential manifestation of the stalemate occurring when a hegemon is too powerful to be challenged by others, yet not powerful enough to achieve its objectives alone.⁵⁸

Others focus on the extent to which unilateralism has shifted over the course of subsequent administrations in the latter years of the Cold War and the years following its end. Robert Kagan, for example, describes changes in the overall balance of power to explain the rift in the lead-up to the Iraq War between the United States and Europe.⁵⁹ Alternatively, Samuel Huntington highlights unilateralist tendencies in the Clinton Administration.⁶⁰ David Lake likewise argues that U.S. policymakers have never given more than modest weight to European dissent.⁶¹ While these arguments are relevant, they address the particularities of U.S. grand strategy and foreign policy, rather than the nature of U.S. foreign relations more broadly. Regardless of what aspect of U.S. diplomatic history one might wish to focus on, Arthur Schlesinger reminds us that "there is no older American tradition in the conduct of foreign affairs than unilateralism."⁶²

⁵⁷ Bruce Cronin, "The Paradox of Hegemony: America's Ambiguous Relationship with the United Nations," *European Journal of International Relations* 7: 107.

⁵⁸ Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why The World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁹ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: The United States and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2007).

⁶⁰ Samuel Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 78 No. 2 (March/April 1999), 35-49.

⁶¹ David Lake, *Entangling Relations* (Princeton University Press: 1999).

⁶² Arthur Schlesinger, "Unilateralism in Historical Perspective," in *Understanding Unilateralism in American Foreign Relations*, ed. Glyn Prins, (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), 18-29.

Curiously, he invokes Ikenberry in questioning why this is the case, given that most Americans remain multilateralist about many individual foreign-policy preferences. This discrepancy becomes somewhat less curious when we acknowledge that there are many catchall policies the public tends to disagree with despite agreeing with many of the tenets found within them, as is the case with, for example, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010.⁶³

Those who associate U.S. hegemony during and after the Cold War with the more liberal tenets of its reign, rather than more self-interested ambitions, tend to portray the Cold War and its aftermath as a relatively peaceful struggle that eventually triumphed in Francis Fukuyama's "end of history," or final enshrinement of liberal democratic capitalism as the only accepted form of governance. However, this imagination of the postwar liberal order, partly based on the decrease in direct militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) between great powers (there were virtually none) ignores a gigantic thorn in the side of that order: it witnessed "the greatest accumulation of armaments the world has ever known, a whole series of prolonged and devastating limited wars, an abundance of revolutionary, ethnic, religious, and civil violence, as well as some of the deepest and most intractable ideological rivalries in human experience," in the

⁶³ Americans have been shown to support most of the components of 'Obamacare,' even while disliking it as a whole, partially due to its complexity. See Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, "Americans Like Obamacare. They Just Don't Know It," Associated Press, January 9, 2017. The same could be said of many foreign policies: citizens sometimes approve of the idea of a policy, but disapprove of its contents; the inverse can just as often be the case.

words of John Lewis Gaddis.⁶⁴

The "stability of the bipolar world" Kenneth Waltz referenced was anything but stable for citizens of the developing world, caught between the forces of Communism, capitalism, and neutrality, none of which guaranteed safety or precluded meddling from one side or the other.⁶⁵ For the "empire of liberty," as Odd Arne Westad termed the United States (in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson), the Cold War was part of a continuity stretching from George Washington to George W. Bush: "From its inception the United States was an interventionist power that based its foreign policy on territorial expansion."⁶⁶ It was only logical therefore that it do everything within its power to withstand its bipolar competitor by any and all means necessary. Gaddis, in contrast, characterizes the Cold War as a one-off for international relations from which little can be gleaned in the larger picture. This contention mirrors the contention between Ikenberry and those of his ilk and Skidmore and those of his. The case for continuity is more compelling. Robert Litwak juxtaposes the Cold War policy of Containment with the containment of 'rogue states' such as Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and Libya after the Cold War, further highlighting the transcendence of U.S. foreign policy through major historical landmarks in international relations

⁶⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, "The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System," *International Security* Vol. 10, No. 4 (Spring 1986), 99-142.

⁶⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus* Vol. 93, No. 3 (Summer 1964), 881-909.

⁶⁶ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9. "Empire of Liberty" originally traces back to Thomas Jefferson.

that might have otherwise offered the chance to reexamine the status quo.⁶⁷ This is but one example; one could also point to military spending, interventions, the expansion of NATO, and the Iraq War, among other policies, that signify continuity since 1945 rather than evolution.

Jack Snyder examines realist, cognitive, and domestic-political explanations for why the United States charted the course of preponderance in the postwar years even when it often seemed contrary to the national interest. Although realism is wary of foreign entanglements, in large part due to the balancing blowback that often forms a counterweight to aggressive foreign ventures, some see expansionism as producing more fecundity than tribulation. However, the author rightly points out that expansion invariably encounters diminishing returns at some unidentified point, as neutrals and/or foes balance against expansion and administrative costs of conquered territories and peoples rise. In the cognitive explanation, policymakers codify expansionist maxims that transcend disconfirming experiences, and in the domestic-political explanation expansionism harms the overall national interest while benefitting certain segments of the political economy that exercise influence over Congress and the presidency. Snyder proposes an alternative explanation that spins off of the domestic-political approach, whereby "logrolling" or backscratching by interest groups coalesces around an expansionist policy as a compromise whose

⁶⁷ Robert Litwak, *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment After the Cold War* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

benefits outweigh its costs for particular constituencies.⁶⁸ His approach falls within the purview of the body of literature that conceives of the national interest as malleable rather than fixed.

While the true motivations for a state's behavior can never be known with absolute precision, the United States has been remarkably consistent in its reservation of the right (or perhaps the privilege) to intervene anywhere in the world it perceives its interests to be at stake. The development that tips the balance toward the perspective that preponderance drives U.S. foreign policy first, engaging in veritable liberal foreign relations only selectively, is the simple fact that it has never capitalized on its favorable position at particular moments (at the end of the Cold War, for example) to facilitate a truly liberal world order in which it behaves only as the protagonist and never as the antagonist. At every watershed moment, U.S. leaders have instead redoubled efforts to assert Americanism to a further extent than ever before. As early as 1944, decisions were made that welcomed the oncoming Cold War by characterizing the Soviets as dangerous aggressors (which they quite well may have been); after the Cold War the decision was made to enlarge NATO rather than incorporate a fractured Russia; after 9/11 the Bush Administration aggressively pursued unilateralism in its prosecution of the war against terrorism and the Iraq War. At every critical historical juncture since 1945, the vantage point of U.S. leaders has been to consolidate and expand relative power, rather than solicit cooperation from

⁶⁸ Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).

potential adversaries. The irony of this perspective is that the United States has done so via the imposition of a quintessentially liberal world order. The 'arsenal of democracy' lives up to its name.

Preponderance after the Cold War

The end of the Cold War presented the United States with an embarrassment of riches and a corresponding question of impending significance: given that it had successfully emerged from the bipolar world as the sole superpower in the international system, what position should it now take with regard to the former Soviet Union and other powerful states? What do you do in international relations when you have achieved global dominance? Continue on with business as usual? Or capitalize on the 'unipolar moment' to inculcate global beneficence and establish a lasting liberal order once and for all? In keeping with its time-honored traditions, the United States did both. In a sense, this was the same question the nation asked itself at the triumphant conclusion of the Second World War (the notable difference being the imminent threat of Communism and the expanding sphere of influence of the Soviet Union). The answer to that question was as unambiguous as it was consistent with postwar grand strategy: continue to do what works. Even foreign policies that end in failure are usually justified by their progenitors, and those that end in success render the policies that supposedly ushered in that success even more immutable than they would otherwise be given the gravitational persistence of institutional resistance to vicissitude.

In 1990, Charles Krauthammer characterized the new balance of power with the Soviet Union flailing thusly: "The immediate post-Cold War world is not multipolar. It is unipolar," as "the center of world power is the unchallenged superpower, attended by its Western allies."⁶⁹ He argued for an international activism to exploit the unique opportunity, labeling neoliberal institutionalists "utopian" and conservative isolationists "naive."⁷⁰ Paul Kennedy described this 'unipolar moment' as unique in all of history: "Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power."⁷¹ Despite that exaltation, he warned that this unprecedented power *did not* render imperial overstretch innocuous, as well as questioning whether that power discrepancy in fact represented a new unipolar world.⁷²

Somewhat curiously, some of the same scholars rejoicing in the enormous resource endowment of the United States have also been those cautioning against arriving at the assumption that this either gives that power free will in the international system or that this endowment will last forever. Leffler, for example, describes American power in 1945 as totally unrivaled in history: "At the end of the war the United States had two-thirds of the world's gold reserves and three-fourths of its invested capital. More than half of the entire world's manufacturing capacity was located in the United States, and the nation was turning out more

⁶⁹ Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 70, No. 1 (1990/1991), 23.

⁷⁰ Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *The National Interest* (Winter 2003), 5-17.

⁷¹ Paul M. Kennedy, "The Greatest Superpower Ever," *New Perspectives Quarterly* Vol. 19, Issue 2 (Spring 2002), 8.

⁷² Paul M. Kennedy, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 78, No. 2 (March/April 1999), 35-50.

than a third of all goods produced around the world. It owned half of the world's supply of shipping and was the world's largest exporter of goods and services. The gross national product of the United States was three times Soviet Russia's and more than five times Great Britain's."⁷³ His argument is nonetheless one of prudence.

With this newly disproportionate share of world power, what were the ideal grand-strategic preferences of the leader of the 'new world order?' John Kohout consolidates grand strategy options at the end of the Cold War into three general categories: noninterventionism, unipolarism (that most closely related to preponderance in his typology) and multilateralism, conceptualizing each in terms of "the international system, characterization of security interests, evaluation of strategic assets, and specification of a strategic approach."⁷⁴ On a more time-expansive level, Paul Miller delineates five enduring "pillars" of U.S. grand strategy dating back to the early 20th century: "Defending the American homeland from attack, maintaining a favorable balance of power among the great powers, punishing rogue actors, and investing in good governance and allied capabilities abroad," in addition to pursuing the democratic peace through economic interdependence and concomitant alienation of nondemocratic states.⁷⁵ Miller attributes several foreign-policy errors, such as the Vietnam War,

⁷³ Leffler 1992, 2.

⁷⁴ John Kohout et. al., "Alternative Grand Strategy Options for the United States," *Comparative Strategy* Vol. 14, No. 4 (1995), 361.

⁷⁵ Paul Miller, "Five pillars of American grand strategy," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 54 (October/November 2012), 7.

alliances with dictatorships in developing countries, and failing to understand the jihadist threat to ignorance of most issues other than those dealing with great-power politics and the overall balance of power. This attribution is particularly relevant to the case studies.

As we will see in later chapters, this overreliance on the balance of power leaves the United States vulnerable to 'hot' threats as U.S. leaders choose instead to focus on 'cold' threats. Max Boot, for example, has documented the rise of American power in conjunction with U.S. participation in small peripheral wars and questioned why the U.S. military continues to place overwhelming concentration on high-intensity conflicts, even after experiences in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.⁷⁶ Miller's work singles out three principle threats to U.S. grand strategy: autocratic states, failed states and the rogue occupiers operating in their space, and what David Kilcullen terms the "global Islamist insurgency."⁷⁷

Although U.S. foreign policymakers do pay some attention to these threats, the United States often employs the same tools against them that were designed to fight interstate conflicts, as U.S. foreign policymaking institutions never fully evolved beyond the Cold War or, for that matter, the Second World War. On the one hand, great-power politics remain a threat to U.S. interests in the form of a resurgent (in ambition, if not in capabilities) Russia, a rising (in both

⁷⁶ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (Basic Books, 2014).

⁷⁷ Miller is referencing David Kilcullen's "Countering Global Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 28, No. 4 (2005), 597-617.

ambition and capabilities) China, and the emergence of domestically oriented populism. On the other hand, the 'hot' wars the U.S. is now fighting, primarily the war against Islamist fundamentalism, can take little from the policies and institutions oriented toward addressing issues of great-power politics. The discrepancy between the strategies and tools needed to address great-power politics and those required to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, environmental degradation, and other non-traditional security problems continues to present challenges to foreign policymakers. The Iraq War is the prime example of erroneously responding to a low-intensity nonstate security problem via state-state conflict.

Posen offers the following typology, as shown in Table 1:⁷⁸

Table 1: Competing visions of grand strategy

	Neo-Isolationism	Selective Engagement	Cooperative Security	Primacy
Analytical Anchor	Minimal, defensive realism	Traditional balance of power realism	Liberalism	Maximal realism/unilateralism
Major Problem of Int'l Politics	Avoiding entanglement in the affairs of others	Peace among the major powers	The indivisibility of peace	The rise of a peer competitor
Preferred World Order	Distant balance of power	Balance of power	Interdependence	Hegemonic
Nuclear Dynamics	Supports status quo	Supports status quo	Supports aggression	Supports aggression
Conception of National Interests	Narrow	Restricted	Transnational	Broad
Regional Priorities	North America	Industrial Eurasia	Global	Industrial Eurasia & the home of any potential peer competitor
Nuclear Proliferation	Not our problem	Discriminate prevention	Indiscriminate prevention	Indiscriminate prevention
NATO	Withdraw	Maintain	Transform & expand	Expand
Regional Conflict	Abstain	Contain; discriminate intervention	Intervene	Contain; discriminate intervention
Ethnic Conflict	Abstain	Contain	Nearly indiscriminate intervention	Contain
Humanitarian Intervention	Abstain	Discriminate intervention	Nearly indiscriminate intervention	Discriminate intervention
Use of Force	Self-defense	Discriminate	Frequent	At will
Force Posture	Minimal self-defense force	Two-MRC force	Reconnaissance strike complex for multilateral action	A two-power-standard force

⁷⁸ Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 13; and Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996), 4.

Posen has characterized U.S. grand strategy since the Cold War as "Liberal Hegemony," chiding it as "unnecessary, counterproductive, costly, and wasteful" in lamenting that "the United States has grown incapable of moderating its ambitions in international politics," proposing instead the alternative that he terms "a grand strategy of restraint." He explains what led to settling upon this form of 'Liberal Hegemony:'

Four factors helped make Liberal Hegemony the victor. First, with the collapse of Soviet power the United States became the most capable global power in history. Nothing stood in the way. Second, the Western liberal model was triumphant. History vindicated the rightness of our system and made it in our eyes the appropriate model for others. Third, the Cold War ended with U.S. forces "manning the ramparts" around the world. Insecurity and disorder beyond the ramparts quickly created demands from within and without to move them outward. Fourth, the United States had built giant organizations to wage the Cold War and squadrons of national security experts to manage them. Most organization theorists will tell you that organizations never want to go out of business; if they succeed at their first task, they will try to find another. For these reasons, a more rather than a less ambitious strategy emerged after the Cold War, even before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States, which supercharged the whole effort.⁷⁹

Posen's description of U.S. national security expanding to a global scale, "Insecurity and disorder beyond the ramparts quickly created demands from within and without to move them outward," closely resembles that of Layne's, "Each new defensive perimeter is menaced by turmoil on the other side of the line," whereby the national-security boundaries of the state are expanded beyond

⁷⁹ Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 2014), xii.

the state itself. In promoting his grand strategy of "Restraint," Posen offers a thorough case against the status quo of 'Liberal Hegemony.' This characterization embodies a substantial subsection of U.S. grand-strategy scholarship that varies in terminology but finds concordance in substance. In true academic fashion, this terminology differs according to the author, and use of the term 'preponderance,' though displaying conceptual overlap with grand-strategic terms such as 'primacy' as it does with many others, is nonetheless nontrivial. The following chapter further disambiguates 'preponderance,' 'primacy,' 'hegemony,' and other similar terms, but here the concept is introduced in relation to the established context.

Leffler was the first scholar to explore the idea of a U.S. grand strategy of 'preponderance' in his 1992 book, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, The Truman Administration, and The Cold War*. His exhaustive survey of postwar declassified internal government documents illustrates in great detail the grand-strategic thinking of U.S. foreign policymakers in the early years of the Cold War. It was Paul Nitze, a high-level foreign-policy official who served in various capacities under multiple administrations that declared: "To seek less than preponderant power would be to opt for defeat." This quote is the ancestral provenance of the term. Nitze's absolute view on total global victory was mirrored by his unambiguous view on the Soviet threat. In a speech in Milwaukee he stated simply: "By the Spring of 1947 all but the most blind could see what the Russians were up to and that the policy of attempting to continue into the

postwar world the wartime collaboration with the Soviet Union was bankrupt."⁸⁰ Robert Worley compares preponderance with primacy, contrasting the two similar means-oriented approaches with the strict intention-oriented balance-of-power Containment approach, which ceded more territory to the enemy and aligned more with defensive realism than offensive realism.⁸¹ Leffler describes what the word "preponderance" meant to postwar strategic planners:

Preponderance did not mean domination. It meant creating a world environment hospitable to U.S. interests and values; it meant developing the capabilities to overcome threats and challenges; it meant mobilizing the strength to reduce Soviet influence on its own periphery; it meant undermining the appeal of communism; it meant fashioning the institutional techniques and mechanisms to manage the free world; and it meant establishing a configuration of power and a military posture so that if war erupted, the United States would prevail. If adversaries saw the handwriting on the wall, they would defer to American wishes.⁸²

Leffler largely looks favorably upon the 'Wise Men' that built postwar grand strategy, but does chastise them for overemphasizing the importance of the periphery in the emerging bipolar world.⁸³ Given that the Cold War's "long peace" among the great powers collaterally littered the developing world with widespread violence and civil disarray as the two superpowers hashed it out for control of the

⁸⁰ Paul Nitze, "Address Before Third Annual Institute of the World Affairs Council of Milwaukee," February 21, 1959, National Security Archives, 4, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB139/nitze03.pdf>

⁸¹ Robert Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power: A Critical Examination of the U.S. National Security System* (Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2015).

⁸² Leffler 1992, 18.

⁸³ *The Wise Men* (1986) by Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas identifies the men most intimately involved in postwar policy planning and describes their story.

hinterlands, this rebuke seems fitting.⁸⁴ In "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," Layne further investigates the grand strategy of preponderance, echoing others in illustrating the lack of policy change at the end of the Cold War: "The Soviet Union's collapse transformed the international system dramatically, but there has been no corresponding change in U.S. grand strategy." He explicates the exegesis of the grand strategy of preponderance:

The United States has pursued the same grand strategy, preponderance, since the late 1940s. The key elements of this strategy are creation and maintenance of a U.S.-led world order based on preeminent U.S. political, military, and economic power, and on American values; maximization of U.S. control over the international system by preventing the emergence of rival great powers in Europe and East Asia; and maintenance of economic interdependence as a vital U.S. security interest. The logic of the strategy is that interdependence is the paramount interest the strategy promotes; instability is the threat to interdependence; and extended deterrence is the means by which the strategy deals with this threat.⁸⁵

Layne, borrowing from Leffler, argues convincingly that this is the most accurate way to consolidate decades of polysemic U.S. grand strategy into one definitive term. His verbiage is more explicit and comprehensive than Leffler's because his research is more ambitious with specific respect to the term "preponderance:" Layne's central purpose is discerning the particularities of modern U.S. grand

⁸⁴ John Lewis Gaddis coined the term 'long peace' to describe the peaceful (in militarized interstate dispute terms) relations between the great powers during the Cold War that turned the developing world into the land of proxy wars.

⁸⁵ Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security* Vol. 22 No. 1 (Summer 1997), 88.

strategy, while Leffler's approach is more ecumenical in nature. Layne subsequently propounds his theory of "Extraregional Hegemony," by which the United States pursues hegemony in Europe, Asia, and the Persian Gulf, attempting to dominate each of these regions for ideological (rather than objective-security) motivations.⁸⁶

Within the broader literature on U.S. preponderance, his characterization of U.S. grand strategy uses neoclassical realism as a point of departure but describes it as more expansive than John J. Mearsheimer's, which sees the United States as hegemonic only in the Western Hemisphere; more intentional than Posen's, which sees it as somewhat ephemeral; and ideologically motivated by the 'Open Door' tradition rather than being structurally determined or given by default objective-realist parameters. The definition of "preponderance" given earlier in the chapter, while borrowing heavily from Layne and Leffler, specifies a sui generis meaning, given the distinct research agenda of this dissertation and its evolution of the term beyond what others have described. This meaning is further specified in the following chapter on methodology.

Layne also acknowledges the successes of U.S. grand strategy, continuing as it has to dominate the international system up to the present day, as well as recognizing that there is little reason to believe any other great power would behave differently under the same conditions.⁸⁷ Indeed, this dissertation,

⁸⁶ Layne 2006.

⁸⁷ This is a contentious assertion, while at the same time being rather conceptually benign because there is no way to prove or disprove this counterfactual. There has not been a power on the scale of American power since the British Empire, and the conditions of that era were very

while arguing for the existence of both imagined and real exceptionalism in U.S. foreign relations, makes no counterfactual claim as to the preclusion or inevitability of how a state with a different culture might behave under similar conditions (as mentioned, it does argue that U.S. foreign relations are ideationally and culturally determined to a large degree). Rather than focusing on the failure of grand strategy since 1945 (which on the whole would be a precarious assertion), Layne's argument rests on the notion that preponderance is unsustainable.

While this dissertation embraces the unsustainability argument, it further argues that the United States has enjoyed preeminence since 1945 *in spite* of its more ambitious foreign policies, rather than *because* of them. The failure of the two case studies, two of the most ambitious foreign policies in modern history, brings this contention to the fore. In light of the success of the U.S. state on the whole since 1945, whether measured by demographics, GDP, or international appeal, it would be overly simplistic to characterize U.S. grand strategy since 1945 as a failure, even while many of the most ambitious foreign entanglements have been. For in spite of the fact that the Chinese economy is steadily creeping up to the size of the American economy, the refrain "Someday I want to be an American" still rings truer to the aspiring developing-country emigrant than that of "Someday I want to be Chinese." The subsequent chapters seek to gain purchase on why the most prominent U.S. foreign policies keep failing, even

different than of the modern era. Furthermore, in many ways American power since WWII has transcended even the zenith of British power. There is therefore scarce equivalent in modern history.

while the U.S. state flourishes. In the words of Richard Haas: "Given its considerable endowments and advantages, this country is clearly underperforming."⁸⁸ The interaction between the grand strategy of preponderance and the individual failed policies examined in the case studies is the central interchange of the dissertation.

The dissertation thus largely evades the Marxist and historical-materialist literature that predicts the demise of the 'American Empire' and assumes that 'elites' have somehow hijacked the national interest to serve the material interests of the 'transnational capitalist class.' This is not the case: the ideational impulses described herein are not 'elite'-driven, but rather inherent in the self-image of the American and thus the self-image of the American state. Some have attempted to compare or differentiate the dominance the United States wielded after the Second World War and after the Cold War to historical empires, previous pursuits of hegemony, imperialism, or prior world orders such as the Pax Britannica. Use of the term 'imperialism,' a somewhat subjective concept that tends to fall into too-often-normative literature that aims to label U.S. foreign policy as imperial in order to subsequently brand it immoral, provides some use here in terms of empirical research but little in the way of conclusions. For example, Kelly Denton-Borhaug examines in *U.S. War-Culture, Sacrifice, and Salvation* the "ineradicable link between sacrifice and war culture solidified in the rise of the nation state:"

⁸⁸ Richard Haas, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 4.

Such a definition of religion connects with the thinking not only of ancient poets and statesmen (Juvenal wrote, 'Now we suffer the evils of a long peace. Luxury hatches terrors worse than wars'), but also modern philosophers and social scientists who have proposed that war is a positive way to maintain national health and communal purpose. Thus, Hegel: 'War has the higher meaning that through it... the ethical health of nations is maintained.' Likewise, Max Weber proposed that *caritas* and true loyalty to the nation-state requires the shedding of blood as a seal of the sanctity of this relationship. The death of the warrior achieves a 'consecrated meaning,' and confers dignity upon the coercive power of the state. The murky, yet deep-seated ties between war and religion are strong, enduring and as a result, largely invisible and outside the awareness of many, perhaps even most people.⁸⁹

The author investigates the nexus between the adoration of military service, sacrifice, and leadership and the development of national identity, a nexus perhaps more evident in the United States than any other industrialized nation on Earth—indeed, it is a common complaint among today's military members that civilians blindly "support the troops" while evading the responsibility to truly understand what it means to serve, as well as that of taking the time to learn about foreign policy in such a way as to vote with the balance of informed opinion.

American militarism is not only a perception but an empirical reality: Richard Ned Lebow notes that the United States has been the most aggressive state since 1945 when measured by war initiation.⁹⁰ The subject of the ideational

⁸⁹ Kelly Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-Culture, Sacrifice, and Salvation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 130.

⁹⁰ Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests, and Orders* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

discordance between the civilian's perception of American militarism and the soldier's experience in war has received increasing attention in the years since 9/11, an era which has included America's longest-ever war in Afghanistan, a seemingly endless war in the war against terrorism, and the full professionalization of an active-duty military for the first time in American history—no draft now tempers the war enthusiasm of the civilian population absolved from the hardships of deployment. The civilian-soldier experience-perception gap is compounded by the lack of politicians with a personal stake in the wars in which the nation is now engaged. At the height of the Iraq War, for example, there were a grand total of two children of U.S. Senators and House Representatives serving as enlisted soldiers.⁹¹

While the total amount of soldiers to have served in the wars since 9/11 now numbers in the millions, the vast majority of Americans do not serve. This leaves civilians and Congressmen unable to conceive of the wars they perpetuate in real terms, relegated instead to imagining the war on terrorism and other conflicts in purely abstract terms. Retired Lieutenant Colonel William Astore describes what remains as "'Support our troops' as a substitute for thought," an oft-embraced characterization of the desultory nature of civilian understanding of war's purpose and drudgery in military literature.⁹² Astore attributes never-ending war as the "new normal" to this phenomenon, along with "defining the world as a

⁹¹ "Absence of America's Upper Classes from the Military," ABC News, August 3, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=2270473>

⁹² William Astore, "7 Reasons America Is Stuck in Never-Ending War," March 20, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/03/seven-deadly-reasons-why-americas-wars-persist>

global battlefield," "threat inflation," and "the embrace of the national-security state by both major parties," all themes the case studies examine in detail. While the voice of the war-weary colonel or general (usually retired) has found increasing attention in scholarly and popular literature since 9/11, it also represents a rift in civil-military relations that dates back decades. In spite of the common perception that military leaders constantly push civilian leaders into war, quite the opposite is often the case, given that those who have experienced war understand its complexities and tragedies far better than the ordinary civilian or politician. Indeed, the story of Colin Powell's purpose in the Bush Administration, as well as the rift within the military over how many troops to send into Iraq, transcend this perception gap. Common sense did not prevail in 2003 because military and intelligence leaders were politicized, in contrast to their respective stated purposes as institutions.

While the model presented in this chapter indeed recognizes significant cultural influences as determining factors in the establishment of preponderance as the prevailing grand strategy alternative since 1945, it also concedes that culture cannot be measured in totality, but only in its particular recognizable manifestations as they codetermine national identity, national purpose, and thus grand-strategic preferences, along with many other factors. While the imperialist literature is not without some use, the more compelling arguments have been those that accept the unique traits of the American self-image and position in the world while acknowledging their similarities with the behavior of other great powers. For even if the voices of Kennedy, Krauthammer, and Schlesinger are

correct in assessing that U.S. postwar power, especially after the demise of the Soviet Union, was at least for a time unrivaled in history, so too are the voices (Kennedy still among them) that warn against assuming that such power can last forever. Layne's premise for shifting from preponderance to his preferred grand strategy of offshore balancing rests partially upon the impending decline in U.S. share of relative world GDP. Even those who are not 'declinists' must agree that share will diminish, if not relinquish preeminence, at some indefinite time in this century. And while there is no perfect consensus on the particularities of exactly how U.S. power has been deployed since 1945, the historical record and scholarly literature placing U.S. grand strategy in the sphere of preponderance is undeniable.

The enduring American paradox

At the precipice of the American encounter with the world is an enduring paradox. William Appleman Williams wrote in 1959, that "America's humanitarian urge to assist other people is undercut—perhaps even subverted—by the way it goes about helping them."⁹³ Williams described the 'Open Door' theme in the history of U.S. foreign relations as "America's version of the liberal policy of informal empire or free-trade imperialism."⁹⁴ Part of his argument lay in the fact that Secretary of State John Hay's 'Open Door Notes' demanded free

⁹³ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), 15.

⁹⁴ Williams 1959, 97.

access to China among the great powers just as the American frontier began to run out of room, providing fodder for the contention that the American way of life is codependent on expansion. According to the official history of the State Department, this "became the official U.S. policy toward the Far East in the first half of the 20th century."⁹⁵ What Williams termed "imperial anticolonialism" was later expounded by Gaddis, who describes "the gap Americans had allowed to develop between aspirations and accomplishments. We had preached self-determination but objected when others sought to practice it; we had proclaimed the virtues of economic freedom even as we sought to impose economic control."⁹⁶ In the same essay, Gaddis also notes that "few historians would deny, today, that the United States did expect to dominate the international scene after World War II, and that it did so well before the Soviet Union emerged as a clear and present antagonist."⁹⁷ It likewise had no intention of capitulating that dominance when the Berlin Wall fell and it still has yet to do so.

Although cultural characteristics and ideational traditions are indeed "hard to pin down," in the words of Michael Hunt, to ignore them is to leave a seismic chasm in the space between grand strategy and our understanding of how it is settled upon with regard to the national interest, processed, and operationalized. Hunt makes his case for this lens of investigation:

⁹⁵ "Secretary of State John Hay and the Open Door in China, 1899-1900," Office of the Historian, Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/hay-and-china>

⁹⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, "The Tragedy of Cold War History," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 73, No. 1 (January/February 1994), 142.

⁹⁷ Gaddis 1994, 145.

At the end I am no less aware of those difficulties and am thoroughly convinced of the truth of Gordon Craig's observation of over a decade ago: 'To establish the relationship between ideas and foreign policy is always a difficult task, and it is no accident that it has attracted so few historians.' But the subject is too important to be left in a state of neglect like a surly invalid relative whose justified claims to attention we honor only infrequently and even then perfunctorily. [U.S. foreign-policy ideology] gained coherence and appeal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and by the beginning of our century its elements had coalesced into a powerful, mutually reinforcing body of thought that had gone far toward dominating the thinking of those most concerned with foreign-policy issues. This strengthened since WWII. In accounting for the supposedly novel situation the United States has come to occupy, historians have focused their attention—almost invariably in narrowly drawn studies—on changes in strategic thinking, the needs of the economic system, elite interests and influence, the role of the presidency, the workings of bureaucratic politics, and the interaction of foreign policy with domestic politics. It is time that ideology, construed in broad historical terms, received its due.⁹⁸

Hunt's characterization of U.S. foreign-policy studies as appearing "almost invariably in narrowly drawn studies" that focus on singular, insular levels of analysis supports the direction and purpose of the dissertation. Furthermore, there is perhaps no state in the international system whose foreign relations are so inextricably tied to ideology than that of the United States. For regardless of the fact that it is often the common perception that the United States pursues aggressive foreign policies in the interest of the "bottom line," or oil, or for practical security considerations, the impact of ideology on the most ambitious foreign engagements since 1945 has been unmistakable. While it is far from singular in the creation of preponderance, the influence of militant liberalism has

⁹⁸ Hunt 1987, xii.

been the most obvious ideational contributor to this grand strategy in the modern history of the United States. Paradoxically, the impulse to expand and the impulse to spread liberalism by punishing nonliberal states and welcoming liberal ones have contrasted with pervasive isolationist tendencies over the course of the previous two centuries. Colin Dueck has cleverly termed the statesmen perpetuating this paradox "reluctant crusaders:"

Americans have often been "crusaders"—crusaders in the promotion of a more liberal international order. But Americans have also frequently been "reluctant"—reluctant to admit the full costs of promoting this liberal international vision. These two strains within the American foreign policy tradition have not only operated cyclically; they have operated simultaneously. In this sense, the history of American grand strategy is a history of "reluctant crusaders." The Bush administration's present difficulties in Iraq are therefore not an isolated event. Nor are they really the result of the president's supposed preference for unilateralism. On the contrary, the administration's difficulties in Iraq are actually the result of an excessive reliance on classically liberal or Wilsonian assumptions regarding foreign affairs.⁹⁹

What much of the relevant literature omits, and what Dueck astutely recognizes, is that the tug-of-war between militant liberalism and isolationism is not just manifested temporally, but in fact the two function "simultaneously." To be sure, there have been fits and starts of expansionism and isolation according to particular circumstances, events, and leaders, but never has either been wholly absent from the proceedings of U.S. foreign relations, even if the pendulum has been swinging far to the militant liberalism side since the total victories achieved in the Second World War. Dueck describes how the incorporation of "idealistic,

⁹⁹ Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 2.

expansive" components in American grand strategy interact with international conditions:

Liberal assumptions encourage American officials to define American goals in unusually idealistic, expansive, and global terms. At the same time, the tradition of limited liability discourages Americans from making concrete sacrifices toward that liberal vision. The result tends to be that expansive goals are pursued by quite limited means. These twin cultural legacies also incline American grand strategy in opposite directions from international pressures. Whereas domestic cultural forces tend to constrain U.S. strategic behavior abroad, and pull it in a more "liberal" direction, international conditions tend to stimulate American involvement overseas, while forcing unwanted compromise on liberal principles. The result is a persistent tug of war between international pressures and U.S. strategic culture: a cyclical tension that drives the story of American strategic adjustment over time.¹⁰⁰

While his point is that international conditions pull American liberalism in a nonliberal direction, he unwittingly exposes the dichotomy of American foreign relations. The paradox of militant liberalism also plays out on the international level: state-endogenous liberalism must by default engage in militancy because it is incapable of peaceful relations with nonliberal societies. At the same time, ideational national-security considerations often supersede liberal ones, as with the case of support for dictators that disavowed Communism during the Cold War. Thus international conditions can pull American foreign policy toward liberal or anti-liberal interventionism depending on the dictations of domestic political mandates. In other words, the "second image" works in forward and when "reversed," and neither American domestic politics nor American foreign relations

¹⁰⁰ Dueck 2006, 5.

can be understood in a vacuum.¹⁰¹ The United States is, at its core, an *international* state. Nevertheless, it is also at its core ideationally self-contained. Thus, the ultimate grand-strategy paradox: Americans define *themselves* by what makes them *American*, yet define their *purpose* in the world by the extent to which they can *engender* that *Americanism abroad*. There can be no static perfection within this paradox; hence the plethora of scholarly terms attempting to define and describe this "liberal leviathan," or "benevolent hegemon," or "empire by invitation," or "reluctant crusader..."

Dueck identifies "nationalist, realist, progressive, and internationalist subcultures" that also operate in U.S. grand strategy, and in hypothesizing that the grand strategy of preponderance precipitates the recurrence of foreign-policy blunders, this dissertation does not mean to suggest that no contending approaches are present in U.S. grand strategy. But when the most powerful state in the international system makes slight adjustments, the impact on international relations is profound: the preeminence of American power means that even a foray into interventionism carries great consequences for itself, the target state, and international relations more broadly—the two case studies in question were monumental foreign-policy undertakings by any standard IR measure; yet, they hardly registered at home for those who were not directly affected by the conflict in comparison to what civilians directly caught in a war zone experience. The battle at home was always ideational—only the soldiers involved in the Vietnam

¹⁰¹ Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization* Vol. 32 No. 4 (Autumn 1978), 881-912.

War and Iraq War experienced the conflict first-hand. But for the state intervened in, the stakes are always existential. When the Leviathan's wake approaches the boat of the Lilliputian, its ripples will be felt long and wide.

In his study examining "the pathological beliefs of fear, honor, glory and hubris," Christopher Fettweis attributes the self-imposed responsibility to assert Americanism globally to "an inflated sense of the possible, overestimation of possibilities, and underestimation of cost."¹⁰² He describes the paradox of power: "A set of particular perils accompanies great strength that make blunders more likely as well as more consequential. The stronger a country gets, the more mistakes it seems to make. Great power also exacerbates the conditions that contribute to misperception." Thus he finds it unsurprising that "foreign policy blunders, both large and small, have been a constant feature of the modern presidency, from the Bay of Pigs through Vietnam to Iraq."

Finally, observers of international politics have long understood that a paradox exists concerning threats and danger. While growing strength should make states feel safer and more secure, the opposite often occurs. The perception of threat tends to expand alongside power, leading strong states to recognize new dangers that they had not seen before. The stronger a country is, the more it fears, whether there is reason to or not. This paradox certainly affects the modern United States, which since the end of the Second World War has adopted the role of both the world's premier power and its supreme worrier. It has consistently detected more danger in faraway corners of the world than any other country, including its closest allies. Washington could find little support for its contention that the vital interests of the West were at stake in Southeast Asia in the 1960s, for example, or in Central America

¹⁰² Christopher Fettweis, *The Pathologies of Power: Fear, Honor, Glory, and Hubris in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 187.

two decades later. The threat from international communism went away, but that heightened perception of threat lingered on: Since the end of the Cold War, fear has inspired a belief that the world is a fundamentally dangerous place, which led to the tragically unnecessary invasion of Iraq. Today, despite the fact that the United States faces no serious threats (a counterintuitive point that will be explained in the pages to come), post-Cold War US policymakers tend to see danger everywhere and are quick to act first and think—if at all—later.¹⁰³

After all, only one letter separates "worrier" from "warrior." In *Promised Land, Crusader State*, Walter McDougall divides U.S. grand strategy temporally between an "Old Testament" and a "New Testament." The Old Testament consisted of 1) liberty at home; 2) unilateralism abroad; 3) an American system of states; and 4) expansionism, while the New Testament consists of 1) progressive imperialism; 2) Wilsonianism; 3) containment; and 4) global meliorism, "or the belief that America has a responsibility to nurture democracy and economic growth around the world."¹⁰⁴ The initial set of guidelines were engineered to shape America domestically while preventing outside influence, while the new set of guidelines are designed to shape the rest of the world either in an American image or for America's benefit.

A distinction must be made here between shaping the world in an American image, which implies the spread of American values and institutions, and shaping it for American benefit, which implies no more than the pursuit of the national interest, which would not distinguish it from any other state pursuing its

¹⁰³ Christopher Fettweis, *Making Foreign Policy Decisions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2015), Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 137-171.

¹⁰⁴ Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 5.

respective national interest. The objective of expanding Americanism and the objective of disproportionately affecting the international system to the point of domination must be considered as separate ambitions in U.S. grand strategy; that said, each features prominently in the history of U.S. foreign relations, and there is of course significant overlap between them. In giving his own take on the multitude of differing, often contradictory shifts in U.S. grand strategy over the centuries, McDougall offers a brief synopsis of the challenges in summarizing and characterizing in scholarly terms its tendencies and directions:

Instead, historians invariably frame several categories in hopes of containing the *mélange* of words and deeds of our forebears. Thomas A. Bailey listed six "fundamental foreign policies," including isolation, freedom of the seas, the Monroe Doctrine, Pan-Americanism, the Open Door, and peaceful settlement of disputes. Bradford Perkins thought material self-interest, republicanism, individualism, and popular sovereignty shaped our young nation's diplomacy. To Robert Ferrell, its three basic principles were independence, free trade, and continental expansion. To Cushing Stout, they were isolationism, republican expansion, and the setting of an example of freedom for others. Paul Varg identified two competing frameworks, one economic and the other ideological, but observed that in practice neither impulse blinded the Founding Fathers to the need for "a hard headed pragmatic approach." Felix Gilbert likewise traced the realist and idealist strains in U.S. diplomacy to the incentives that attracted colonists to America in the first place: the desire for economic betterment and the utopian dream of a better society. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., detected cycles in American history traced by the "warfare between realism and messianism, between experiment and destiny." Henry Kissinger saw abiding dualities between isolationism and globalism, idealism and power politics, while Michael Kammen called us a "people of paradox" who (at least "at our best") pursue "a politics of 'utopian pragmatism.'" Edward Weisbrand saw the U.S. foreign policy norms as self-determination, a feisty us-versus-them attitude toward the world, and a belief that war is justified only in self-defense. Finally (but the list could go on), Michael Hunt thought that three "core

ideas" shaped our foreign affairs: the quest for national greatness and liberty, belief in a strict racial hierarchy, and suspicion of revolutions in spite of our own revolutionary heritage. For an allegedly isolationist people, Americans seem to have a hearty appetite for foreign policy doctrines! As Eugene V. Rostow summed us up: "We embrace contradictory principles with equal fervor and cling to them with equal tenacity. Should our foreign policy be based on power or morality? Realism or idealism? Pragmatism or principle? Should its goals be the protection of interests or the promotion of values? Should we be nationalists or internationalists? Liberals or conservatives? We blithely answer, 'All of the above.'"¹⁰⁵

While over the course of the previous four centuries, "all of the above" seems an apt depiction, a certain set of assumptions, contentions, and objectives have solidified since 1945 that carry with them a potential to deleteriously affect the national interest; in fact, they seem to have done so. Reinhold Niebuhr observes in *The Irony of American History*, "If virtue becomes vice through some hidden defect in the virtue; if strength becomes weakness because of the vanity to which strength may prompt the mighty man or nation; if security is transmuted into insecurity because too much reliance is placed upon it; if wisdom becomes folly because it does not know its own limits—in all such cases the situation is ironic."¹⁰⁶ Niebuhr further delineates four distinct contradictions in the American personality: "The persistent sin of American Exceptionalism; the indecipherability of history; the false allure of simple solutions; and, finally, the imperative of

¹⁰⁵ McDougall 1997, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), xxiv.

appreciating the limits of power." ¹⁰⁷ The irony of American preponderance continues an age-old struggle for identity in the self-image of the American mind.

To summarize, the seven decades succeeding the most monumental foreign-policy accomplishment in U.S. history have produced a set of problematic foreign-policy assumptions uniquely emblematic of U.S. grand strategy: 1) The ideational, geographical (resource endowment), and historical traditions of American exceptionalism demand an exceptional foreign policy most expediently operationalized via a grand strategy of American preponderance; 2) the persistence of American preeminence signifies the success of the pursuit of American preponderance; 3) the extension of the U.S. security perimeter throughout the globe promotes U.S. interests overseas and defends the nation from attack, 4) maintaining overwhelming military force discourages revisionist powers from attempting to challenge U.S. authority; and 5) this overwhelming military force permits the discouragement or removal of hostile regimes and stability or installment of friendly regimes. The first four assumptions form the bedrock of the hypothesis; the fifth operationalizes the research question.

The OPM

This dissertation asks why many of the most important U.S. foreign-policy campaigns have fallen short of their objectives or failed altogether since the Second World War. It hypothesizes that the pursuit of preponderance and the assumption that hard (coercive military) power can transform the politics of other

¹⁰⁷ Niebuhr 2010, x.

states precipitate and exacerbate U.S. foreign-policy blunders. The hypothesis posits that when policymakers overestimate the capacity of American power to transform the politics of other states, the likelihood of a foreign policy resulting in a blunder increases. It concomitantly hypothesizes that the prevailing grand strategy of American preponderance since the Second World War, despite sustained resistance from those advocating a more guarded foreign policy, precipitates the frequency and severity of foreign-policy blunders. (This two-part hypothesis is at times referred to individually and at times in plural; this signifies the same thing). As mentioned, the theoretical model is referred to as the OPM. To test the two hypotheses, the dissertation will contrast data collected illustrating what effect U.S. policymakers expected from the application of U.S. power in the preparation for a particular foreign-policy mission and the actual results of those interventions. The phrase *transformation of foreign politics* implies an effort by U.S. foreign policymakers to redesign the infrastructure of the political leadership and alliance distribution in the target state in a manner thought to be more favorable to U.S. interests.

The OPM is composed of four primary contentions. These contentions constitute the corresponding data Indicators attempting to establish inferences connecting U.S. foreign-policy blunders to the OPM. First, it presupposes that the modern thrust of American preponderance, beginning with the Second World War and continuing to the present, continues a cultural and ideological tradition

dating back to the founding of the nation.¹⁰⁸ The budding postwar indoctrination of American preponderance perpetuated a foreign policy that justifies the pursuit of "monsters" via American exceptionalism and justifies American exceptionalism through the need to pursue those monsters. The prevailing status quo is an American military presence in virtually every corner of the globe that seeks to prevent the emergence of threats *before* they materialize, rather than responding to threats as they emerge. This produces an *imperative of action* in the mind of the U.S. foreign policymaker that assumes that with great power comes the capacity to transform the politics of other states via intervention.

Second, the OPM asserts that the eagerness on the part of U.S. foreign policymakers to dictate the conditions of the political leadership infrastructure of other states facilitates a corresponding overestimation of the capabilities of partner states and nonstate actors. As intervening foreign policies are paired with the domestic policies of local state or nonstate actors, an assumption of the applicable agency of U.S. power corresponds to an assumption of agency on the part of local partners. Eagerness to "have a dog in the fight" in areas of instability can lead to dismissal of concerns over the viability, popular support, and capabilities of available state and/or nonstate partners. This deficiency is prominently evident in the case studies. A state endowed with enormous relative power such as the United States is afforded the luxury of creating a grand strategy and imposing it, or attempting to impose it, on other states in the system.

¹⁰⁸ Charles Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization: America in Midpassage*, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 442-458.

However, the implementation of this grand strategy can find significant obstacles when interference in another state is part of the means to achieve these grand-strategic ends. Furthermore, the emphasis on the holistic view of the international system and its balance of power, a view paralleled by IR scholarship, neglects tactical considerations relating to the implementation of grand strategy with regard to the capabilities of the partner state and the capabilities of hostile state or nonstate actors in the target state. Traditional IR's reluctance to look "within states" omits cultural differences between states that intervening militaries inevitably encounter. Each of the case studies exhibits many of the hallmarks of a great power employing the assumption that power innately contains the ability to rearrange and control the political composition of other states, as well as an inability to accurately detect and respond to micro-level, culturally sensitive issues during the course of intervention.

Third, the tendency to inflate the capabilities of partner governments and nonstate partners corresponds to an underestimation of the capabilities of adversaries in target states. Analyzing contentious politics in relative terms, an increase in the power of adversarial actors correlates directly with a decrease in the power of friendly actors, just as the inverse is true. Numerous scholars and policymakers point to "ungoverned spaces" as one of the primary threats to U.S. and allied national security. However, Anne Clunan and Harold Trinkunas contend that the term "ungoverned" is a misnomer, given that there is no populated area anywhere in the world that has no sense of hierarchy and no

sense of governance.¹⁰⁹ For example, Afghanistan under the Taliban was not ungoverned; on the contrary, the Taliban imposed a strict set of laws and regulations over the population. In Vietnam and Iraq, while U.S. foreign policymakers did eventually recognize the persistence of hostile actors, they did so greatly underestimating their capacity to control and affect the local population, an exercise pivotal in the outcome of the conflict. Describing an area governed by a hostile actor as "ungoverned" misrepresents the nature of the threat by dismissing the roots of the hostile actor's regulatory imposition over the *alternatively governed area*.

Fourth, the OPM contends that U.S. foreign-policy blunders suffer from a scarcity of operational learning facilitated by substantial information biases in the collection of mission intelligence both in the decision-making stage and in the operational stage. This obstacle to efficacious decision-making reveals a discrepancy between strategic objectives, be they grand-strategic, theater-wide, or mission-specific, and tactical expedience. Many standard operating procedures are so maladaptive that updated versions of doctrinal manuals make few adjustments based on realities on the ground. For example, according to multiple military commanders, the 2014 version of the Army's counterinsurgency manual contained many of the same shortcomings and faulty assumptions as the 2006 version.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Anne Clunan and Harold Trinkunas, *Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Walter Ladwig III, "The New FM 3-24: What Happens When the Host Nation Is the Problem?" Council on Foreign Relations, June 10, 2014.

The impulse to invent, inflate, or otherwise distort threats correlates to the impulse to dictate the terms of international relations by imagining a constant production of threats to the American way of life that only the United States can confront. This constant drive to crusade against the evils of the world develops into a *bounded rationality of mission*, in which the emphasis on crusading against threats transcends the nature of the threat itself, whereby the act of pursuing monsters becomes preeminent in the minds of policymakers and the actual threats facing the nation become diluted even as others are inflated. Threats are codified as existential even when they are not, and the response to them is therefore more comprehensive and militant than it would otherwise be. One is more reluctant to capitulate to an enemy that one has already labeled as 'evil.' In the words of George Kennan, "There seems to be a curious American tendency to search, at all times, for a single external center of evil, to which all our troubles can be attributed, rather than to recognize that there might be multiple sources of resistance to our purposes and undertakings, and that these sources might be relatively independent of each other."¹¹¹ This bounded rationality of mission encapsulates misperceptions into policies in a way that prevents the accurate assessment of a foreign policy both before and after implementation.

One of the most prominent features of U.S. grand strategy over the course of the last seven decades has been the reliance on the outward projection of power rather than the utilization of power to respond to threats as they

¹¹¹ Andrew Bacevich, *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 108.

materialize. For U.S. foreign policymakers, this was the paramount lesson of the Second World War: we cannot wait for threats to reach our shores; we must confront them before that moment can arrive. From President Eisenhower to President Bush, this has remained unchanged for seven decades.¹¹² While many assessed the 'Bush Doctrine' as a fundamental realignment of U.S. foreign policy, this is not an accurate assessment of American foreign relations. When President Bush warned, "The United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive foreign posture as we have in the past... We cannot let our enemies strike first," he mischaracterized the modern history of U.S. foreign policy.¹¹³ The 'Bush doctrine' of 'preemptive strike' was merely a more explicit version of a long-implicit grand strategy.

¹¹² President Obama's policy shift away from large-scale intervention in Iraq is not meaningless, but does not alter the overall trajectory of U.S. foreign relations, especially with the Afghanistan War ongoing in addition to the expanse of the 'drone wars.'

¹¹³ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, "America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy," September 1, 2003, Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/america-unbound-the-bush-revolution-in-foreign-policy/>

CHAPTER 4 Methodology

Eclectic scholarship is marked by three general features. First, it is consistent with an ethos of pragmatism in seeking engagement with the world of policy and practice, downplaying unresolvable metaphysical divides and presumptions of incommensurability and encouraging a conception of inquiry marked by practical engagement, inclusive dialogue, and a spirit of fallibilism. Second, it formulates problems that are wider in scope than the more narrowly delimited problems posed by adherents of research traditions; as such, eclectic inquiry takes on problems that more closely approximate the messiness and complexity of concrete dilemmas facing “real world” actors. Third, in exploring these problems, eclectic approaches offer complex causal stories that extricate, translate, and selectively recombine analytic components—most notably, causal mechanisms—from explanatory theories, models, and narratives embedded in competing research traditions.¹¹⁴

Peter Katzenstein and Rudra Sil

This dissertation contains several distinct components, each representing a separate yet correlated section. Each section addresses in its own way the central research question of what factors have contributed to the presence and severity of U.S. foreign-policy blunders since the Second World War. This chapter forms a bridge between the first three chapters and the subsequent three chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the general problem of reoccurring blunders in U.S. foreign policy since the Second World War. Its corresponding methodological section here briefly discusses its significance to the research. Chapter 2 presented a sui generis framework for FPE. Its corresponding methodological section here frames the conceptual underpinnings of that

¹¹⁴ Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 40.

framework, enabling the case studies to be operationalized along conceptual-data lines. Chapter 3 presented a theoretical model on why and how U.S. foreign-policy blunders have continued to reoccur since the Second World War. Its corresponding methodological section here operationalizes its assertions in order to set up the case studies in a hypothesis-testing format. The fourth and final section of this chapter relates that hypothesis-testing with what conclusions might be drawn from the collection of chapters in the dissertation as whole.

The FPE framework presented in Chapter 2 offers comprehensive, fungible standards for the evaluation of foreign policy, detailing the techniques and metrics involved in this process. This framework is designed to test the outcome, or *what*, of any given case study. Its primary purpose is to evaluate the effect of the case study on the national interest of any given state (in these cases the United States). The OPM presents assertions relating to factors it argues have contributed to the presence and severity of U.S. foreign-policy blunders since the Second World War. This theoretical model is designed to test the factors behind a case study's outcome, or the *why* and *how* of what caused the case study to end in blunder. The two case studies offer both the justification for the classification of blunder and an examination of its causes based on the OPM. Each case study chapter is thus divided into two parts: Part I processes the case study through the FPE framework; Part II processes the case study through the OPM. The following sections operationalize the research questions, assertions, and key terms presented in the first three chapters in order to define the research

agenda and construct a point of departure for the subsequent case study chapters.

Methodological approach

The above quote by Katzenstein and Sil informs the basic philosophy of the research approach as one of "analytic eclecticism" in that it will value pragmatic functionality over paradigmatic parochialism. Arthur Stinchcombe asserts that one can effectively "borrow whatever works to build a theory for wherever one needs it" and that "the same advice can be applied to methods."¹¹⁵ In their metaphorical discussion of "Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics," Gabriel Almond and Stephen Genco argue that "to progress scientifically, the social disciplines require their own philosophy of science trained on explanatory strategies, possibilities, and obligations appropriate to human and social reality."¹¹⁶ In other words, human problems require a multidimensional approach that hard-scientific or excessively positivistic paradigms lack. As Valerie Hudson's research demonstrates, the human decision-maker is the interlocutor of the material/ideational intersection. Though this dissertation does not address comparative politics literature, as the research question examines U.S. foreign policy specifically, it will draw on the comparative method, defined by Lijphart as

¹¹⁵ Arthur Stinchcombe, *The Logic of Social Research* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 301.

¹¹⁶ Gabriel Almond and Stephen J. Genco, "Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics," *World Politics* Vol. 29, No. 4 (July 1997), 522.

“a method of discovering empirical relationships among variables,” a useful method given the multidimensional approach used.¹¹⁷

The case studies will employ a qualitative research design relying on primary and secondary sources. Archival research of official U.S. documents, such as national security statements, speeches, public transcripts, and memoirs of foreign policymaking officials, offers an accounting of what policymakers were thinking in terms of objectives, how they estimated the capacity of American power to transform foreign politics, and why they intended to intervene in each case. The case studies transcend temporal eras, thereby accounting for changes in public opinion, leadership, and other more transient variables. The general approach to data analysis will follow a process-tracing model that seeks to diagnose the course of a blunder from the origins of a decision through its incremental evolution and implementation. Process tracing, defined by Collier as “the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator,”¹¹⁸ provides the most salient archetypal medium for examining how faulty decisions come to be made and implemented.

The dissertation will lightly incorporate IR (primarily realist) grand theory and policy precedents into the analysis of the impact of the assertions of the hypothesis on blunders in a way as to provide a harmony of consciousness,

¹¹⁷ Arend Lijphart, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method,” *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 65 (September 1971), 683.

¹¹⁸ David Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” *Political Science & Politics* Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 2011), 823-830.

neither “unconscious” nor “overconscious” in the classification of Giovanni Sartori in his dichotomous evasion of positivism and embrace of the researcher as “a man at work and aware of the assumptions and implications of whatever he is about.”¹¹⁹ As a qualitative research design constructed to better understand human decision-makers, the approach will require substantial interpretation and data contextualization on the part of the researcher, whose job is to triangulate and situate the data in reference to the hypothesis and the overarching research objectives.

While there is some debate in IR over whether to focus on variables or cases in comparative analysis, as “variable-oriented studies mainly aim at establishing generalized relationships between variables, while case-oriented research seeks to understand complex units,” the approach here follows the assumption by Della Porta and Keating that “both approaches are legitimate.”¹²⁰ The aim is to understand both “complex units” and the correlation between variables. According to Luker, the purpose of social science methods is to develop “a set of guidelines about how to conceptualize and execute a systematic and rigorous intellectual inquiry into something that lets you get as close to the ‘truth’ as possible.”¹²¹ The ‘truth’ is best pursued not through the methodological myopia of “mastering esoteric facts or techniques, but in making

¹¹⁹ Giovanni Sartori, “Concept Misinformation in Comparative Politics,” *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 64, No. 4 (December 1970), 1033.

¹²⁰ Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 198.

¹²¹ Kristin Luker, *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-glut* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 5.

connections across traditional boundaries—going wide rather than deep.”¹²² In selecting a number of methods and factors that crisscross various pieces of the foreign-policymaking puzzle, this research aims to go wide rather than deep. In doing so, it values an intuitive research process over paradigmatic formality, consistent with the general suggestion put forth by W. Phillips Shively.¹²³ In seeking richness, however, it does not attempt to evade the responsibility of rigor; each case study indeed requires a substantial direction of data and investigatory resources.

Elster reminds us that “the social sciences, like other empirical sciences, try to explain two sorts of phenomena, events and facts,” with a fact being merely “a temporal snapshot of a stream of events,” and an event representing a protracted course of action symbolic of widespread social phenomena.¹²⁴ This dissertation seeks to explain a particular type of event, the foreign-policy blunder, by way of gathering a series of essential facts. The ultimate goal of this research is to establish causal mechanisms between the decision-making process of policymakers and U.S. foreign-policy blunders. While causal mechanisms “make no claim to generality” and are explanatory rather than invariably predictive, they nevertheless hold value in predicting the increased likelihood of an event given

¹²² Luker 2010, 12.

¹²³ W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research* (North Attleboro, Massachusetts: Pearson, 1974).

¹²⁴ Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3.

certain conditions and circumstances, if not the occurrence of the event itself.¹²⁵ The difficulty and value in any description, explanation, or prediction vary depending on the question posed, and all three will be examined in this study. King, Keohane and Verba link the value of empirical research to the ability to extrapolate general inferences about a series of events or processes, thereby producing some amount of probabilistic explanatory power.¹²⁶ By attempting to define and describe the conditions and grand-strategy assumptions that may lead to blunders in foreign policy, the dissertation thus means to produce an explanation of what factors increase the likelihood and severity of blunder in any given U.S. foreign policy.

The hypothesis posits that where American power to transform the politics of other states is overestimated, U.S. foreign policymakers will be more likely to overplay their hand and invite the possibility of a blunder. It concomitantly hypothesizes that the prevailing grand strategy of American preponderance since the Second World War, despite sustained resistance from those advocating a more guarded foreign policy, precipitates the frequency and severity of foreign-policy blunders. The argument is therefore more geared toward descriptive probability than direct causation. The research design has been formulated with the purpose of understanding and explaining the conditions, calculations, and decision-making processes that increase the probability of the outcome of a

¹²⁵ J. David Singer, "The Level-Of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (October, 1961), 79.

¹²⁶ Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 36-46.

blunder. Blunders in U.S. foreign policy since WWII will constitute the dependent variable, with the Vietnam War and the Iraq War representing the case studies. The OPM will be operationalized based on four Indicators, assessed qualitatively, to examine the interaction between U.S. foreign-policy objectives and contentious local politics in the area of intervention.

The four OPM Indicators will be the following: first, in order to assess how U.S. foreign policymakers estimated the capacity of U.S. power to affect the politics of other states, secondary sources, doctrinal codes, policy statements, other official documents, and declassified materials will be examined in order to establish a picture of what that capacity was estimated to be. Second, the U.S. ability to control, bolster, and refine the partner/host state (the South Vietnamese government and the reconstituted Iraqi government after the invasion) will be assessed through an examination of process-tracing accounts. Third, the ability to limit the power and influence of local adversaries will be assessed through the evaluation of their capabilities throughout the course of the conflict. Fourth, policy rationalization and operational learning will be evaluated throughout the timespan of the foreign policy in question, offering a picture of how U.S. policies adapt to changing circumstances and new information, with the expectation that the pursuit of preponderance fueled the dismissal of relevant disconfirming feedback and the corresponding perpetuation of strategic blunder.

Discussion of the national interest

Chapters 2 and 3 refer to both the objective-realist interpretation of the national interest as relatively fixed and knowable and a more subjective interpretation of the national interest as somewhat more volatile and, to a certain degree, pliable. This dissertation accepts both perspectives; both have merit and both are operative in terms of this research design. The FPE framework presented in Chapter 2 presents metrics for objectively identifying the value of any given foreign policy. This value measures the cost and outcome of the policy with the objectives according to the national interest of the state. While the concept of the national interest has been molded, questioned, manipulated, and discarded *ad nauseum* according to the tendencies of any individual scholar, this research aims to utilize as objective a definition of the term *as possible*, which is not to say entirely objective; indeed, part of the OPM contends that it has been manipulated (by statesman and citizen alike) to fit the grand strategy of preponderance, which deviates from the actual national interest. At the same time, the actual national interest depends in part on the perceived national interest, and can therefore be determined by it to a certain extent. However, this determination has limits, and cannot completely break free from the confines of objective and/or enduring assumptions as to what the national interest consists of in terms of defining national identity and the purpose of a given state as it clashes with the international system. To lose our barometer in totality would preclude even a rudimentary understanding of how objectives in foreign policy interact with the process of their pursuit.

Thus, it is incumbent upon the researcher in this case to not only distinguish between the perceived national interest and the more enduring, objective components of it, but also to investigate, describe, and interpret the interaction between one and the other. This task is positioned at a pivotal point in the research design. Without it, juxtaposing particular objectives nested within a specific foreign policy against the umbrella of grand-strategic objectives at the higher level of foreign-relations abstraction is rendered null. Because of this fundamental imperative, we take the time here to engage in what the term signifies. Nevertheless, while it occupies a position as an essential subject in the FPE process and the OPM model, the nuances of the term are not the subject of this dissertation, nor is this research in any way attempting to reinterpret or even interpret it for constructivist or otherwise 'subjectivist' ends.

Therefore, in order to circumvent the controversy surrounding the term's multifarious assimilations into divergent parochial hideouts of IR scholarship, this research uses the standard realist assumptions inherent in its implied significance in the process of evaluating it in relation to the three case studies as *a point of departure*. However, even accepting an obsessively standard definition of such a contentious term would require a circumstantiation of its connotations, a truncated iteration of which we turn to now. As Benjamin Frankel astutely summarizes, "The debate over what constitutes the national interest is as old as the nation-state itself."¹²⁷ This quite accurate assertion could be interpreted along

¹²⁷ Benjamin Frankel, "Sans Exubérance: Pursuing the National Interest in the 1990s," in *In the National Interest: A National Interest Reader*, ed. Benjamin Frankel (London, England: The National Interest, 1990), xi.

two axis points: what it *does* consist of, from an objective point of view, and what it *ought to* consist of, from a normative or evaluative point of view. One half cannot wander far from the other: realist and constructivist must meet somewhere in order to find enough common ground to inform the other of their fatuity. Their battleground is the policymaking sphere, even if that sphere ignores them both.

What is traditionally thought of to be the irreducible factor in comprising the national interest is the physical security of the nation-state, without which all matters of the state seem peripheral by comparison. When the enemy is at the gates, other internal exigencies of the state can wait. If there can be a corollary to accompany the existential security of the territorial nation-state at the most irreducible level, it would be the material capabilities in men, money, and munitions that can defend, purchase, or otherwise secure the borders from attack, in addition to expanding them whenever possible. If state security is the irreducible objective, then material capabilities represent the irreducible currency generally thought to be capable of facilitating that objective. For the typically parsimonious realist, then, the national interest can be determined in terms of strict power dynamics measured in the material capabilities of the state, the most common denominator in securing its borders and maintaining or expanding its power.

Hans J. Morgenthau, for example, describes the national interest as he described international relations in general, as a conduit through which *relative* power is to be pursued in international politics, employed in international conflict,

and perceived in international prestige. Morgenthau, Kissinger, and others of the realist IR canon chastise the liberal school of thought that attaches moral virtue and its dissemination to the development of an international society of states in favor of the *realpolitik* necessary in estimating and pursuing the existential necessities of national security, labeling Wilsonianism or liberalism or meliorism or other perceived trivial misadventures into the fantastical adolescent and providing a reminder to make choices based on thousands of years of empirical reality rather than a future-perfect chimerical imagination.¹²⁸

In *National Interest* (1970), Joseph Frankel bifurcates the national interest literature between whom he terms 'objectivists' who focus on a relatively fixed national interest as an explanatory variable, assuming its traditional definition in understanding how it affects FPDM, and 'subjectivists' who imagine a malleable national interest that constantly fluctuates as it is molded by policymakers and altered by shifting public preferences.¹²⁹ Constructivists unsurprisingly fall into the latter category, problematizing the abbreviated realist definition of the national interest just as they would other theoretical maxims of the paradigm. While a more objective picture of the national interest would rely on quantifiable measurements such as land mass, population size and demographics, weaponry (particularly nuclear weaponry after the advent of the nuclear age), geography, economic productivity, and financial reserves, subjective factors include regime type and stability, ideology, nationalism, alliance formation, cultural preferences,

¹²⁸ Peter Pham, "What is the National Interest? Hans Morgenthau's Realist Vision and American Foreign Policy," *American Foreign Policy Interests*, No. 30: 256-265, 2008.

¹²⁹ Joseph Frankel, *National Interest* (Macmillan, 1970), 15-17.

religion, and national identity. Though the subjective factors might be thought of as more of a modern or critical interpretation, both categories have been examined by policymakers and scholars for centuries: consider Clausewitz and his admiration for armies abundant in morale, a quality whose measure eludes quantifiable exactitude.

Even at the latter stage of 1970 in the trajectory of IR as a scholarly field, Joseph Frankel stated simply, "Unfortunately the theories of international relations supply no clues for our search of the meaning of the national interest as a whole."¹³⁰ In much the same fashion as scholars have forsworn attempts at delineating what constitutes success and failure in foreign policy, IR has remained provincial on the subject of defining the national interest, limiting the development of the applicability of the term beyond the paradigm level. In calling for unification of a more sophisticated understanding of the concept across the field as a whole, Frankel implied that the problems preventing it up to the point of his publication could be surmounted by more precise scholarly phronesis.

The inevitability of this task has since been called into question. Scott Burchill shifts the focus from a unifying vision of the national interest to a survey of how each respective conventional (realism, liberalism), progressive (English School, constructivism) and critical (Marxism, feminism) approach conceptualizes the term. He concludes via a thorough investigation that the disambiguation of the term can only exist at the paradigm level or below, as the distinctions each makes in its ontological assumptions cannot transcend the epistemological on an

¹³⁰ Frankel 1970, 27.

IR-wide scale.¹³¹ This and other works problematize the term to a reduction that can only serve parochially paradigmatic endeavors.

The purpose of discussing the fits and starts of the disambiguation of what it means when the national interest is applied to the analysis of foreign policy is not to show that an understanding of it is impossible—indeed, this dissertation assumes that it is possible—but rather to demonstrate that its most concrete definition may omit important variables that relate to what it is and how it can be changed by circumstances, events, leaders, and public preferences, as well as to acknowledge the extensive literature on the subject that challenges its generic definition. Taking these contributions into consideration produces the, heretofore mentioned, definition of the national interest: *the collection of primary policy objectives commonly held to advance the relative power and prestige of the nation-state vis-à-vis other nation-states in the international system*. The advancement of the national interest relies on the state constructing and pursuing *achievable* objectives by utilizing scarce foreign-policy resources to enhance the security and prosperity of the state. *Power* is conceptualized here as the military and political ability to achieve policy goals in foreign affairs, via coercion or otherwise (the common adage that 'power' signifies the ability to convince or coerce others to do what they would not otherwise do is relevant here).

¹³¹ Scott Burchill, *The National Interest in International Relations Theory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

The evolution or devolution of that military and political power relates directly to the decisions foreign policymakers arrive at in the pursuit of the national interest. The term *prestige* is delineated concurrently with power to recognize and incorporate the significance of perception among other states in the system that strictly material political and military power definitions neglect. While military force and political coercion capabilities may be the point of departure for any discussion and estimation of one state's power relative to another, the *utility* of military and political power cannot be defined in strictly quantitative terms in a globalized world containing far more liberal democracies than previous centuries. The extent to which states perceive another's intentions must be integrated into the definition of power in order to account for balancing, threat perception, and other factors that relate to interstate relations, since they can enhance or restrict the utility of material capabilities. Indeed, Democratic Peace Theory comes as close to any theory as a law with IR; it relies heavily on the power of perception.

Thus the disambiguation of the term 'national interest' necessitates several questions: a) what does it consist of in general state terms; b) how is the national interest defined by the leaders of any given state; c) are states capable of pursuing a standard set of grand-strategic national-interest objectives over a period of decades and administrations; d) if so, do they in fact do so? The dissertation accepts the realist assumption that the national interest is, for the most part, knowable and *relatively* fixed, but rejects the assumption that it is given by default in material terms. It is generally knowable in the sense that it can

be clearly defined (or clearly enough to study it scientifically), and relatively fixed in that what is beneficial to a state is unlikely to change drastically (or quickly) over the course of time and across varying administrations.

However, the extent to which the national interest can be manipulated is generally underestimated by realist doctrine. Indeed, the OPM presupposes that leaders either unwittingly or knowingly pursuing policies detrimental to the national interest much more often than is commonly assumed. This phenomenon, which problematizes the rational-choice approach to FPDM, suggests that ideological preferences, interest groups, sudden or slowly developing fits of national rage (9/11-Iraq War), or the tendencies of individual leaders can potentially mollify some of the more tangible foreign-policy inputs. This is not to suggest that realism advocates policies that harm the national interest—indeed, many realists opposed the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, and other blunders simply because of the perception that they violated realist doctrine and thus the national interest—but it does begin to disestablish the indefatigable fixation of what constitutes the national interest.

Grand strategy

Grand strategy and the foreign policies it implements form a medium for the pursuit of the national interest. It envisions the national interest on the largest possible scale and codifies specific objectives thought to employ that national interest in the most effective (if not efficient) means possible. Conjuring up the particularities of grand strategy, a favorite novelty exercised by every presidential

administration in the first months of office, is a relatively painless process. Grand strategy details lofty objectives, generalized threats, and simplified media for addressing threats and propounding the national interest. Along with specific foreign policies, it is for the most part presidential-driven. While Congress ultimately must sign off on the most costly foreign-policy programs, presidential direction has increasingly become the standard-bearer for foreign policy, especially given that the country has not declared war a single time since December 8, 1941. In the words of Christopher Fettweis: "Presidents are more than merely the most important actor in that process— they essentially run it single-handedly, making the most important decisions virtually free of interference from pesky outsiders such as the public or Congress. Although the founders of this country envisioned an active, perhaps even leading role for the legislative branch, over time the executive has essentially taken over the foreign affairs of the United States."¹³² While establishing the rhetoric to delineate grand strategy is a relatively painless process, its implementation rarely is, and the yawning fissure that can come about between the ideals of grand strategy and the muck of foreign policy invite blunder in many forms.

Documents describing grandiose grand-strategic ambitions thus tend to utilize magisterial elocution and idealized framing in the expression of defining the American purpose in the world. In practice, international relations play out in an extremely complex web of interconnected and constantly turbulent alliances,

¹³² Christopher Fettweis, *Making Foreign Policy Decisions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2015), Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 123-131.

rivalries, and unpredictable conditions. The picture-frame discourse that the average American is exposed to through the State of the Union Address, sound-bite electoral campaigns, truncated press briefings, and simplified media reports present a Manichean worldview that mirrors both theory and policy in what Thomas Schelling has aptly described as "the retarded science of international strategy." Schelling's reminder that "pure conflict, in which the interests of two antagonists are completely opposed, is a special case" and therefore most strategic considerations are "not concerned with the efficient application of force, but with the *exploitation of potential force*" (emphasis in the original) calls into question the manner in which statesman and citizen alike tend to understand international conflict.¹³³

Although Schelling's analysis addressed international conditions at the height of the Cold War, they remain as relevant today, as not much has changed in terms of the simplified nature of foreign-policy discourse, at least in the public arena. In reality, totalitarian conflicts in which the victor state utterly dominates a loser state, as was the case with the annihilation of regimes in Germany and Japan and the construction of new democratic states in their stead, disappeared from international conflict almost entirely (at least among the great powers) at the close of those hostilities. However, U.S. grand strategy remains focused on conflict in these terms and has shifted only partially in applying force against Islamist fundamentalism, continuing as it does to rely on the terms of conflict similar to those of the Second World War. Conceiving of conflict in these terms

¹³³ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Harvard University Press, 1960), 4.

has severely stunted the ability to confront adversaries that do not fit that mold, Vietnamese guerillas and Islamist fundamentalists chief among them.

A more realistic objective in international relations is represented by what Herbert Simon has termed 'satisficing,' a portmanteau of 'satisfying' and 'sufficing,' in which the frailty of human cognition limits its capacity to process even a rudimentary series of interconnected events and conditions, thereby devolving cognitive decision-making duties to the pursuit of satisficing in place of satisfaction.¹³⁴ If the ultimate goal of any state is 'maximizing the utility function' of its relative power and capacity *vis-à-vis* other states, recognizing this bounded rationality is essential in constructing and employing theories and policies that accept the presupposition of this satisficing. This cognitive limitation parallels the practical limitations of attempting to implement policies in search of grand-strategic objectives in the chaotic bedlam of international relations—even the most adept statesmen are subject to the anarchy of the international chessboard. Human frailty and international anarchy are two phenomena often cited by realist theory to constrain the extent to which a state should be willing to become embroiled in international conflict. However, this admonition has been largely ignored by U.S. policymakers for seven decades. The assumption that power equates to the capacity to control the politics of other states comes about at the expense of an accurate understanding of the fungibility of international power itself.

¹³⁴ Allen Newell and Herbert A. Simon, "The Logic Theory Machine: A Complex Information Processing System," *IRE Transactions on Information Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1956), 61-79.

The work of Simon and Schelling illustrates the mercurial nature of the *outcome* of the national interest and its classification as successful, unsuccessful or, more than likely, mixed-outcome, as they relate to the objectives of the state. But before the national interest is ever pursued, a state must capture, define, and disseminate its meaning, and this is a process unto itself, especially in a large, power-decentralized state such as the United States. The process of defining the national interest is beholden to a number of bureaucratic, interest-group, *groupthink*, and political pressures. When Kissinger says of pursuing the goals of the national interest that "whether these goals are desirable is relatively less crucial" than leaders' "ability to realize their goals," he describes a FPDM environment in which the arts of consensus and implementation often take precedent over the science of what the national interest actually consists of. Research by Daniel Drezner suggests a differentiation between bureaucratic institutions that are insulated from others and those that are embedded in larger institutions.¹³⁵ Those that are embedded have less of a chance of influencing foreign policymaking through the maintenance of their original mission, while more insulated institutions can stand a better chance of holding onto their original mission purpose, but are less able to wield influence in the formulation of foreign policy.

Not only are domestic-institutional and international-structural constraints ubiquitous in the chambers of power, but once a particular policy problem

¹³⁵ Daniel Drezner, "Ideas, Bureaucratic Politics, and the Crafting of Foreign Policy," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 2000), 733-749.

reaches the upper-echelon decision-making group, which typically consists of only a dozen or fewer leaders, there still remains a great deal of decision-making to hash out.¹³⁶ A number of studies examine this most intimate of conflict definition and response processes, Irving Janis' concept "groupthink" chief among them.¹³⁷ Janis' 1972 classic describes a process whereby members of policymaking leadership circles value membership in the group over the purpose of the group to the extent that group members undermine personal doubts to avoid dissent and demonize both internal dissenters and external adversaries.¹³⁸ Graham Allison's 1971 *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* presciently explores the complexity of FPDM, a work whose title takes inspiration from President John F. Kennedy's quote, "The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer—often, indeed, to the decider himself." Allison contrasts the "rational actor" model alongside his alternative "organizational behavior" and "governmental politics" models, given that the rationalist model by default relies on an omission of key facts.¹³⁹ Rather than normatively assessing varying approaches, Allison demonstrates that different analytical lenses inevitably transpose differing facts according to their

¹³⁶ Valerie Hudson describes a high-level decision-making circle in which there are fewer than a dozen members throughout her previously cited textbook *Foreign Policy Analysis*.

¹³⁷ Irving Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

¹³⁸ Paul Hart, "Irving L. Janis' Victims of Groupthink," *Political Psychology* Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 1991), 247.

¹³⁹ Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Little, Brown & Company, 1971).

own theoretical assumptions, thereby ambiguating the process of studying FPDM depending on the approach utilized.

These studies highlight that even at the late stage of high-level FPDM, foreign-policy outputs can still be affected to a substantial degree by FPDM leaders and the dynamics of their small groups. Even considering the domestic-institutional and international-structural confines of their area of decision-making operation, there is still much to be formulated in terms of the national interest as it relates to a particular policy issue. Furthermore, foreign policymakers sometimes do stray from those institutional and structural confines, for a whole variety of reasons. Taken together, the pressures of defining the national interest, developing a consensus, and implementing a particular policy leaves a number of vulnerable decision-making fulcra that may fall victim to any number of highly unpredictable problems.

The OPM contends that U.S. foreign-policy blunders exhibit predictable signs of vulnerability and decision-making error at each of these fulcra. By pursuing a grand strategy of preponderance, U.S. foreign policymakers seek out conflict rather than avoiding it, thereby exposing the state to a host of threats that are not existential to the national security of the state. By assuming that power inherently contains the ability to dictate the politics of other states, they miscalculate the utility and applicable limits of power. And by focusing on the ideational motivations for conflict, they conflate hard power and political power as well as conflating universal human (liberal) assumptions and the cultural dynamics of individual conflicts in areas of intervention. By incorporating

simplified platitudes into grand strategy and projecting them in the process of intervention, foreign policymakers by default muddle the preferences of local citizens and political actors in the target area. When the Vice President proclaims that American invaders of a Muslim country "will be greeted as liberators," he falls victim to this exact blunder-inducing assumption.

The extent to which the intervening state can affect and control local political dynamics is operationalized via the phrase *transformation of the politics of other states* through intervention by way of either a) destruction of the existing political power structure through regime change and replacement with a new regime or b) bolstering the extant regime to render it capable of protecting its citizens, maintain support of its population through legitimate rule, and advance the national interests of the intervening state. The phrase implies an effort by U.S. foreign policymakers to redesign the infrastructure of the political leadership and alliance distribution in the target state in a manner thought to be more favorable to U.S. interests. This dissertation seeks to assess how U.S. foreign policymakers estimated the ability of the United States to transform the politics of other states against what that ability was in reality in the case of the two foreign-policy blunder case studies. This phrase signifies a number of specific implications in relation to the OPM.

First, the OPM contends that the United States has been hypersensitive in the perception of overseas threats to the point of gross exaggeration of those threats. This perception correlates with an impulse to act decisively to disable the threat before it can metastasize into American allies or onto American shores.

One of the media for this phenomenon is the manifestation of disapproved states as threatening states in the discourse of U.S. foreign policy. The bridge from characterizing a state or its regime as unfortunate to characterizing it as a threat seems to be more accessible in the United States than in any other state in the international system. While this may be partially determined by the enormous resource endowment of the United States as the world's greatest power, the OPM makes no contention that the hyper-aggression of the United States is due entirely to its disproportionate share of the international balance of power. It does contend that this enables an aggressive foreign policy, but does not accept that it is its primary driver. Instead, U.S. foreign policymakers have displayed an eagerness to characterize an unfavorable regime as a threat and subsequently characterize the United States as the only state with the will and ability to initiate a resolution to the threat via intervention. In some cases, this cannot be done through a negotiation or simply partnering with a faction within the country, but requires a destruction and reconstruction of the state itself.

This necessity of action is thereby judged by U.S. policymakers to require a rearrangement of local power dynamics that cannot be achieved through the extant institutions of the state. This is either because a) there may be a friendly state but that state is insufficient to achieve U.S. objectives or b) hostile actors are either threatening the state or in control of the state. It is the policy of every state to support friendly states and oppose threatening ones. But the United States has taken on a preponderant role as the caretaker of Western liberal capitalism and opposer of states unwilling to yield to that "new world order." By

virtue of the classification of regime type as inherently threatening when nondemocratic, the United States has precluded the ability to partner with nondemocratic governments even when it is in the national interest of the United States to do so.

By the same token, it has also disobeyed this self-imposed dictation by also partnering with tyrants when it is perceived to be in the national interest. The Cold War witnessed this hypocrisy on a monumental scale, as the United States eschewed both democracy and human rights with respect to regimes and leaders willing to oppose Communism. The U.S. decision to abide by Democratic Peace Theory only selectively not only signals to potential democracies that they may in fact not enjoy the support of the United States in the future but also signifies to nondemocratic adversaries that this schizophrenic application of foreign policy undermines the basic tenets of rational-choice theory and therefore the foundations of deterrence, that most sacred of implied international safeguards.

Second, U.S. foreign policymakers assume that the United States wields the power, whether military or political or a combination of both, to control the state or area in question in such a way as to effectively dominate its political and military institutions and other institutions and duties of the state, either through proxy or by invasion. This implication directly addresses the central research question. Can one state, especially if granted an abundance of power, control the political dynamics of another through intervention? U.S. foreign policymakers have foreseen the possibility to transform other states in an American likeness since successfully accomplishing that task during the immediate aftermath of the

Second World War. But the success of reconstructing postwar Germany and Japan has not been met in other places, specifically states without the same traditions of a robust, functional, democratic state, reverence toward state institutions, a commanding sense of solidarity among citizens, virtually no language, religious, or sectarian fault lines, and an extraordinary level of productivity, education, health, and standard of living.

If the 'greatest generation' found glory in conquering Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany, the two subsequent generations it spawned have spearheaded a new American adventurism that has been met with mixed results. A further discrepancy between the Second World War and the Korean, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq Wars is that they were simply enacted in policy and enshrined in memory as policing actions against hostile actors in protection of the friendly populations of each state. The United States has not declared war on another state since the last time its people were physically threatened at Pearl Harbor (with the exception of the 9/11 attacks, which provoked two U.S. wars but no declaration). This is partly due to the fact that the Executive Branch has sequestered much of the FPDM involved in initiating foreign conflict, but also to the way in which Americans have come to accept war as an everlasting feature of American foreign relations. The isolationist United States of the interwar period metamorphosed in the trial by fire of the Second World War into a permanent monster-slaying crusader whose dyspathetic tentacles detect danger at every corner of the globe. The assumption that the United States can transform other states to induce its own security continues to inform its grand strategy.

It is further assumed that with the support of the United States, the local partner state, whether extant or created via intervention, can sufficiently perform its domestic duties of statehood in addition to advancing the national interests of the United States, and that the national-security considerations of the policy problem are such that the need to act is absolute and the risks of inaction are too great for it to be considered a viable alternative. To reiterate, the OPM presents assertions relating to factors it argues have contributed to the presence and severity of U.S. foreign-policy blunders since the Second World War. This theoretical model is designed to test the factors behind a case study's FPDM development and outcome, or the *why* and *how* of what caused the case study to end in blunder. It hypothesizes that when U.S. policymakers overestimate the capacity of American power to transform the politics of other states, the likelihood of a foreign policy resulting in a blunder increases. It concomitantly hypothesizes that the prevailing grand strategy of American preponderance since the Second World War precipitates the frequency and severity of foreign policy blunders.

Indicators

Indicator I. How U.S. foreign policymakers estimated U.S. power to affect the politics of other states

This Indicator tests to what degree U.S. policymakers believed they could affect the politics of the state in question. It can begin to be ascertained through public and internal statements made by policymakers at the highest levels of government, most notably the president and his upper-echelon administration officials and advisors. If U.S. foreign policymakers are exaggerating the ability of

U.S. political and military power to transform the politics of other states, that estimation will contrast with the local effects of intervention. High-level FPDM figures are especially important in understanding the larger picture in foreign policy because they set the tone for the discussion of a particular issue, wield the largest television audiences, receive the most attention in the press, and are charged with setting foreign affairs and leadership of the military institutions of the state. Statements by Congressmen, transcripts from Congressional hearings, and public speeches and declarations of policies by members of the Senate and House of Representatives offer a further glimpse into the zeitgeist of the American public, as these individuals are constantly campaigning and tend to rely on their seat for well-being, unlike the president and his officials who tend to find wealth and fortune through books, speeches, and other similar avenues. Public opinion polls offer a picture of how the average person views a particular issue, but are sometimes subject to dramatic change over short periods of time, and are thus more useful in charting that change rather than providing a snapshot at an exact moment in time.

Gauging the confidence level of the political and military leaders of the state can best be understood by an examination of the statements and documents involved with a particular issue. For example, if policymakers spend a majority of their time discussing what ought to be done with respect to a given country or a particular issue, rather than if anything ought to be done at all, this type of language implies that the state does indeed wield the power to affect that particular issue in a transformative fashion. Correspondingly, if policymakers

spend much of the time discussing an issue in terms of how to implement an intervention rather than observing and estimating the perceived power and tangible capabilities of adversaries in the area of intervention, we can assume that the potential threat from local adversaries is estimated to be quite low. Furthermore, policymakers often make such statements outright, such as characterizing the military or political threat of a foreign adversary as minimal (this oft-invoked tool for mitigating the concerns of war-wary citizens ironically contrasts with the inflation of the threat of the adversary, a phenomenon evident in each of the two case studies—if the enemy can be so easily defeated, why should the citizen be concerned about the threat it poses?) Officials often find a clear explanation for this paradox evasive, and thus their explanations can often confound the public, especially in the aftermath of the conflict, when the "rally around the flag" effect subsides.

Indicators II and III. The U.S. ability to control, bolster, and refine the partner/host state; the ability to limit the power and influence of local adversaries

Successful intervention requires either an infusion of resources to a friendly extant state or removal of a hostile extant state and installation of a new state. Therefore, the success of an intervention is inextricably tied to the ability of the new or bolstered state to perform its duties in two critical areas: the monopolization of violence, by way of protecting its citizens, and maintenance of support among the population, through which it claims its legitimate mandate to govern. Indeed, these are the two most fundamental functions of any state. These two Indicators will be assessed through an examination of the strength

and legitimacy of the partner state throughout the course of the intervention. If the intervention succeeds in sufficiently propping up the partner state to the extent that it can protect its people and establish legitimacy, the objectives of the intervention as related to the national interest of the intervening state are more likely to be met. Without a functioning state, the intervening state is unlikely to achieve its objectives, since there is no medium through which to advance its national interests. Likewise, the extent to which the power and influence of local adversaries can be reduced or eliminated corresponds to the ability to prop up the allied regime.

Indicator IV. Operational learning and policy justification

This Indicator will be examined along two dimensions. Vertically (in terms of the FPDM hierarchy), it examines feedback integrity from the lowest tactical-operational environment up through the highest levels of FPDM. Horizontally (on the FPDM-implementation-feedback-messaging spectrum), it examines rationalization/justification integrity as intervention policy is debated and settled upon internally and then framed and messaged first privately within government and then publicly to the American people. Feedback integrity and rationalization/justification integrity are evaluated across the timespan of the conflict in order to gauge the coherence and transparency of the policy and the justification for its investment in political, financial, and military resources. Jervis reminds us that "decision makers are faced with a large number of competing values, highly complex situations, and very ambiguous information, and therefore

the possibilities and reasons for misperceptions and disagreements are legion."¹⁴⁰ This is true even in the absence of information-processing biases. When these biases are present because of already extant ideational preferences, they become compounded as the reality, the policy as it relates to the national interest, and the message are processed through the FPDM chain. Stephen Walt's tweak on neorealist theory to juxtapose balance of threat with balance of power yields utility here as well in presenting perception as a crucial medium of interaction that complements the speed and timing of the hard power pendulum.¹⁴¹

Case studies

Each case study chapter is divided into two parts. Part I processes the case study through the FPE framework. Part II processes the case study through the OPM. The case studies were chosen because they are all considered quintessential blunders by the definition given in Chapter 2. This does not excuse the researcher from presenting the codification behind that classification, which is delineated in Part I in each of the case studies. The central research question poses an inquiry about the problem of recurrent blunders in U.S. foreign policy since the Second World War. Virtually every one of the largest foreign-policy campaigns it has pursued since that event has fallen short of its objectives. It thus follows that the most grandiose in ambition and severe in result should

¹⁴⁰ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 31.

¹⁴¹ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring 1985), 3-43.

constitute the case studies of that research question. While the potential criticism that pursuing such a mountain of data across two gargantuan events in U.S. foreign-policy history may leave the research a mile wide but an inch thin is understandable, the justification for the research design is clear. Every research agenda depends on the nature of the research question. The research question posed here addresses a holistic problem in U.S. foreign policy over the course of seven decades. It must, therefore, cover the most significant foreign-policy events over that time period. It is far from coincidental that these events are classified as blunders. This is precisely the purpose of the research.

While many a dissertation can claim to conjure up mastery of obscure subject matter unlikely to ever reach the audience of the layperson, this research purposively explores a holistic topic relevant to the average citizen and presents it in a clear and concise manner that the average person can understand. This is not to argue that an erudite exploration detailing the ancient mating rituals of the extinct peoples of the central Amazon basin has no epistemological significance for the general public. But it is a fundamental objective of this research to address the 'theory-policy gap' by 'asking big questions and giving simple answers.' It is the hope and expectation of this research that it will not only facilitate future research on FPE and FPDM but also engender a better understanding of why U.S. foreign-policy blunders have continued to occur in such magnitude since the Second World War and why virtually every major campaign since that event has fallen short of its objectives. As this is a qualitative research design, its vehicle for success relies on a triangulation of a multitude of

documents in concert with one another. It is not enough to understand each research question, chapter, section, or document ad hoc. The rigor of the research design will be measured by the ability of the researcher to organize and interpret the substantial data of each case study in line with the research questions, hypotheses, and Indicators.

Data collection and interpretation

The research follows a qualitative research design that is designed to establish a correlation between foreign-policy inputs and foreign-policy outcomes. It seeks to establish links between the presence of positively identified OPM Indicators and the presence and severity of U.S. foreign-policy blunders. It is not meant to demonstrate direct causation, but rather to establish that blunders may be more *probable* and possibly *severe* the more heavily U.S. foreign policy is influenced by the OPM. The OPM may be present in interventions that end successfully, and if this were shown, it would not necessarily disprove the model. The primary method of inquiry will be the examination of secondary sources. The case studies are expansive and their sources of reference ample. Given that there are many years of research having already been conducted for each of the case studies, there is an enormous amount of data available for each of them. This dissertation's purpose is therefore not to produce new data, but to detect, compile, organize, triangulate, and interpret extant data in a new way to answer new questions. Secondary sources will be comprised primarily of scholarly origination but will also include some works by journalists and other nonscholarly

researchers with intimate knowledge of and/or extensive data collection on a particular subject.

While innumerable works have been published that relate to the subject matter, there is sometimes no substitute for the original words of the FPDM source. Documents related to the exact words of internal discussions among high-level foreign policymakers can fall into two categories: transcripts or audio files of informal conversations between foreign policymakers, which offer a glimpse into the development of how a particular policy problem is detected, interpreted, and understood, and formal memos and meetings drafted and conducted in a formal setting in which foreign policymakers are being briefed, informed, or advised on a particular topic. This raw record of FPDM thought processes, unfiltered by speechwriters, journalists, or scholars, provides an unadulterated account of a policy problem before it ever reaches the public arena. Declassified documents number in the thousands for the Vietnam War and are too many to examine individually. In the case of the Iraq War, there are fewer documents of this kind available, but still many of essential value. This data will therefore be utilized on an individual basis in order to substantiate the data from secondary sources. It is also particularly useful for testing Indicator IV, which charts the course of a conflict's justification and how information from the target environment is processed up the chain of command.

Despite the fact that these original sources of FPDM can shed substantial light on how a policy problem is detected, processed, and responded to, the argument will be made throughout the two case studies that the true motivations

for foreign policy are *not* hidden away in some secret government closet, but are very much available to the average citizen, whether that citizen be policy-attentive or policy-oscitant, through the proliferation of public statements with regard to a particular issue. In other words, preponderance is an open secret, it is fundamentally *national* in nature, and there is no need to conceal its tenets from the public because the public generally accepts them. What is expected to be uncovered in the case studies is the intricacy with which subterfuge is employed against the public because FPDM leaders are aware of the fallacy of a given foreign policy but neither wish to be blamed for its failure nor possess more favorable alternatives and thus harbor the facts with which the public might more quickly come to the realization that a blunder is in fact occurring (which it inevitably will, if indeed a blunder is occurring—but for the foreign policymaker, they would ideally come to this conclusion upon termination of their time in office).

An array of declassified data centers provide the researcher with countless media for understanding how foreign policymakers operate and how decisions are made. Among the largest collections of declassified documents on U.S. foreign policy are the following: The *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series, publishing an assortment of documents from 1861 to the late 1970's relating to multiple agencies overseen by the Office of the Historian of the U.S. State Department; the Digital National Security Archives maintained by George Washington University, which secures and stores declassified materials in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act; the National Archives, much

of which is now digitized; the Declassified Documents Reference System, providing declassified documents from 1941 onward; the Center for the Study of Intelligence releases, published by the Central Intelligence Agency; and the Cold War International History Project digital archive, which houses declassified documents from the former Soviet Union.¹⁴² These data reserves are in addition to publicly available Congressional hearing transcripts, leaked documents such as the Pentagon Papers, leaking websites such as Wikileaks, the Public Papers of the Presidents series, which contains many speeches, press conferences, and other official statements of U.S. policy, and memoirs of presidents and other high-ranking officials. The CIA also fully released its official history in digital format in January 2016. In short, given that each of the three case studies began many years ago, a plethora of sources are available documenting primary sources of foreign policymaking. Nevertheless, secondary sources will constitute the primary medium of investigation.

¹⁴² David Gibbs, "Guide to Using Declassified Documents," University of Arizona, http://dgibbs.faculty.arizona.edu/guide_using_declassified_documents

CHAPTER 5 The Strategic-Tactical Blunder of the Vietnam War

It became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it.¹⁴³

U.S. Army Major to reporter Peter Arnett regarding the town of Ben Tre, February 7, 1968

Criteria by which to measure the war have been hard to come by.¹⁴⁴

Henry Kissinger

Part I. FPE

The Vietnam War is the classic example of the foreign-policy blunder in U.S. history. Its development therefore offers a unique set of FPDM tensions, events, and circumstances with which to evaluate the policy in relation to U.S. grand strategy more broadly, in addition to offering a large data set from which to examine the errors that led to problematic FPDM and an unfavorable foreign-policy outcome. As we are four decades removed from the unsuccessful termination of the conflict, we can draw upon a number of elongated studies, historical accounts, military transcripts, and declassified documents to gain a full

¹⁴³ A U.S. Army Major made this comment to reporter Peter Arnett as they surveyed the destruction of Ben Tre after the Tet Offensive on February 7, 1968. 1,000 civilians died in the fighting in the town that now claims a population of 114,000. A large billboard there now proclaims, "10,000 years to the glorious Communist Party of Vietnam," accompanied by a memorial to Viet Cong "martyrs" that died in the battle. Quote and statistics from James Pringle, "Meanwhile: The Quiet Town Where the Vietnam War Began," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Henry Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 47, No. 2 (January 1969) in *The United States and the Vietnam War Series: Leadership and Diplomacy in the Vietnam War*, ed. Walter Hixson (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 309.

picture of the process of the blunder's proceedings. How and why did U.S. foreign policymakers initiate, escalate, and perpetuate the war in Vietnam? Why did the status quo policy continue even after policymakers became aware of a steady flow of disconfirming information rendering the policy fruitless, and how did they rationalize this failed policy unto themselves and to the general public over such a long period of time? What did U.S. policymakers estimate the capacity of American power to transform Vietnamese political and security conditions to be, and how did this play out over the course of the war? How did the American presence in the country affect the ability of local partners (the governmental leadership of South Vietnam) and adversaries (North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front or Viet Cong)? This chapter addresses these and other questions in the first of three case studies. It first evaluates the blunder through the five criteria of the FPE metrics presented in Chapter 2. It then analyzes it through the four Indicators of the OPM presented in Chapter 3.

The Vietnam War exemplifies the strategic-tactical gap in U.S. grand strategy in the most lucid terms: in a country with little strategic value, great human, financial, political, and military resources were expended in a failed campaign to prevent the country from "falling," or being "lost," in official U.S. foreign-policy terminology, to Communism. U.S. foreign policymakers never fully recognized the cultural conditions in the country that united to complicate the war effort, relying instead on superior technical capability and firepower to eliminate the individuals involved in the South's insurgency rather than adequately addressing or relinquishing to the political conditions that problematized

intervention at every stage. As more U.S. troops poured into the country, more North Vietnam Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) cadres mobilized; as the war enlarged in scope, the galvanization against it strengthened. The wider the military campaign became, the less effective it was. The longer it continued, the less support it could rely on in the United States. Except for a token contingent of "Free World" (this term was actually used on occasion in internal U.S. foreign-policy discourse) allies, it was never anywhere near a multilateral effort.

As the war dragged on, more and more Americans could draw no connection between the Vietnamese insurgents and civilians their army destroyed by the thousands and the ideals for which the war was supposedly being fought. The war over that justification thus assumed monumental proportions, as everyday Americans for the first time witnessed the horrors of war from the comfort of their living rooms over the airwaves of their set-top box. While the strategy of Containment ultimately succeeded, in much the same fashion as U.S. dominance of the international system, it did so in spite of total failure in Containment's piece de résistance. In the words of George Herring, "Containment was misapplied in Vietnam."¹⁴⁵ Why did the policy fail so miserably, what led to the strategic-tactical gap in this case, and why did the United States continue to pursue a failed policy so long?

The overarching strategic objective of the American effort in Vietnam was to stem the flow of Communism and prevent the feared "domino effect" from

¹⁴⁵ George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: John Wiley, 1979).

taking hold in Southeast Asia. This required the subsequent tactical objectives of supporting the fledgling, repressive state of South Vietnam, combatting NVA and VC forces wherever they materialized in South Vietnam, and breaking the will of hostile North and South Vietnamese to continue to fight.¹⁴⁶ In addition to denying the Communist enemy an expansion of territory, the effort concomitantly sought to expand the sphere of influence of liberal democratic capitalism that policymakers envisioned would protect the United States and the American way of life the larger it became (this piece of U.S. grand strategy was abandoned ad hoc in Latin America, Africa, and Asia wherever it conflicted with anti-Communism; anti-Communist sentiment therefore transcended pro-democratic sentiment under the imperatives of the Cold War, including in South Vietnam). This zero-sum game in the larger picture found its way all the way down the chain of command to the tactical picture. Every VC cadre killed was one fewer individual that could threaten the United States and the American way of life.

Thus, in this quintessential proxy war, the country was to be used as an example that the United States would defend its allies and man the perimeters of the "Free World" wherever Communism sought to expand. Therefore, in simplified form, the objectives were (a) to prop up and support the state of South Vietnam; (b) to prevent North Vietnamese incursions into the South and suppress the VC; (c) to thereby stunt the material spread of Communism; and (d) to

¹⁴⁶ Throughout this dissertation, this phrase is invoked in correlation to its presentation in the previous chapters. Please take note that the terms 'strategy' and 'tactics' are used in relation to one another in accordance with different levels of abstraction. For example, the 'strategy' of the Containment of the Cold War employed the 'tactic' of the Vietnam War; likewise, the 'strategy' of the Vietnam War employed the 'tactics' of pacification and attrition. The strategic-tactical gap in U.S. grand strategy and foreign policy transcends various levels of abstraction.

display to adversaries and allies alike that adversaries would be confronted and allies would be supported, and, in so doing, restrain the ideational appeal of Communism. Despite the tradition of mission in U.S. history, never before or since has a U.S. military conflict been so united with an ideational struggle. Americans could not see Vietnam for what it was because their lens of analysis was blinded by anti-Communist fervor; by the time this lens became partially removed as hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops confronted a skilled, resourceful, and determined enemy, the conflict had been lost.

None of these objectives were met. The only silver lining of the failed American effort in Vietnam, if one in fact exists, would be the fact that the invasion and occupation of South Vietnam by NVA forces in 1975 preceded the fall of the Berlin Wall by a mere fourteen years. One of the enduring tragic ironies of this classic strategic blunder is that the whole *raison d'etre* for fighting the war in the first place—that Communism had to be stopped everywhere to be stopped anywhere—never materialized. The logical fallacy that each individual country was somehow inexorably linked to an international Communism that found its strength in global unification fell flat on November 9, 1989. This inaccurate assumption on the part of U.S. foreign policymakers imagined a link between international Communism and individual countries that never existed to the extent imagined. That there was some level of cooperation between Moscow, Beijing, and their supposed satellite states did little to defy the basic tenets of realism; states look inward before looking outward. The American intervention in Vietnam bore this out to a fastidious degree: the fall of Saigon did not usher in a

new era of international Communism. The domino theory and two millennia of realist doctrine quickly proved incompatible. Though Vietnam, as Beijing, remains technically Communist, Communism as an idea has been all but purged from the Earth in any practical sense of the word. The ideational link between Vietnam and the American imperative to purge the world of Communism was largely a figment of the American imagination.

In *The Limits of Intervention*, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs Townsend Hoopes describes the strategic-tactical gap in U.S. foreign policy:

I felt the absence of an explicit framework of policy for both global and inter-regional issues. With respect to particular regions and countries, small interdepartmental groups of flexible membership conducted day-to-day operations with ability and zeal. But the bridging mechanisms needed to relate policy in one region to policy in another, and to link them to general problems of global implication—like the proliferation of nuclear weapons, or the progressive withdrawal of British military forces from East of Suez—seemed weak. Moreover, there appeared to be a serious lack of the kind of comprehensive assessment and long-range planning that was a remembered feature of those days during the Truman years when George Kennan and later Paul Nitze headed an elite Policy Planning Staff at the State Department. Closer examination confirmed the impression of no central guiding philosophy in foreign policy, as well as of slackness in coordinating the disparate elements. An important cause lay in the fact that President Johnson, a man of little background and much uncertainty in foreign affairs, had inherited an organization for their conduct that had been made deliberately loose and flexible by President Kennedy, a man of broad knowledge, intuitive grasp, and determined initiative in that field. This inheritance, which adversely affected both the scope of deliberations on Vietnam policy and the quality of President Johnson's decisions from the fall of 1964 onwards, showed itself in the structural weakness of the National Security Council and in inadequate attention to longer-range policy

planning. The principal results were fragmented debate, loose coordination, and an excessive concentration on the problems of the moment.¹⁴⁷

Hoopes' nostalgia for the immediate postwar days of the 'Wise Men' may indeed be warranted, but it is also revelatory of another development in U.S. foreign policy over the subsequent decades. During the early postwar years, the United States was still forging and asserting its new identity as the singular arbiter of international affairs. This burgeoning quest to remain the 'indispensable nation' even after the cessation of the hostilities of the Second World War necessitated conceiving of the nation in ideational terms. This new purpose first had to be envisioned in order to then be articulated in artfully ambitious terms, in addition to specifying what that purpose intended to achieve in the international system. It would then be necessary to construct some kind of theoretical policy for how best to attach means to end in grand strategy; that theoretical policy emerged in the form of Containment, the temporary standard-bearer of the grand strategy of preponderance. The grand-strategic objective to become the world's singular international arbiter of international affairs thus employed the mid-level strategy of Containment. That mid-level strategy subsequently needed application at the tactical level. The most significant tactical application of it became Vietnam, and the Vietnam War failed.

This process illustrates the strategic-tactical gap in U.S. foreign policy in the clearest possible terms, and Hoopes' characterization of it illustrated his keen

¹⁴⁷ Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention: How Vietnam Policy Was Made—and Reversed—During the Johnson Administration* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 1.

perception of its shortcomings in the pivotal year of 1965, when escalation was taking flight. As a WWII Marine Lieutenant who had risen to become Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and served under three secretaries of defense before holding a number of high-level foreign-policy positions at the interchange between policymakers and defense officials, he was in a unique position to give his assessment of conceptual and logistical shortcomings in the FPDM chain of command. These shortcomings would become the applicative basis for the Vietnam imbroglio, a blunder spurred on by the persistent impetus of preponderance. The institutional and geographic hypertrophy of the global military presence of the United States engendered by the Second World War remains in place to this day; since 1945 it has never achieved its former success, and Vietnam was its crowning failure.

Criterion I. Degree of fruition of primary and secondary objectives

Between 1964, when General William Westmoreland was appointed Commander of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), and 1968, when he was promoted to Army Chief of Staff, the number of troops in Vietnam grew from 16,000 to over 500,000. The United States either had to pour millions of troops into the country and invade North Vietnam proper or accept that it would never control the countryside, control the night, or stem the influx of fighters, support systems and weapons from North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Instead, they kicked the can down the road until there was nothing left of it. From 1960-1963, the United States and South Vietnam targeted guerilla activity but

neither fully understood nor actively targeted with sufficient scope the political and intelligence infrastructure of the Viet Cong (VCI). This allowed it to establish the underlying political and intelligence network that would sustain the guerilla arm of the insurgency in the years to come.

The VCI, made up of somewhere between 70,000 and 100,000 cadres by 1967, was a "simple organization: Virtually every village had a cell made up of a Communist Party secretary; a finance and supply unit; and information and culture, social welfare, and proselytizing sections to gain recruits from among the civilian population. They answered up a chain of command, with village cadres answering to the district, then to the province, and finally to a series of regional commands which, in turn, took orders from Hanoi."¹⁴⁸ Although operations were ultimately controlled by Hanoi, VC cadres and People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) officials also wielded their own amount of autonomy, being closer to the frontlines as they were. Although it was called such by some high-level U.S. foreign policymakers, this was no "ragtag" organization, as U.S. advisors and intelligence operatives learned during the advisory years (1954-1963). The VCI has been characterized as the largest and most sophisticated system of intelligence gathering and political organization in the modern (post-WWII) history of asymmetrical warfare.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Dale Andrade and James Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future," *Military Review* Vol. 86, No. 2 (March/April 2006), 12.

¹⁴⁹ William Rosenau and Austin Long, "The Phoenix Program and Contemporary Counterinsurgency," RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, 23, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2009/RAND_OP258.pdf

It was also highly adaptable. For example, after the Tet Offensive, which left the VC decimated but was nevertheless a political victory for the North in that public opinion in America began to turn away from the war, the Communist Politburo in Hanoi enacted COSVN Resolution 9, which hailed Tet as a success in that it broke U.S. resolve and forced the Americans to "sink deeper into a defensive and deadlocked position," but also shifted its strategy to focus on fighting against pacification efforts rather than taking on the U.S. army in fixed battles.¹⁵⁰ In other words, it instructed guerillas to go back to what they did best, now that the message that they *could* face the American army in sustained, pitched battles, including in urban areas, had been sent. With the loss of nearly all VC operational forces expended during Tet, VCI reorganization and replenishment would ensure long-term combat viability.

COSVN was an acronym for Central Office for South Vietnam, the center of the insurgency's political leadership, whose decision-making apparatus was described by the CIA thusly: "Leadership at all levels within the VC Infrastructure is provided through the PRP, through Party Committees set up at each echelon. According to the statutes of the PRP, the Central Committee—or, more formally, the Central Executive Committee—is the highest decisionmaking body of the PRP between Party Congresses."¹⁵¹ The American effort never succeeded in dismantling the VCI, which proved far more effective operationally than the

¹⁵⁰ Andrade and Willbanks 2006, 10.

¹⁵¹ "The Central Office for South Vietnam: Its History, Organization and Functions," Central Intelligence Agency, June 10, 1969, 12, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000354548.pdf

government of South Vietnam (GVN), the American Army, or its U.S. civilian agency counterparts in terms of controlling the populace with a steady combination of ruthless intimidation, coercion, and ideational appeal. The U.S. effort suffered from discombobulation from the beginning of the buildup. General Westmoreland, for example, characterized this problem on January 7, 1966, the second year of the buildup: "It is abundantly clear that all political, military, economic, and security (police) programs must be completely integrated in order to attain any kind of success in a country which has been greatly weakened by prolonged conflict...The Viet Cong, themselves, have learned this lesson well. Their integration of efforts surpasses ours by a large order of magnitude."¹⁵²

From the North Vietnamese perspective, the assessment of the war was not much different than Westmoreland's early lamentations of stunted progress. The authors of Hanoi's official military history of the "American War" acknowledges that over certain periods of the war, notably 1961-1963, 1966, and 1969, North Vietnam faced intermittent setbacks in the overall war effort. Nevertheless, the admittedly biased account does highlight the one persistent truth of the war: the more forces the American army employed, the more the North resisted. It omits the substantial level of support it received from the Soviet Union and China, and downplays the level of support and direction it gave to prop up the insurgency in the South from 1959 onward. But it describes the "maturation" of the insurgency from a disparate band of disorganized peasant-warriors to a fully capable insurgent army capable of challenging the American

¹⁵² Andrade and Willbanks 2006, 10.

military from the battle of Ap Bac in 1963 onward through ingenuity, resolve, and a whole host of prototypical guerilla warfare tactics.¹⁵³

One of the ironies of the tactical dynamics of the Vietnam War was that the guerilla tactics used by the VC made it impossible to apply conventional military doctrine to their pursuit, but when they did decide to meet the American army in pitched battle, they won even when they lost by inflicting American casualties. Even at a 5:1 or 10:1 ratio, Ho Chi Minh and his military strategists knew that the Americans would eventually capitulate, given that for them this was a war of choice. Just as George Washington's Continental Army made great strides against the British Army with guerilla warfare tactics but gained coherence and strength by eventually confronting their imperial overseers in conventional battalion-strength battles, so too did the NVA and VC utilize both to their advantage. This never changed during the course of the conflict. When it suited them, such as in 1969 after the Tet Offensive, the enemy retreated into the hinterlands to reorganize and replenish. When in strength, NVA and VC battalions would materialize in order to inflict what were, by American standards, heavy American casualties.

The evolution from guerilla warfare to pitched battle took form as U.S. forces evolved from an advisory role to full-scale regimented search-and-destroy missions, which increased after escalation was settled upon in 1964. One of the first such confrontations was the January 2, 1963 Battle of AP Bac. In many

¹⁵³ Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975* (University of Kansas, 2002), translated by Merle Pribbenow, in *Journal of Military History* Vol. 67, No. 1 (January 2003), 304-305.

ways, the story of the Vietnam War is the story of John Paul Vann. The corollaries between his individual contribution to the war and the overall war effort are unmistakable, as Neil Sheehan's Pulitzer Prize-winning biographical account details. His role in the conflict is relevant to FPE Criterion I because it illustrates how a failed military strategy was upscaled rather than reformulated; this in essence ensured failure in the military component of the war, if not the political component (which ultimately failed as well). This took place not in 1967 or 1968, when the war was in full-tilt, but more than a year before escalation was eventually chosen as the course of action in the Johnson Administration, and long before the size of the U.S. commitment rendered withdrawal politically implausible. This attribute is nontrivial because of the fact that it affects how we understand and analyze the FPDM that led to the persistent policy of commitment.

Vann recognized that the VC held "the strategic and tactical initiative" (Westmoreland would later use this lack of initiative as a justification for increasing troop levels by an order of magnitude).¹⁵⁴ He observed that the VC had access to all two million people in the division zone, and while the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) could move freely within it with American firepower, advisors, and the backing of fighter bombers, in no way did they control the countryside, nor was their presence welcome in many of the surrounding provinces. The average soldier of the shoddy ARVN showed up for

¹⁵⁴ Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (Vintage Books, 1988) [electronic version], 140.

the paycheck, held few loyalties to the state, could barely adjust the sight of his rifle, and wanted nothing to do with fighting the VC. This attitude was not in spite of the loyalty of commanders; indeed, ARVN colonels tended to elbow each other for resources, regime favoritism, and stature, with little regard for nationalist sentiment and little more for the trade of combat. Colonel Cao, to whom Vann was assigned, stated simply, "It is not safe to go out at night." Vann cited in one of his reports "a deplorable condition" in which "commanders at all levels who do nothing can still retain their command, and even advance, while those who are aggressive may be relieved if they suffer a setback or sustain heavy losses." Colonels were not incentivized to fight: "Petty jealousies among battalion and regimental commanders take precedence over, and detract from, the primary mission of closing with and destroying the enemy."¹⁵⁵

The further ARVN companies ventured into VC territory, the more weapons would eventually fall into enemy hands, the lower morale would sink in their ranks, and the more tactical experience would be garnered and weaponry captured by the VC, thereby evening out what would have otherwise been guerilla disadvantages in technical capabilities and firepower. What the guerilla could draw on that the ARVN regular could not was faith in his or her cause and the backing of a state in Hanoi perceived to be legitimate in the minds of its citizenry, unlike the oligarchy headquartered in Saigon. For harassment, psychological warfare, and weapon-procurement purposes, the VC would attack Regional Force/Popular Force (RFPF) rural militia outposts at night, which would

¹⁵⁵ Sheehan 1988, 222.

in turn lead to indiscriminate artillery bombing, allowing the enemy to gather more support from among the smoke of burning villages. When ARVN troops did venture out on patrol, ambush was a constant concern. VC cadres became so adept at policing battlefields abandoned by the ARVN and Americans that the trash heap left behind after even an unsuccessful battle would supply a treasure trove of materiel: "expended smoke grenades, safety levers and pins, LAW tubes, Claymore mine components, ammunition boxes and containers, grenade and projectile packaging tubes, propellant containers, packing material, pallets, sandbags, bandoleers, loading clips, machine-gun links, empty C-ration cans, mortar increments (propellant bags), artillery projectile booster charges (removed from fuse wells), expended 'pop-up' flare tubes, expended time fuse igniters, field telephone wire, expended batteries, used field dressings, IV (intravenous) bottles, and other soiled medical items."¹⁵⁶ For a battle in which the ARVN was overrun, there was no limit to what could be uncovered.

Vann's cohort, Colonel Daniel Boone Porter, observed, "Everything he had seen had convinced him that if the Vietnamese on the Saigon side were going to prevail, they needed Americans who would show them how to fight their war and also find a way to goad them into fighting it."¹⁵⁷ The war the United States would eventually fight did not exist in Vietnam until Americans invented it. A climate of civil conflict, an official army of the state, mobilized guerillas, and sociopolitical strife were all present in 1962; the war as it came to be was not. Though Vann

¹⁵⁶ Gordon Rottman, *Viet Cong Fighter* (New York: Osprey, 2009), 42.

¹⁵⁷ Sheehan 1988, 158.

was particularly sensitive, in fact favorably inclined to, Vietnamese cultural standards and practices, the soldier in him recognized the primal imperative of security: "Security may be ten percent of the problem, or it may be ninety percent, but whichever it is, it's the first ten percent or the first ninety percent," and thus "without security, nothing else we do will last."¹⁵⁸ His plan was to coerce Colonel Cao into major policing actions that would smash the cornerstone guerilla forces that made up the hierarchy in Cao's area of operation; he thought he could accomplish this task within six months.

In some ways, the battle of Ap Bac was the prototypical Cold War battlefield. Vietnam itself as an international conflict zone was somewhat accidental, but also the product of certain geographical conditions. President Kennedy had become enamored with the intrigue of the Special Forces, in large part simply because he found them personally compelling, but also for practical reasons: Nikita Khrushchev had announced on January 6, 1961, two weeks to the day before Kennedy assumed the presidency, his intention to support "liberation wars and popular uprisings," and the United States did not intend to sit on the sidelines while peasants the world over were given a copy of the Communist Manifesto and a Kalashnikov, preferring instead for them to be trained via a Bible and an M-14.¹⁵⁹ The Special Forces would facilitate that exchange. Kennedy's military mentor, Maxwell Taylor, published a book enshrining the doctrine of

¹⁵⁸ Sheehan 1988, 264.

¹⁵⁹ Raymond Garthoff, *A Journey Through the Cold War: A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 132.

"limited war" that precipitated JFK's military predilection for "flexible response." These terms implied the ability to project power anywhere on Earth via a rapidly deployable force capable of working hand-in-hand with local allies and utilizing superior firepower and tactical prowess rather than relying almost exclusively on nuclear deterrence.¹⁶⁰

This transformation in military doctrine responded to the innumerable low-intensity "Third World" battlefields in which the United States and its allies was engaged, Vietnam chief among them. Although Krushchev had taken criticism from China for not doing enough to fight the hot battles of the Cold War, the Americans had plenty of reason to be wary of Soviet influence in Cuba, Vietnam, Algeria, the Congo, and elsewhere. Thus, what Vann concluded from the battle of Ap Bac, conclusions that would symbolize his and others' views toward the war in the coming years, carried with it global implications far beyond what the local population of 600 miserly inhabitants could begin to fathom. The terms of the battle, as described by Sheehan:

The 350 guerrillas had stood their ground and humbled a modern army four times their number equipped with armor and artillery and supported by helicopters and fighter-bombers. Their heaviest weapon was the little 60mm mortar that had proved useless to them. They suffered eighteen killed and thirty-nine wounded, light casualties considering that the Americans and their Vietnamese protégés subjected them to thousands of rifle and machine-gun bullets, the blast and shrapnel of 600 artillery shells, and the napalm, bombs, and assorted other ordnance of thirteen warplanes and five Huey gunships. The Hueys alone expended 8,400 rounds of machine-gun fire and 100 rockets on the tree lines at Bac. With

¹⁶⁰ Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (Harper, 1960).

the weapons they held in their hands the guerrillas killed or wounded roughly four of their enemies for every man they lost. They inflicted about 80 killed and well over 100 wounded on the Saigon forces and also killed three Americans, wounded another eight, and accounted for five helicopters. (The Saigon side later officially admitted to 63 killed and 109 wounded, holding down their losses by misstating the number of casualties suffered by the reserve company in front of Bac.) The guerrillas managed to cause all of this damage while still conserving their own bullets. From the first shots at the Civil Guards through the last fight with the paratroops they fired about 5,000 rounds of rifle and machine-gun ammunition.¹⁶¹

The tactical result of the battle was a stalemate. Cao's forces took no ground, retreating the following day, as was characteristic of this asymmetric war. Neither side had inflicted a mortal wound on the other. However, stalemate in this case meant victory for the guerrillas. They could wait out. All they needed to do was survive as a fighting force capable of gathering popular support and intimidating or assassinating opponents. A tie or even a marginal loss in battle was a victory for the VC. The United States *could* continue fighting this type of battle even with disproportionate expenditure of resources ad infinitum, and indeed *did* so for the next decade. However, the four fundamental problems that would become more evident to more people later in the war were the four problems that would ultimately bring about defeat. First, to withstand the American army in pitched battle, even when taking substantially more losses, meant that the VC got stronger with each engagement. It gained tactical expertise; it established itself as a viable fighting force; it confiscated American weapons which were far in advance of their own; it signified to the populace that it meant to stay and meant

¹⁶¹ Sheehan 1988, 992.

to fight; it produced martyrs to inspire young men and women to fill their ranks; it facilitated South Vietnamese and American casualties; it sapped ARVN morale; it sapped the resolve of the American public. Second, while the guerillas stayed in the communities in which they fought, strengthening the bond between them, or retreated into the nearby hinterlands, the ARVN and Americans withdrew with nothing having been gained from the battle.

Third, the meta-battle perspective of the ordinary civilian caught in the conflict was to blame the foreigner (both the Saigon foreigner and the literal foreigner) for civilian casualties; this perception was greatly exacerbated by the indiscriminate artillery shelling and aerial bombing that often accompanied military action. Fourth, because the ARVN and Americans did not want to declare defeat, they changed the metrics for success: the 'body count' would define victory, which in turn implanted the incentive to produce corpses, whether combatants or civilians, that could verify this measure of 'success.' Furthermore, colonels like Cao knew that cornering the guerillas would force them into more aggressive action against his forces, which in turn would mean higher casualties. Since the regime in Saigon needed the army to uphold its own legitimacy and provide for internal security, it did not want to risk it against an army of peasants far detached from the confines of the capitol. These were the battlefield conditions that would eventually lead to the "Americanization" of the war effort, which in turn would eventually lead back to "Vietnamization" as the American public tired of the seemingly futile campaign. Vann understood these issues immediately; he spent the rest of the war making his case in vain. The further

significance of the story of John Paul Vann is his effort to inform high-level military and political leaders of the need to reformulate the war strategy, both strategically and tactically, which is discussed in Indicator IV of the OPM.

All this is not to suggest that with a better military strategy the war could have been won, nor that a military success would have led to political success. Both were always unlikely outcomes, and, as we shall see, U.S. foreign policymakers knew this to a reasonable degree of certainty from an early stage. 1968 became the pivotal year of the war because of the confluence of the two main consequences of the Tet Offensive. The immediate battlefield effect was the near complete annihilation of the VC. The long-term effect was the loss of the most essential weapon in the 'arsenal of democracy:' public opinion. After being told for years that victory was just around the corner, the American public realized they were being told lies by their leaders, thus making the average American turn against the war. Once support was gone, it was never again recovered; anti-war momentum permanently assumed a critical mass, and Richard Nixon was elected partially based on the premise that he had a "secret plan to end the war." That plan would be "Vietnamization," or the shifting of responsibility for the war's prosecution to the GVN. The war had come full circle, and would end with the 1973 Paris Peace Accords and the withdrawal of U.S. forces altogether in 1975 as North Vietnam assumed control of the entire country, fulfilling Hanoi's promise to someday reunite the quintessentially nationalistic nation.

Criterion II. Corollary strategic consequences

In terms of the national interest, the most disruptive effect of the war was an ideational effect. The American military had lost its first major war; its impenetrable invincibility had been punctured; to many Americans it had lost the moral high ground. This loss came at the height of the Cold War, deflating the sense of inevitable victory Americans had come to enjoy as members of the most successful nation-state since the Peace of Westphalia. And while one of the ironies of the Vietnam War was that it appeared to come at great loss and yet hardly appeared to affect the national interest, it had a devastating effect on the morale of the nation. This strategic irony mirrored the tactical irony of the war: there was little national interest in Vietnam until a commitment was made to invent one. Therefore, the effect on the national interest existed once a commitment was made to the country in the form of unprecedented aerial bombing, hundreds of thousands of troops, and hundreds of billions of dollars. These two ironies represent the divergence of the Cold War and its "hot" proxies and illustrate the strategic-tactical gap in U.S. foreign policy. The ultimate result was the loss of confidence for a nation that would not fight another major war until its next foreign-policy blunder, which is the subject of the next chapter (if we are to term the 1991 Gulf War a policing action).

In the February 1941 issue of *Life* Magazine, public intellectual and founder of *Life*, *Time*, and *Fortune* magazines Henry Luce coined the term "American Century," advocating a global role for U.S. leadership in the world and

a sharp turn away from the isolationism of the interwar period.¹⁶² His words were prescient, and the nation listened, promulgating what would later be referred to as the "Greatest Generation." To many, the national nightmare of Vietnam had washed away that optimistic internationalist vision. Sociologist, Daniel Bell, wrote that "the American Century foundered on the shoals of Vietnam."¹⁶³ This loss of national morale was termed "Vietnam Syndrome" in popular and scholarly discourse over the next two decades, and was to some degree exorcised during the 1991 Gulf War, which many viewed as successful, before returning with the "Iraq Syndrome," a term not yet born given that the conflict is still ongoing after fourteen years of violent conflict.¹⁶⁴ While the exact impact of Vietnam Syndrome is impossible to quantify, and the U.S. by no means avoided conflict during the time in which it most affected the national psyche, its presence was unmistakable. Even during the 1991 Gulf War, policymakers were careful not to repeat the mistakes of Vietnam. The so-called "Powell Doctrine" that emphasized 'overwhelming force,' multilateralism, and public support was heavily influenced by the Vietnam War, all three of which were to some degree absent from the war planning of the 1960's (Powell was himself an infantryman in Vietnam and had witnessed its failures first-hand).

¹⁶² "Henry Luce and 20th Century U.S. Internationalism," Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/internationalism>

¹⁶³ Anthony Burke, *Beyond Security, Ethics, and Violence: War Against the Other* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 169.

¹⁶⁴ "Vietnam Syndrome" is also used as a catchall term for medical issues sustained by military personnel deployed to Vietnam.

Geoff Simons describes the dialect associated with "Vietnam" as a term with specified conceptual implications, rather than as a literal country or event:

For many, Vietnam is less a territorial expanse or a political entity, more a warning, a rebuke, a shibboleth or a metaphor. Thus Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, the Argentinian revolutionary, wanted to create 'two, three or more Vietnams'; Afghanistan became 'Russia's Vietnam,' the Lebanon became 'Israel's Vietnam'; and on 10 August 1996 the influential Moslem cleric Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah warned the United States of a 'new Vietnam' if it attacked Iran... there was no 'Germany Syndrome', no 'Japan Syndrome', no 'Italy Syndrome', no 'Korea Syndrome' and no 'China Syndrome' (except in a very different context)—though, as we shall see, there was a 'Somalia Effect.'¹⁶⁵

This led to the effect of "an enervating reluctance to use the American armed forces to protect U.S. interests around the world."¹⁶⁶ The 'Somalia Effect' to which the author refers was an echo of Vietnam Syndrome: many accredited the failure to intervene in the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 to the loss of eighteen U.S. soldiers in Mogadishu less than a year earlier. Indeed, the 'syndrome' was often compared to the 'effect' in the Clinton Administration's dithering over what to do with Rwanda; the international community did nothing, and nearly one million people were slaughtered in one hundred days. Though the author's conclusion—that "Vietnam forced the United States to refine its pursuit of global hegemony, with ethical factors continuing to weigh nothing in the scale of realpolitik calculation"—is a rather cynical one, it does highlight the impact of the event on

¹⁶⁵ Geoff Simons, *Vietnam Syndrome: Impact on U.S. Foreign Policy* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998), xvii.

¹⁶⁶ Simons 1998, 14.

the pursuit of hegemony, whether morally induced or brought about by practical considerations. The backlash against the Vietnam War would have international repercussions as well: it would eventually become "the rallying cry of the radical left throughout Western Europe and North America."¹⁶⁷

Just as much of the justification for intervention in Vietnam was due to the perception of weakness that another country falling to Communism would create, perhaps the primary loss in terms of the U.S. national interest was one of perception. An army of peasants with limited technology and military sophistication had defeated the full force of the American military and demonstrated to the rest of the world that a determined Communist-nationalist army could defeat foreign aggression if it only stood its ground and refused to capitulate. Thus, in Kissinger's words, "Vietnam is still with us. It has created doubts about American judgment, about American credibility, about American power, not only at home but also throughout the world. It has poisoned our domestic debate. So we paid an exorbitant price for the decisions that were made in good faith and for good purpose."¹⁶⁸

The "good faith" Kissinger and many other U.S. foreign policymakers at the heart of the Vietnam War clung to in the years of its aftermath is questionable on multiple grounds, not the least of which is what the campaign meant to the U.S. national interest, if anything. In human terms, the harm done in any large-scale war in which hundreds of thousands or even millions of people are killed is

¹⁶⁷ Donald Sasso, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: The New Press, 1997), 344.

¹⁶⁸ Burke 2007, 169.

immeasurable, and understandable only to those who are directly affected by it. The FPE process utilized here means to evaluate the foreign policy in question as it relates to the national interest. An accounting of casualties may therefore seem irrelevant to the social-science observer. However, in the context of the Vietnam War, this is not the case. The anti-war movement across the college campuses and streets of America indeed gained steam because of the harm being done to the Vietnamese people, and this movement precipitated the end of the conflict, at least as far as America was concerned. It was not an uncommon occurrence for U.S. soldiers to be spat at upon returning from the dangers of Vietnam; this was unheard of in American history and this sentiment has never returned to the treatment of U.S. soldiers who once again enjoy the reverence of a nation, if only in symbolism.

The Vietnam War is therefore singular in American history in terms of the direct effect between the loss of the war and the sentiment among everyday Americans that there was an inherently *moral* problem with perpetuating a conflict that was killing so many ostensibly innocent people in addition to its active combatants. The nature of guerilla warfare meant that Vietnamese civilians were caught in the midst of many of the war's battles, and the extreme difficulty in identifying and targeting combatants made it impossible for the U.S. military to avoid civilian casualties, whether by direct targeting out of ignorance of who the enemy was or by indirect collateral damage from indiscriminate artillery and aerial bombing. And while intentional massacres by ground forces like that of My Lai were far from regular occurrences, their presence on American television

screens made Americans question whether they could claim the moral high ground for perhaps the first time in their history. It is therefore relevant here to take a brief accounting of the casualties caused by this war that nobody seemed to be winning prior to the end of the 'decent interval' and the North's full-scale invasion of the South in 1975.

Who exactly these people were that the American army was killing is therefore relevant as well. The VC were highly adept at violence and terrorism, and to target such actors was perhaps an acceptable 'casualty of war' to the average American. After all, in the context of Containment, 'spillover' was an inevitability. The world was in the midst of a Cold War and Vietnam was its hot landing zone. In the historical development of the remnants of French Indochina, that spillover was regional. It came in the form of the bombing of Laos and Cambodia. From the North Vietnamese and PRP side, the war was far more nationalistic than the United States ever let on. For the fiercely nationalistic Vietnamese people, the long-term goal was a unified, independent Vietnam, for which Vietnamese north and south of the 17th parallel had been struggling, often successfully, for hundreds of years.

For its part, the self-serving GVN viewed virtually all policy matters through the lens of maintaining governance and the system of bribery, clientelism, and opposition suppression that allowed it to keep its hold on power, at least in Saigon and its immediate environs. But for the Americans, Vietnam was part of "Indochina," which included the French colonies of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. "The American commitment to anti-colonialism, seen in some of

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's pronouncements during World War II, diminished because Washington deemed it more important to stop Communism than to champion the cause of independence. Although there was an awareness that Ho was a popular figure, the United States almost inevitably opposed his movement because of its Communist leadership and ultimately gave its political, moral, financial, and material support to the French," as described by historian Kenton Clymer.¹⁶⁹ This pragmatic attachment to colonialism, fundamentally at the heart of the American tug-of-war for international identity described in Chapter 3, made it inevitable that the conflict the United States was to assume in Vietnam would spill over into Laos and Cambodia. This effect was compounded by the insecurity in those countries, the international nature of the Communist materiel supply network from China and the Soviet Union, and the difficult terrain in the virtually borderless areas on the Vietnam-Laos and Vietnam-Cambodia borders that posed significant complications in targeting the mountainous and canopy-laden supply lines of the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Laos and Cambodia had their own independence struggles to deal with. Cambodia's took form in earnest after the 1942 arrest of two Buddhist monks by the French, while in Laos nationalists seized the opportunity to begin their movement when the Japanese displaced the Vichy French government in 1945. President Eisenhower declared in an NSC meeting on December 31st, 1960, "We cannot let Laos fall to the Communists even if we have to fight... with our

¹⁶⁹ Kenton Clymer, "Cambodia and Laos in the Vietnam War," in *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War*, ed. David Anderson (Columbia University Press, 2011), 357.

allies or without them," given that Laos was "the key to the whole area" and "it would just be a matter of time until South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Burma would collapse" and fall into Communist hands.¹⁷⁰ On January 19, 1961, Eisenhower discussed Laos at length with Kennedy; Vietnam was not even on the agenda. Relative foreign-policy novice Kennedy viewed the situation through political expedience, remarking on the whole matter: "Whatever's going to happen in Laos, an American invasion, a Communist victory or whatever," to get it over with "before we take over and get blamed for it." While Kennedy "understood that Laos by itself was of little political or economic interest to the United States, he considered it symbolically important to the Cold War. An American failure in Laos would have important negative ramifications elsewhere in the world, he feared, including elsewhere in Indochina."¹⁷¹

The years of the Vietnam War bore witness to confusion, tension, and negotiation between the United States, Laos, and Cambodia, as well as extensive aerial bombing. In 1963, Norodom Sihanouk, King and later head of state of Cambodia from 1955-1970, ended American aid in 1963 after the assassination of GVN President Ngo Dinh Diem. But with or without consent, bombing of the border regions was an inherent potentiality, given the supply lines the NVA used to furnish their armies as well as the VC. Historian Alfred McCoy estimates the amount of bombing in Laos' Plain of Jars: "By war's end, this Plain of Jars, a small region with poor highland farms and no infrastructure, received

¹⁷⁰ William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part II: 1961-1964* (Princeton University Press, 1986), 9.

¹⁷¹ Clymer 2011, 360.

over three times the total dropped on industrial Japan [during WWII], becoming the most intensely bombarded place on the face of the planet."¹⁷²

If the political necessities of the Cold War were making and unmaking strange bedfellows in the remnants of French Indochina, so too were geographical hinterlands become epicenters of the hot wars fought under its guise: the Plain of Jars became "a strategic prize for both the communist forces in the caves of Sam Neua Province just to the northeast and the CIA secret army based at Long Tieng Valley just to the southwest."¹⁷³ The amorphous battlefields of the Vietnam War not only posed complications for military tacticians, but also for U.S. foreign policymakers for whom moral questions of who to target and how to target them were reduced to quantifiable units like "structures," "enemy sites," "supply vehicles," and the ever-generic "Viet Cong Infrastructure," especially under the quantification-obsessed Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. There was no code under McNamara's obstinately statistical battlefield metrics for civilian casualties.¹⁷⁴ B-52 bombers are simply not built to target small groups of individuals, even when assuming the opaque layers of canopy jungle do not prevent ground forces from identifying those individuals, itself a virtually impossible endeavor in the netherworld of borderlands comprising the supply-line warscape. While the American public did eventually find out about the bombing in

¹⁷² Marilyn Young and Robert Buzzanco, *A Companion to the Vietnam War* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Companions to American History), 2002, 292.

¹⁷³ Young and Buzzanco 2002, 292.

¹⁷⁴ *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, documentary film, dir. Errol Morris, 2003.

Laos and Cambodia, the secrecy surrounding it delayed the ferocity and scope of the anti-war movement:

Among the few things that the American public did not know was that thousands of innocent Laotians died in the bombing and the terrifying gunship attacks. The gunships, which operated during the night, unleashed 6,000 rounds per minute and were guided by sensors that detected the urine of mammals. Thus monkeys, water buffalo, cattle, guerillas, wandering refugees, and villagers—all suffered. Under international law, the American action in Laos may have constituted a war crime. Nor did most Americans know that the CIA tolerated Vang Pao's control of the heroin trade or that the intended market for the deadly drug was increasingly American soldiers in South Vietnam. Under Vang Pao's direction, Air America, the CIA airline, flew the raw opium to market. Vang Pao's control over the opium harvest and of food aid supplied through USAID also gave him enormous power over the Hmong villagers.¹⁷⁵

The "power over the Hmong villagers" is especially relevant because the Hmong were fearless warriors that were utilized by "Free World" forces in the struggle against Communism throughout their native territory, from which there was no escape. In 1973, ten years after Cambodia had ended its partnership with the United States, the United States ended its partnership with Laos. It is difficult to quantify the destruction the Vietnam War had on Laos and Cambodia, but simple enough to estimate that the use of each as pawns in the battle against Communism exacerbated the sense of tribalism and cyclical violence that these countries were already prone to. To be sure, neither was a united Jeffersonian democracy before the Americans came to town. But the stunted sociopolitical

¹⁷⁵ Clymer 2011, 363.

development of these countries was relieved in no part by the American presence. The emergence of the Khmer Rouge during the Vietnam War and consolidation of power after the Cambodian Civil War were not a direct consequence of American actions, and in fact the movement was allied with North Vietnam. But it is not inconceivable that a different American approach in the rubble of French Indochina would have led to an outcome other than the most terrible reign of terror since the Holocaust, in which some two million Cambodians perished in mass executions, starvation and disease.

Although this dissertation focuses on these foreign-policy blunders as they affect the U.S. national interest, the perspective of the enemy, including their collective tolerance to withstand intimidation, displacement, imprisonment, torture, death, and other forms of misery cannot be omitted from this evaluation. The determination of the NVA and VC to resist the theretofore omnipotent U.S. military indeed played a major role in limiting the ability of U.S. foreign policymakers to make progress on their overall strategy. A survey of Vietnamese casualties as a result of the conflict paints a picture of a people ravaged by war yet unrelenting in their resolve, consistent with what might be expected from a nation that had been successfully fighting against foreign aggressors from the Chinese to the French for centuries. Vietnamese Casualties of the war are therefore rather crudely classified under this Indicator, because the Indicator is designed to assess undesired consequences and collateral side effects of the foreign-policy action, which those killed in the Vietnam War inevitably became on government charts.

Although there was a careful accounting of the casualties sustained by foreign armies, there are no confident estimates of Vietnamese casualties during the "American War." Numbers from one to three million are frequently reported.¹⁷⁶ One million Communist combatants are commonly thought to have lost their lives, along with 250,000 South Vietnamese soldiers.¹⁷⁷ However, there are no reliable figures to this effect.¹⁷⁸ The North Vietnamese government had no more motivation to admit to the staggering cost of war dead than did the U.S. government. One study utilized a demographically controlled model to estimate total Vietnamese war deaths between 1965-1975 at 655,000 adult males, 143,000 adult females, and 84,000 children, totaling 882,000.¹⁷⁹ The staggering numbers of war dead indicate perhaps as much as any other figure the extent to which military force failed to break the will of the enemy. In terms of long-term effects on the population, a 2002 study found that U.S. bombing did not have negative impacts on local poverty rates, consumption levels, infrastructure, literacy, or population density; however, a 2010 study found the opposite,

¹⁷⁶ Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 450.

¹⁷⁷ Charles Hirschman, Samuel Preston, and Vu Manh Loi, "Vietnamese Casualties During the American War: A New Estimate," *Population and Development Review* Vol. 21, No. 4 (December 1995), 783-812.

¹⁷⁸ Since there were no reliable figures during the war, confident assessments have been difficult to quantify to an exact degree since the war. For some estimates, see Thomas Thayer, *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985); William Turley, *The Second Indochina War* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); "Vietnam Declares War Dead," Associated Press, April 3, 1995; and "Power Kills" website maintained by the Political Science Department at the University of Hawaii: <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/SOD.TAB6.1B.GIF>

¹⁷⁹ Hirschman, Preston, and Loi 1995, 806.

discovering a correlation between the number of "war invalids" and economic stagnation.¹⁸⁰

The potential for civilian targeting facilitated by the incentive to tally enemy dead is described by Philip Caputo in *A Rumor of War*.

General Westmoreland's strategy of attrition also had an important effect on our behavior. Our mission was not to win terrain or seize positions, but simply to kill: to kill Communists and to kill as many of them as possible. Stack 'em like cordwood. Victory was a high body-count, defeat a low kill-ratio, war a matter of arithmetic. The pressure on unit commanders to produce enemy corpses was intense, and they in turn communicated it to their troops. This led to such practices as counting civilians as Viet Cong. "If it's dead and it's Vietnamese, it's VC," was a rule of thumb in the bush. It is not surprising, therefore, that some men acquired a contempt for human life and a predilection for taking it.¹⁸¹

At the height of the war in late 1967, General Westmoreland continued to insist that the "cross-over point" at which "North Vietnamese casualties exceeded their ability to replace them" was on the horizon, in fact claiming publicly multiple times that it may have already been reached.¹⁸² It would never be reached, and Westmoreland in his memoirs would later blame hamstringing politicians in Washington, D.C. for failing to achieve the objectives he felt his futile war of attrition could have.

¹⁸⁰ Edward Miguel and Gerard Roland, "The Long-Run Impact of Bombing in Vietnam," *Journal of Development Economics* Vol. 96, No. 1 (September 2011), 1-15; Anh Duc Dang, "The Long Term Impact of Vietnam's War Veterans," Research School of Economics, Australian National University, August 2010.

¹⁸¹ Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Owl Books, 1977), xix.

¹⁸² Andreas Daum, Lloyd Gardner, and Wilfried Mausbauch, *America, the Vietnam War, and the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 80.

Criterion III. Cost

Given that none of the primary objectives of the war were met, the extent to which it can be classified as a blunder is inexorably compounded by its enormous cost in political, financial, and military terms. Between 1964 and August 15, 1973, the U.S. Air Force expended 6,162,000 tons of ordnance over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, primarily in Vietnam, with the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps expending an additional 1,500,000 tons, compared to a total of 2,150,000 tons of aurally originated explosives in all of the Second World War in both the European and Pacific theaters.¹⁸³ In Laos alone, a periphery of the war, \$1.5 million a day was spent on a bombing load in eight-minute frequencies over a ten-year average, totaling two million tons, which in itself surpasses WWII ordnance in the European theater.¹⁸⁴ (Laos still has 80 million unexploded bombs dropped by the U.S. Air Force that continue to maim farm animal and civilian alike).¹⁸⁵ The Vietnam War was therefore by far the most intense aerial bombing campaign in the history of warfare. Ultimately, this unprecedented military might affected neither the morale nor the proliferation and mobility of the enemy in any decisive way, as the supply chains of the Ho Chi Minh Trail needed only to be shifted a few kilometers here and there to adjust to the predictable paths of

¹⁸³ Michael Clodfelter, *Vietnam in Military Statistics: A History of the Indochina Wars, 1772-1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995).

¹⁸⁴ Simons 1998, xviii.

¹⁸⁵ Rebecca Wright, "What 80 Million Unexploded Bombs Did to Laos," CNN, September 6, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/05/asia/united-states-laos-secret-war/>

regular bombing campaigns. The war cost American taxpayers \$686 billion in FY2008 dollars, peaking at 2.3% of GDP in 1968, an enormous cost in absolute terms but one the prolific U.S. economy could withstand without significant structural adjustments.¹⁸⁶

2,594,000 U.S. military personnel served within the borders of South Vietnam in one capacity or another.¹⁸⁷ 58,220 U.S. military personnel perished in the war, 61% of whom were aged 21 or younger. 38,224 of these deaths were attributed to the Army, 14,884 to the Marine Corps, 2,559 to the Navy, 2,586 to the Air Force, and 7 to the Coast Guard.¹⁸⁸ Roughly one-third of those killed were drafted. Table 2 gives an overview of American casualties:¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Stephen Daggett, "Costs of Major U.S. Wars," CRS Report for Congress, July 24, 2008, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/108054.pdf>

¹⁸⁷ Reg Grant, *The Vietnam War* (Arcturus, 2004), 64.

¹⁸⁸ "Statistical Information about Fatal Casualties of the Vietnam War," National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html>

¹⁸⁹ Nese F. DeBruyne and Anne Leland, "American War and Military Casualties: Lists and Statistics," Congressional Research Service, January 2, 2015, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32492.pdf>

Table 2: U.S. Casualties of the Vietnam War

(as of December 22, 2014)

Casualty Type	Total	Army	Air Force	Marines	Navy ^a
Killed in Action	40,934	27,047	1,080	11,501	1,306
Died of Wounds	5,299	3,610	51	1,486	152
Missing in Action—Declared Dead	1,085	261	589	98	137
Captured—Declared Dead	116	45	25	10	36
Total Hostile Deaths	47,434	30,963	1,745	13,095	1,631
Missing—Presumed Dead	123	118	0	3	2
Other Deaths	10,663	7,143	841	1,746	933
Total Nonhostile Deaths	10,786	7,261	841	1,749	935
Total In-Theater Deaths	58,220	38,224	2,586	14,844	2,566
Killed in Action (No Remains)	575	173	206	102	94
Missing in Action—Declared Dead (No Remains)	691	201	339	74	77
Captured—Declared Dead (No Remains)	52	32	7	3	10
Nonhostile Missing—Presumed Dead (No Remains)	91	86	0	3	2
Nonhostile Other Deaths (No Remains)	332	69	30	37	196
Total—No Remains	1,741	561	582	219	379
Wounded—Not Mortal	153,303	96,802	931	51,392	4,178
Number Serving Worldwide ^b	8,744,000	4,368,000	1,740,000	794,000	1,842,000
Number Serving Southeast Asia	3,403,000	2,276,000	385,000	513,000	229,000
Number Serving South Vietnam	2,594,000	1,736,000	293,000	391,000	174,000

Source: DCAS, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_vietnam_sum.xhtml.

Notes: Inclusive dates are November 1, 1955, to May 15, 1975. Casualty dates after the end date represent service members who were wounded during the period and subsequently died as a result of those wounds and those service members who were involved in an incident during the period and were later declared dead.

Americans were far more concerned with the lives of other Americans than with the financial burden of the war, which was harmful to the U.S. economy but not substantial enough to be debilitating. While the "Vietnam Syndrome" discussed in Criterion II lasted for a great many years, it was more likely due to the fact that America failed than the fact that it expended great financial resources in the battle to defeat Vietnamese Communists. In other words, despite an alternative undercurrent of isolationism, Americans have always shown a willingness to go to war and pay a great cost for a cause believed to be worth fighting for. What Americans were neither prepared for nor accustomed to was to lose such a monumental military campaign, especially against a perceived Lilliputian such as North Vietnam, and to lose so many soldiers in the process.

A number of factors all but guaranteed that the cost of the war would grow as the years of escalation advanced. There was, of course, the obvious cost of

maintaining and supplying more troops all the way around the world; hundreds of thousands were more costly than tens of thousands. But certain aspects of the military strategy in Vietnam built upscaling costs in them. In 1965, when the buildup was taking form, General Westmoreland shifted away from the extant strategy of protecting the population to seeking out the enemy wherever he lay, in order to seize the battle initiative and ferret out VC and NVA wherever they materialized en masse. He did not abandon pacification (pacification is discussed in OPM Indicator III), but he did reformulate the war effort from defensive protection to offensive maneuvers, shifting the aim from strategic defense against NVA and VCI incursions to aggression to seek out and eliminate their forces, or "search and destroy," as it came to be known. He instituted a three-phase plan that would utilize the increasing number of troops in an increasingly offensive capacity. First, he would stunt the NVA offensive in the central highlands in order to stop their momentum. He would then use the twenty-four battalions that would be at his disposal in 1966 to secure the capitol region, the delta provinces, and other key areas of the conflict. He envisioned victory in 1968, when "the incremental attrition of enemy strength would make the war too costly and force the enemy to seek a negotiated settlement," thus fixing the number of forces to the expectation of success as the buildup became fully implemented:

The arrival of North Vietnamese and American combat forces in the summer of 1965 transformed the nature of the war in South Vietnam. By the end of the summer, the enemy's combat strength, which had steadily increased in 1964 and early 1965, reached an estimated 221,000, including 55 NVA battalions and 105 VC

battalions. At the end of July, President Johnson announced plans to deploy forty-four more army and marine battalions, increasing American military strength in South Vietnam to 175,000 by the end of the year. The president had decided to send regular U.S. Army units and not to mobilize any reserve units. It was no longer just a struggle to defeat Viet Cong insurgents. A war between conventional North Vietnamese forces that had entered South Vietnam and American ground forces, the so-called main force war, was superimposed on the continuing political struggle for the countryside. MACV changed from a staff originally concerned with advisory duties to a headquarters, dubbed "Pentagon East," that increasingly concentrated on operations. As U.S. Army and Marine Corps units arrived in 1965, pacification became known as the "other war," a patronizing usage that stigmatized the program's status as a noble but failing endeavor that was no longer the main event.¹⁹⁰

The "other war" was actually a commonly used official term in military and CIA documents, signifying the program to "win the hearts and minds" of the population by protecting it from the influence and intimidation of the VCI. The "main event" indeed changed dramatically in 1965, due to the intensification of combat, as described by Colonel Hal Moore recounting the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley:

Now came the body count. From the beginning of the fight I had known that higher headquarters would eventually want to know what damage we had done to the enemy. So after each major action in this battle, hating it, I asked my company commanders for their best estimates of enemy killed. With the battle raging back and forth over three days and two nights, it was anything but orderly. There was no referee to call time out for a body count. We did the best we could to keep a realistic count of enemy dead. In the end it added up to 834 dead by body count, with an additional 1,215 estimated killed and wounded by artillery, air attacks, and aerial

¹⁹⁰ Richard Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 31.

rocket attacks. On my own I cut the figure back to 634, a personal allowance for the confusion and fog of war, and let the 1,215 estimated stand. We captured and evacuated six enemy prisoners. On our side, we had lost 79 Americans killed in action, 121 wounded, and none missing. But the body count on both sides, tragic as it was, did not go to the heart of the matter. What had happened here in these three days was a sea change in the Vietnam War. For the first time since Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the North Vietnamese Army had taken the field in division strength. People's Army soldiers were pouring down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in unprecedented numbers, and now they had intervened directly and powerfully on the battlefield in South Vietnam. Seventy-nine Americans had been killed in just three days in X-Ray. The cost of America's involvement in this obscure police action had just risen dramatically. Vietnam was now a whole new ball game militarily, politically, and diplomatically. Decisions would have to be made in Washington and Hanoi, and they would have to be made soon.¹⁹¹

Colonel Moore understood exactly how the war was evolving to the NVA division level even in real-time, just as John Paul Vann had understood the significance of the VC fighting a pitched battle and holding its own at Ap Bac. Moore understood the misperception involved in measuring success by enemy dead, as well as the connection between that strategy of attrition and the implication that American war dead would inevitably come to assume the other side of that metric. A war of attrition was a two-sided coin, even with a 10:1 kill ratio and superior firepower. When Ho Chi Minh estimated "You will kill ten of our men, and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who tire of it," the calculation was perhaps more scientific than even Ho realized.

The first chapter of Colonel Harry Summers' book *American Strategy in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis*, "Tactical Victory, Strategic Defeat," opens with a

¹⁹¹ Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore (Ret.) and Joseph Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once... And Young* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 216.

quote that Colonel Summers received as Chief, Negotiations Division, U.S. Delegation, Four Party Joint Military Team, from Colonel Tu, Chief, North Vietnamese (DRV) Delegation, on April 25, 1975, after the North had taken over Saigon:

"You know you never defeated us on the battlefield," said the American Colonel.

The North Vietnamese Colonel pondered this remark a moment. "That may be so," he replied, "but it is also irrelevant."¹⁹²

Colonel Summers then briefly alludes to Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts' political-bureaucratic study (discussed in the Part II), which asserts that the system worked, but nonetheless failed to achieve its objectives. Some military leaders lauded the contribution of the military effort as an "unqualified success" if its job were to "organize, train and equip active duty and reserve forces," given that "the Army doesn't make strategy," leaving grand strategy to the statesmen and figuring out tactics on its own. Repeatedly invoking the military philosophy of Clausewitz in his 1832 publication *On War*, such as the need to "develop a theory that maintains a balance among what he calls the trinity of war—the people, the government, and the army," Summers describes the 1832 work as "the most *modern* source available" (emphasis in the original) and "untainted by today's bias."

¹⁹² Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., *American Strategy in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007), 1-5.

Summers blames both military tacticians for failing to develop a viable strategy and failing to communicate strategic imperatives to the FPDM officials in Washington, D.C., as well as the negligence of those officials. Specifically, he blames the war strategy for failing to attack the real enemy, the NVA, rather than the "near" enemy of the VC, who were directed and supplied by North Vietnam. His obsession with Clausewitz obscures the modern complexities of this war for preponderance with an unlikely Lilliputian. Yet, quite astutely, he recognizes that the Vietnam War was fundamentally a problem of American society: even in the time of Clausewitz it was necessary to maintain support for the war at home. The memoirs of the military men so involved in the Vietnam War illustrate how the correlation between its human cost and the confusion over how to evaluate it combined to lead the strategy into blunder.

Criterion IV. Availability and consideration of alternatives

It is a common misperception that leaders are dragged into a 'quagmire' by circumstances, political demands, security concerns, or other inevitable imperatives, and that therefore we should not retroactively assess the very difficult decisions forced upon them by the constraints and demands of an anarchical, dangerous international system. Indeed, this is one of the perceptions scholars cite in dissuading against FPE in the first place. This perception is not only false, but it also carries with it the effect of providing excuses to future leaders that their actions will be accepted to the point of exculpation. This

chapter gives examples of this misperception in the scholarly literature, while also referencing the counter-literature that takes the opposite approach. This section addresses how the alternatives of advisory and escalation were settled upon as the advisory period shifted in 1964 to a full-scale military buildup. The experience of the Vietnam War shatters the illusion that FPDM officials rationally pursue the national interest. At the same time, it shows how a nation can be *united* in blunder, in that the policy that shows clearly harmful trends from an early stage is settled upon in spite of those trends because the national consensus precludes a more prudent course of action.

Two factors thus become clear in any study of the Vietnam War which are essential to the overall research objective of this dissertation. First, U.S. foreign policymakers *did* understand the very difficult circumstances in which the U.S. military would find itself if a full-scale war were to be the alternative settled upon. They knew that success was going to be hard to come by, and settled on escalation anyway because the "loss" of Vietnam was never accepted as a viable alternative. The grand strategy of preponderance fueled the refusal to accept that 'Indochina' would fall into Communist hands. One of the many ironies of the war was the contradiction between the understanding that victory would be very hard to come by, especially when there were no metrics with which to evaluate it, and the overwhelming confidence that the invincible American military was incapable of losing in battle. In fact, it did not lose a single battle, but still lost the war.

Second, this alternative was settled upon as a national consensus, including incorporating the preferences of Congressional leaders and the

American populace, rather than being a hijacking of foreign policy by a faction of foreign-policy hawks that somehow clawed their talons into the Oval Office or a terrible FPDM fallacy by a few 'wise men.' This was a national blunder involving every aspect of American society and it cannot be attributed to a small group of misguided leaders. That said, the FPDM officials that made the mistakes that led to blunder must be held accountable for their actions, even if they were in fact pursuing the national consensus (if not the national interest—a distinction discussed throughout this dissertation).

A state's foreign-policy agenda is determined and operationalized based on what alternatives are available to the policymaker. The grand strategy of the United States necessitated action in any part of the world in which Communism could gain a foothold, even in the periphery. Because neither U.S. foreign policymakers nor the American people were content to sit back and allow further countries to 'fall' into Communist hands, U.S. leaders determined that the alternative of doing nothing and allowing a potential Communist takeover of Vietnam was neither politically nor morally viable. Thus the alternative that would have precluded this tragedy from ever occurring—that of staying out of the country militarily altogether, or at least limiting intervention to an advisory role—never received the attention it needed in order to be considered a viable option. There are those who point to the military strategy as being the culprit, and not without reason. But any strategy short of attacking North Vietnam and perhaps even China with nuclear weapons would have proven insufficient in the face of the determined enemy.

While there is now general consensus in both the scholarly and popular literature that the Vietnam War was a blunder from which there was little to gain even in victory, there is considerable debate over the extent to which non-intervention in Vietnam was considered by foreign policymakers and the extent to which the Kennedy Administration differed from the Johnson Administration in its calculations. In *The Bitter Heritage*, historian and Kennedy advisor Arthur Schlesinger argued that the Vietnam debacle was "a tragedy without villains," as the United States slowly began to be embroiled in "a land war in Asia—a war which no president, including President Johnson, desired or intended."¹⁹³ This is a shortsighted view of the circumstances. It may be true that no president desired it, but it is not true that no president intended it. Who, if not a presidential administration, can set and shape policy alternatives? If no president intended a war, how did the war come about? At the center of this debate over to what extent the various presidents involved held sway over the availability of alternatives is whether Eisenhower and Kennedy had so marooned Vietnam policy as to place it beyond the scale of de-escalation.

As Gary Hess describes, "this interpretation, which is reflected in much of scholarly literature, substantially exonerates America's leaders as *reasonable men acting prudently* on the basis of existing assumptions and projections, but with tragic consequences" (emphasis mine). Hess presents a distinction between what he terms the "turning point argument" and the "Cold War imperative

¹⁹³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy* rev. ed. (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1968), 47–48.

interpretation," with the former contending that Kennedy's exceptional "prudence" would have prevented a large-scale military intervention in Vietnam and the latter contending that Kennedy was a Cold War warrior like any other that held no special trait that would have prevented it. (This debate mirrors the change-continuity debate discussed in Chapter 3). Unsurprisingly, those close to Kennedy, such as Schlesinger and Robert Dallek, Kennedy's preeminent biographer, argue that he was determined not to commit troops en masse to Vietnam, due to the tenuous circumstances in which the country and the GVN were attempting to survive. David Kaiser asserts that Kennedy had determined that if Diem's regime became untenable, the United States "would not regard South Vietnam as a vital American interest" and would therefore allow it to fall.¹⁹⁴ But as Hess notes, "although Kennedy talked of the need for the Vietnamese to fight their own wars, he actually took steps that pulled the United States much more deeply militarily and politically into the survival of South Vietnam."¹⁹⁵ The same is true of Johnson, who proclaimed on multiple occasions that he wanted Vietnam to fend for itself, and yet he chose to escalate troop levels into the hundreds of thousands.

Just as the continuity in U.S. foreign policy argument discussed in Chapter 3 is more compelling than the change argument, the "Cold War imperative" approach is more compelling as well. If the historiography of the Vietnam War

¹⁹⁴ David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 247.

¹⁹⁵ Gary Hess, "South Vietnam Under Siege, 1961-1965: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Question of Escalation or Disengagement," in *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War*, ed. David Anderson (Columbia University Press, 2011), 152.

has proved anything, it is that many of the pitfalls of a potential full-scale war in a former French colony were all too clear even to the Eisenhower Administration, which oversaw the unsuccessful French defense falter at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and thus inherited the "problem" of Vietnam for itself. Eisenhower, having written in his diary, "I am convinced that no type of military victory is possible in this type of theater," pledged only financial and air-power support to the French, adding \$385 million in aid in addition to the \$2 billion from the Truman Administration, which was willing to commit troops to Indochina but unable to do so with so many troops garrisoned in Korea.¹⁹⁶

Despite the refrain of those who would absolve U.S. foreign policymakers of the colossal blunder that Vietnam ultimately became, as a state, across leaders, very few prominent figures involved in U.S. foreign policy at the highest levels were prepared to allow Saigon to fall into Communist hands, even if the threat of such an inevitability necessitated a military intervention, precisely the course these leaders charted from the very beginning. Perhaps none of them desired it, but by dismissing the possibility of 'Indochina' falling into Communist hands, they forced their own hands toward that intention. The leaders ignored the local realities of Vietnam because they chose instead to focus on the bigger picture, which is to say Containment policy and the total demonization of Communism everywhere. Although this was especially true after the

¹⁹⁶ Richard H. Immerman, "Dealing with a Government of Madmen: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Ngo Dinh Diem," in *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War*, ed. David L. Anderson (Columbia University Press, 2011), 140.

assassination of Kennedy, it was also true to a certain extent in his administration.

Whether Kennedy would have withdrawn U.S. forces from Vietnam, as some have speculated, cannot be known. He probably would not have. He was as determined as Eisenhower had been to support or to build a viable state in South Vietnam opposed to Communist North Vietnam. But just as Kennedy should not be commended for planning to end the U.S. military commitment to South Vietnam, Eisenhower should not be congratulated for avoiding one. Both warrant plaudits putting the braces on more zealous, reckless advisers. Yet neither demonstrated the foresight or political courage to make a decision based on the realistic assessment that there never would be a viable state of South Vietnam and that a unified Vietnam under Communist leadership would not threaten the United States or its allies. For different reasons, Eisenhower and Kennedy would likely have responded to the challenges in Vietnam that confronted Lyndon Johnson differently and more effectively than he did. Yet neither can escape responsibility for their role in forcing those challenges on their successor.¹⁹⁷

Even this passage from the well-researched Richard Immerman, from the *Columbia History of the Vietnam War*, attempts to make a decisive projection of what Kennedy would have done without actually providing convincing evidence that he would have done anything differently than anyone else, because there is no convincing evidence—in fact, there is evidence to support either claim. Kennedy's statements on Vietnam and Laos were just as contradictory as every other leader's.

On November 22, 1963, when Kennedy's assassination made Johnson president, there were 16,000 troops stationed in Vietnam, not a meager number

¹⁹⁷ Immerman 2011, 122.

by any stretch, but one that would soon be dwarfed over the course of the next two years. Once it became clear in 1964 that the government of South Vietnam could not stand on its own, there were essentially two options in Vietnam: commit troops en masse or permit the loss of South Vietnam, and potentially other neighboring countries comprising the former territory of French Indochina, to Communist expansion. McNamara summarized three alternatives in 1964 as "leave the country with as little loss as possible, maintain present force and lose slowly, or add 100,000 men—recognizing that number may not be enough—and adding more next year."¹⁹⁸ Over the course of 1964, Johnson steadily began to Americanize the war effort on a scale that would eventually become monumental. What turned into a gradual buildup of forces was the result of the foreign policymaking establishment deciding that neither pulling out nor assuming responsibility for the war was a viable option. Secretary of State Dean Rusk griped "that the consequences of both escalation and withdrawal are so bad that we simply must find a way of making our present policy work."¹⁹⁹ The "present policy" that ensued consisted of slowly ramping up offensive combative operations against the VC and initiating an aerial bombing campaign against North Vietnam to punish aggression against South Vietnam. This pseudo-strategy, while destined to fail strategically in the long term, achieved two short-

¹⁹⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, 1964–68 , vol. 3, "June Through December 1965," 117–18.

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2016), 106.

term tactical aims: it placated the Cold War hawks at home, and sent a message to the VC that attacks would be met in kind.

Unfortunately, what this alternative did was to institutionalize a war of attrition in which the NVA and VC became more motivated each time one of its own was killed, while the United States became less so and at the same time less willing to pull out. Roger Hilsman describes this stay-the-course philosophy with regard to the Kennedy Administration: "In an interesting example of one type of gambit in the politics of Washington policy-making, the President avoided a direct 'no' to the proposal for introducing troops to Vietnam. He merely let the decision slide, at the same time ordering the government to set in motion all the preparatory steps for introducing troops."²⁰⁰ Meanwhile, President Diem's promise to enact democratic reforms in exchange for American advisors, technicians, mechanics, B-26 and T-28 helicopters and their pilots turned up empty as he continued on with business as usual, maintaining the status quo on the GVN end. There seemed to be no way out, but only because nobody would devise an alternative that would incorporate the possibility of 'losing' Vietnam.

Ultimately, the story of Vietnam was not so much about what alternatives were available, but how foreign policymakers justified the need to adhere to the status quo of neither winning nor losing amongst themselves and to the American voting public. U.S. war planners and statesmen had every opportunity to rethink the strategy in Vietnam due to the low intensity of American involvement during the advisory years of the conflict. In sum, U.S. foreign

²⁰⁰ Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Company, 1967), 424.

policymakers set their own alternatives at only two: advise, assist, and hope for the best, which prevailed during the Kennedy Administration until his assassination, and assume and protect, which prevailed in the Johnson Administration once the GVN appeared unable to stand on its own. Because of his assassination, exactly what Kennedy may have done will forever remain a counterfactual. What did happen was that Johnson chose to "Americanize" the war effort in Vietnam rather than allow it to fall into Communist hands.

There is a tendency in the literature to place undue emphasis on the personal stubbornness of Johnson's and Nixon's myopia in dealing with the Vietnam War, and indeed both were myopically stubborn in conceptualizing and implementing their hopes and fears as far as the conflict was concerned. Many accounts of the Vietnam War focusing on presidential decision-making point to the character deficiencies of the two principle presidential protagonists, and not without substantial evidence. For example, David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* quotes Johnson as saying, "I don't want loyalty. I want *loyalty*. I want him to kiss my ass in Macy's window at high noon and tell me it smells like roses. I want his pecker in my pocket."²⁰¹ Donald Schmidt assesses that "a 'Caligula Syndrome' haunted the Executive Mansion as Lyndon Johnson overwhelmed all advisors," leading to an environment in which "advisors denigrated into sycophants as the Johnson ego swept all before it."²⁰² In fact, entire volumes have been dedicated simply to illustrate the FPDM folly of the Johnson

²⁰¹ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 434.

²⁰² Donald Schmidt, *The Folly of War: American Foreign Policy, 1898-2005* (New York: Algora, 2006), 281.

Administration (Because President Nixon took power after escalation had come to fruition, the line of inquiry is slightly less intriguing with regard to that administration). In *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam*, H.R. McMaster declares, "The War in Vietnam was not lost in the field, nor was it lost on the front pages of The New York Times or on the college campuses. It was lost in Washington, D.C."²⁰³

While the low-hanging fruit of the arrogance, obstinacy, and cognitive biases of the faulty FPDM of the Johnson Administration no doubt contributed to the strategic folly in Vietnam, it does not account for the whole picture. Although it is true to a certain degree that 'yes-men' were valued in the Johnson and Nixon Administrations as they are to a certain degree in any leadership group, the extent to which this philosophy informed war planning has been exaggerated. The central problem of the strategy was that the nation, not just the president and his cabinet, had an appetite to fight Communism militarily, at least until 1968. Larry Berman demonstrates the case in *Planning a Tragedy* that the failure of policy in Vietnam was not an isolated symptom of a particular, ephemeral FPDM ill but rather was seen as a weapon in the arsenal of preponderance that could hit Communism with force rather than words alone. At some point Americans needed to weaponize the lofty rhetoric of the Cold War or risk the self-emplaced label of cowardice; Vietnam was as good a place as any. President Johnson

²⁰³ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997), 408.

explained as much when he addressed the nation in April 1965 at Johns Hopkins University:

The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied. To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next. We must stay in Southeast Asia—as we did in Europe—in the words of the Bible: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further..." Our objective is the independence of South Vietnam, and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves—only that the people of South Vietnam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way.²⁰⁴

Privately and among aides and small groups of journalists, he would characterize the Cold War and its hot proxies in cruder terms. "If you let a bully come into your front yard one day, the next day he will be on your porch and the day after that he'll rape your wife in your own bed."²⁰⁵ After bombing North Vietnam in 1964, he declared, "I didn't just screw Ho Chi Minh, I cut his pecker off."²⁰⁶ When asked about why he would be successful in Vietnam, Johnson "unzipped his fly, drew out his substantial organ, and declared, 'This is why.'"²⁰⁷

In this way, National Security Advisor to both President Kennedy and President Johnson McGeorge Bundy, whom the term "the best and the brightest" was named for, estimated that "Kennedy didn't want to be dumb," but "Johnson

²⁰⁴ President Johnson quoted in Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 8.

²⁰⁵ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 263.

²⁰⁶ Halbestram 1969, 414.

²⁰⁷ Eric Alterman, *Why Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and its Consequences* (Penguin, 2004), 181.

didn't want to be a coward."²⁰⁸ Bundy therefore concludes that Kennedy would never have allowed escalation to happen had he survived long enough to make that decision. While he is far from the only FPDM official to make that case, any account that focuses exclusively on the personality or foreign-policy preferences of the president omits the majority of the motivations and justifications for a war in Vietnam. The sociopolitical causes of this national blunder cannot be constrained to a small group of people. It was in large part the result of the pursuit of preponderance and its theoretical employment of Containment, especially in a region in which the United States was already invested.

Criterion V. Context, scope, and stakes

The Vietnam War was being fought in the minds of U.S. policymakers long before American soldiers were ever deployed to the deltas, jungles, and highlands of Vietnam. Of the three case studies examined in this dissertation, the case of Vietnam is most heavily influenced by the international context. The Cold War affected every aspect of U.S. foreign policy. Most importantly, it defined the image America had of itself as the hegemonic defender of freedom in every corner of the globe, the world's only indispensable nation, without which the 'Free World' would inevitably succumb to the barbarities of heathenism and Communism. The question, in terms of policy, was never whether Communism or Soviet expansionism were evil or needed to be expelled from the earth. This was taken as a given. Instead, policymakers needed to find a way to satisfy the

²⁰⁸ Gordon Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (Holt Paperbacks, 2009), 4.

American impulse to purge the world of this scourge most effectively using finite resources as resourcefully as possible. They ended up doing the exact opposite of this. The answer to the question of why and how the United States instead ended up squandering 58,220 U.S. troops and \$686 billion in the process of losing its first major war is therefore found in the American self-image as the global defender of the 'Free World.'

The rationalization for Vietnam policy—that Vietnam was at that time the frontier of the sacred battle against Communism and to abandon the freedom-loving people of South Vietnam was in effect to abandon the perimeter of the 'Free World'—was repeatedly invoked by virtually every major political and military leader of the era involved in the campaign. Ironically, the massive commitment that accompanied knotting the global lens of the Cold War so tightly with the effort in Vietnam may have been what doomed the war from the outset. Not only was Vietnam the wrong place to pick a fight with Communism given the ineptitude of the effete GVN and the strength and following of Hanoi, but it used resources in a way that meant the ends of anti-Communism and the means of military expenditure became inversely related in this anti-nationalist campaign.

To be sure, the military strategy in Vietnam failed. But to view the Vietnam War as a failure of military strategy obscures the historical context and the division within the American self-conception. To view this tragic event in American history, as many analyses do, dismissing the historical context obfuscates the larger picture with which policymakers made their calculations, practical or not. Just as the battlefields of the Cold War found seedlings in the

ashes of World War II, so too did the Vietnamese people transform their struggle to expel French colonialism into a struggle to expel American invasion. One of the most glaring oversights of war planning was the portrayal of the Vietnamese peasant as weak and incapable of mounting any meaningful resistance against a modern American army, even when acknowledging the French collapse at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. As far back as Yalta, President Roosevelt did not understand the devout history of Vietnamese nationalism, saying that "the Indochinese were people of small stature, like the Javanese and Burmese, and were not warlike," adding that "France had done nothing to improve the natives since she had the colony."²⁰⁹ While Roosevelt, still in the midst of the fervor over the wartime campaign of freeing the peoples of the Earth, retained more sympathy for those living under the yoke of colonialism than would his Cold Warrior successors, his was but part of a long series of underestimations of the historical sense of nationalism that would become among the U.S. military's fiercest obstacles during the Vietnam War. This nationalism transcended the 17th parallel.

After 1954, U.S. foreign policymakers thus "inherited" the problem of Vietnam, realizing that financial assistance alone would not prevent Communist victory. Meanwhile, to the Vietnamese people, North and South alike, the polar opposite view was taken: the average Vietnamese cared little about the international context, and much more about their ability to pursue their daily lives without interference from meddlers, whether the meddlers hailed from the other

²⁰⁹ Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945, Office of the Historian, United States Department of State, Bohlen Collection, Bohlen Minutes, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945Malta/d393>

side of Vietnam, a distant state in Saigon indifferent to their daily struggles, or an outside power intent on stemming the flow of Communism from Moscow or Beijing.

That the country divided into two, and subsequently fought what was in effect a civil war with a superpower taking one side, says much more about Vietnam than it does about the Cold War, as was true in every Cold War battlefield from Cuba to Uganda. This discrepancy between the views of the outside power and those of the local people, even in the virtually stateless areas of rural South Vietnam, precluded a workable partnership between the United States and the GVN, just as it has in various countries in which an outside power interferes in the internal affairs of another to advance its own objectives. Even where a 'puppet' state is emplaced, the outside power often finds it difficult to advance its own agenda, since locals have an agenda of their own. This is especially true when the local opposition can count on outside support, as the Soviets would later learn in Afghanistan.

U.S. foreign policymakers were correct about one thing: North Vietnam never would have accepted even a neutral South Vietnam, although if it had remained neutral war may have been delayed and less costly. What we now know about the domino theory, and what U.S. foreign policymakers failed to understand at the time, was the extent to which every state in the international system sought to advance its own interests above all else. Thousands of years of realist international-relations evidence, hundreds of years of state-centered international-relations evidence, and decades of modern realist IR scholarship

should have informed both American and Soviet understanding of the desired autonomy of even Lilliputians, but neither fully grasped this interminable social phenomenon. Although the concepts of state sovereignty and the national interest are well known fundamentals of realist theory, they seem to have been overlooked by strategy planners in Washington whose tunnel vision lumped all Communism into one category of evil. Communist countries around the world not only competed with each other along traditional balance-of-power lines, but also for influence in foreign insurgencies and access to markets and political systems throughout the developing world. Still, in the Cold War between the West and Communism, every country lost into enemy hands indeed fed the myth that the enemy had to be confronted or it would continue to expand.

One of the great ironies of the war was that the war itself became the stakes: there were very little stakes until the decision to commit was made, at which time victory became paramount because of the refusal to accept defeat. The 'investment trap' had the effect of increasing the cost of the war while increasing the scope of it *on that cost alone*. The strategic effect of the South being overrun by the North was nonzero, but it was neither significant in the larger picture of the international system. State Department Official Chester Cooper commented in the spring of 1965, just as the buildup was taking shape, "The 75,000 American troops in Vietnam were now a hostage. They represented too large a force to pull out without a tremendous loss of prestige, yet they were too small a combat force to take over the burden of the fighting from the clearly

ineffectual South Vietnamese forces."²¹⁰ Cooper, who also served on the NSC, adeptly illustrates the groupthink aspect of Vietnam thinking:

During the process I would frequently fall into a Walter Mitty-like fantasy. When my turn came, I would rise to my feet slowly, look around the room and then directly look at the President, and say very quietly and emphatically, 'Mr. President, gentlemen, I most definitely do *not* agree.' But I was removed from my trance when I heard the President's voice saying, 'Mr. Cooper, do you agree?' And out would come a 'Yes, Mr. President, I agree.'²¹¹

Yet it was not groupthink that led to the tragedy of Vietnam. There simply was no way to reconcile the refusal to 'lose' Vietnam and the acceptance that it was not worth mass American casualties.

A passage from President Nixon's memoir displays the higher level of abstraction that the war permanently fell victim to:

While the path to the Chinese Summit had unfolded relatively smoothly, the way to the Soviet Summit was strewn with pitfalls. During the first few months of 1972, our intelligence indicated that vast quantities of Soviet arms were pouring into North Vietnam. "I think that what offends me most about the Soviets is their utter lack of subtlety," Kissinger said when we learned this. "They're just trying to blacken China's eyes because of your trip. They want to increase their influence in Hanoi, but they don't see the danger of giving new toys to the North Vietnamese fanatics." On January 25, I wrote a letter to Brezhnev informing him of my speech that night and stating, "The Soviet Union should understand that the United States would have no choice but to react strongly to actions by the North Vietnamese which are designed to humiliate us. Such

²¹⁰ Chester Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcet, 1972), 344.

²¹¹ Cooper 1972, 223.

developments would be to no one's benefit and would serve to complicate the international situation."²¹²

Lost in this international-system level of analysis is the situation in Vietnam itself, which had of course been quite tenuous for some nine years. Nixon then comments on his personal FPDM process with regard to the U.S. national interest in Vietnam:

I pointed out that I had withdrawn over 500,000 troops from Vietnam. I had shown the greatest restraint when the North Vietnamese began their massive buildup in March, because I did not want anything to affect the summit. But when the North Vietnamese actually invaded South Vietnam, I had no choice but to react strongly. "The General Secretary remarked earlier that some people may have wondered whether the action I took last month was because of irritation," I said. "If that were the case, I would be a very dangerous man in the position I am in. But that is not the case. On the contrary, my decision was taken in cold objectivity. That is the way I always act, having in mind the consequences and the risks."²¹³

This "cold objectivity" with which he described his FPDM was quite a departure for the man who had confided in his Chief of Staff, H.R. Hadelman, "I call it the Madman Theory, Bob. I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that, 'for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about communism. We can't restrain him when he's angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button' and

²¹² Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978).

²¹³ Nixon 1978.

Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace."²¹⁴ Perhaps following Machiavelli's advice that it can sometimes be "a very wise thing to simulate madness," this was one of his confounding responses to the maddening stalemate of the war and the feeling of helplessness brought about by a strategic inability to achieve victory and a political-expedient inability to withdraw.²¹⁵

In the minds of U.S. foreign policymakers there clearly was some kind of connection between Vietnam and the broader Cold War, but what exactly was it? Kissinger coined a concept to describe the connection between the Soviet Union as the epicenter of the global Cold War and Vietnam, which he termed "linkage." Nixon had argued publicly in his 1968 campaign that that the Soviet Union was "the key" to getting some kind of settlement achieved in Vietnam. Kissinger, for his part, believed that the "proper incentives" were "not yet in place" for the Soviets to have enough of a stake in desiring an American withdrawal. As the war had drawn on, Hanoi had gained technical expertise, weaponry, resolve, and confidence, and therefore had become less reliant on its overseers in Beijing and Moscow; this all while continuing to receive arms and support from both, given that neither wanted to relinquish a foothold in the country to the other or allow Hanoi to slip completely from their grasp. Kissinger's biographer, Walter Isaacson, describes Kissinger's concept of "linkage" as a "variegation" of Nixon's focus on Moscow:

²¹⁴ H.R. Hadelman, *The Ends of Power* (Times Books, 1978).

²¹⁵ Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy* (University of Chicago Press, 1979), 305.

American policies toward the Soviet Union on various issues—trade, arms control, Vietnam, etc.—should be linked. In the crudest sense, this meant using trade on arms agreements as bargaining levers to extract Soviet help on Vietnam. But in a subtler sense, linkage was a way to assure that policy reflected reality. For example, it would be unrealistic to expect great progress in arms control at the same time as there was increased Soviet-American tension over regional wars, such as Vietnam. By acknowledging these linkages, Washington could create a framework of incentives and penalties that would, in theory, make it in Moscow's interest to be helpful on Vietnam. Linkage was a policy that played to Kissinger's intellectual strengths: it appealed to a person who could conjure up the connections and motivations that linked far-flung events. That type of thinking came naturally to someone who was both a brilliant conceptualizer and slightly conspiratorial in outlook, who could feel the connections the way a spider senses twitches in its web. Nixon was receptive to the idea of linkage, which Kissinger spelled out to a meeting of the National Security Council on the day of the inauguration.²¹⁶

FPE Conclusion

The Vietnam War is commonly conceived of as the classic U.S. foreign-policy blunder. The engagement failed to meet its objectives, fell victim to events and circumstances that could have been and were foreseen long before their unfortunate occurrence, cost an exorbitant sum in blood and treasure, and caused great harm to the national interest. This harm was most present in the prestige and morale of the nation, since one of the ironic elements of the blunder was the virtual irrelevance of the peripheral Southeast Asian nation of Vietnam to the national security of the United States, an irrelevance rendering the huge cost of the failed campaign grossly disproportionate to the importance of the policy's objectives. It is difficult to imagine U.S. foreign policymakers in 1964 being willing

²¹⁶ Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 166.

to expend even for victory the cost that was ultimately expended in defeat. In the end, the national refusal to allow Communism to spread, under the guise of preponderance, amounted to a FPDM process at the highest levels akin to placing a blindfold over the conductor of a train. Though this blunder-inducing FPDM is certainly not unique to the "American War" in Vietnam, the event serves as a historical admonition against hubris, dismissal of state differentiation, and the cognitive and institutional biases promulgated by ideological myopia.

In his later writings, McNamara attempted to mitigate some of his miscalculations by engaging in a series of intellectual discussions and publications with various scholars and policymakers, including a book partially based on conversations with North Vietnamese politicians and war planners and a documentary. Among his conclusions in *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* are that the war could not have been won along strictly military lines (hardly a controversial conclusion), but also that the war could have been much more limited in scope, perhaps even avoided altogether, if leaders in both Hanoi and Washington had taken a less aggressive stance.²¹⁷ This seems a superficial conclusion, given that simple conversations rarely resolve deep-seated international conflict. McNamara and his fellows delineate six principal lessons from the mistakes made in the Vietnam War on both sides: (1) understand the mind-set of your adversary; (2) communicate with your adversary at a high level; (3) in foreign policy, practice the democratic principles

²¹⁷ Robert S. McNamara, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), 373.

you preach (by bringing the public and Congress into the decision-making process); (4) apply power only in a context of multilateral decision-making (aside from territorial self-defense of the United States); (5) *acknowledge that some problems in international affairs have no solution, particularly no military solution* (emphasis mine); and (6) organize to apply and administer military power with intensity and thoroughness.²¹⁸

While the Vietnam War certainly was a national tragedy, and even a tragedy for the casualty-stricken yet victorious North Vietnamese and VC, the constant use of the war as *tragedy* by its policymaking overseers and their scholarly apologists obfuscates its understanding, characterization, and classification. While it can certainly be conceived as a national tragedy in that the American people were complicit and negligent in failing to scrutinize both the grand strategy of preponderance and the specific FPDM of their leaders, these leaders were not ordinary citizens. They held privileged information and intelligence and consistently lied amongst themselves and to the country about the motivations for the war, the methods used in the war, the state of the war, and the outlook for it to be brought to a successful conclusion. It is therefore imprudent of the scholar both on moral and academic grounds to examine it as "a tragedy without villains." Part II instead examines the war along the lines of the OPM model, the conceptual foundation of foreign-policy blunder in U.S. grand strategy expounded in Chapter 3.

²¹⁸ Jack Matlock, Jr., "Why Were We in Vietnam?" *The New York Times*, August 8, 1999.

Stanley Karnow writes in his epic history of the war, "History is an organic process, a continuity of related events, inexorable yet not inevitable. Leaders and the people who follow them make and support choices, but within the context of their experience and aspirations. The roots of the American intervention were planted and nurtured in what Professor Daniel Bell has called America's concept of its own 'exceptionalism.'"²¹⁹ This exceptionalism is a two-sided coin. William Fulbright describes this Manichean Americanism thusly: "The inconstancy of American foreign policy is not an accident but an expression of two distinct sides of the American character. Both are characterized by a kind of moralism, but one is the morality of decent instincts tempered by the knowledge of human imperfection and the other is the morality of absolute self-assurance fired by the crusading spirit."

While these two sides of the American character are fundamentally ideational in origin, the true understanding of their value, good, bad, and neutral, can only be assessed through their material manifestation in the physical world. An idea must find application to justify its relevance. At the center of that interchange is the foreign policymaker, whose trade defines the purpose and direction of the state in the process of colliding with other states. Distinctions between the words, desires, imperatives, alternatives, and actions of FPDM officials are sometimes in line and sometimes incredibly murky. So far, we have seen that they tend to get murkier the more they are attached to ideological pretense. While Part I has attempted to evaluate the *what* and *how* of the foreign

²¹⁹ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 11.

policy of the Vietnam War, Part II attempts to address in further detail the *how* and *why* of the war in order to contextualize it within the broader umbrella of U.S. grand strategy. Where FPE meets OPM is in the *bounded rationality of mission*.

Part II. OPM

Indicator I. U.S. estimation of capability to transform the politics of Vietnam

Every aspect of the Vietnam War can be analyzed along some kind of paradoxical lines, and Indicator I is no exception. For while the long line of evidence of U.S. foreign policymakers' private statements demonstrates that they almost invariably held great reservations about committing to 'Indochina,' they willingly did so. This was due in part to the contradiction that it was inconceivable that the U.S. military could be defeated (the potential war being instead a concern of what victory would cost in blood and treasure), and yet it was also unclear what could be gained politically in a peripheral country with only a shadow of a state in Saigon. This reluctance to commit to Vietnam is evident in hundreds of communication transcripts between presidential advisors. For example, as early as February 1965, before escalation took hold as policy, McGeorge Bundy wrote that "at its very best, the struggle in Vietnam will be long," and McNamara agreed that "this war is one of attrition and will be a long one." Dean Rusk had warned of "a long and tortuous prospect." War planners estimated victory would require 200,000 men and two to three years to resolve. Kennedy's advisors had told him in 1961 that he would need 250,000 men and to be prepared to use nuclear weapons to secure Laos. And yet, despite all of this

ominous forecasting, in the words of Richard Neustadt, "Johnson's advisors just could not conceive that the North Vietnamese would not come to terms once they saw the opposition they were likely to face and the punishment they might suffer." Indeed, Johnson Administration officials told Neustadt "their great mistake was to underestimate the North Vietnamese."²²⁰

Thus while the United States never lost a battle in Vietnam, U.S. foreign policymakers still managed to greatly underestimate the will and capability of the VC, but particularly the NVA. David Halberstam's conclusion should therefore not come as a surprise:

Our total military superiority was checked by their total political superiority. In effect this meant we could win any set-piece battle we wanted but the other side could easily replenish their battlefield losses whenever *they* wanted (emphasis in the original). What was even more depressing was the optimism I found among the top Americans in Saigon, which struck me as essentially self-deception. There was much heady talk implying that we were on the very edge of a final victory and that the other side was ready to crack. Invitations were even sent out that December by some high-ranking diplomats asking friends to come to the light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel Christmas party.²²¹

In comparing results to expectations, then, what transpired was the realization of foreign policymakers' fears without the realization of their hopes. They had accurately identified *some* of the potential problems in Vietnam, while greatly underestimating the cost required to achieve victory and the resolve and

²²⁰ Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 84.

²²¹ Halberstam 1993, 5.

capabilities of the enemy. Whether the American people would have been willing to pay the costs estimated by war planners is difficult to ascertain, but it became a moot point because the costs for both the American public and foreign policymakers became too great to sustain, and "Americanization" became "Vietnamization," which became the "decent interval" that ultimately led to total defeat with the capture of Saigon by North Vietnam and the forced evacuation of all Americans and a handful of fortunate Vietnamese from the capitol.

From a grand-strategic perspective, the context of the Cold War dictated the attitudes, preferences, and assumptions of the U.S. foreign policymakers involved in the decision-making, planning, execution, and evolution of the Vietnam War. To understand the foreign policy of the Cold War, we must first understand the attitude with which American leaders envisioned the place of their nation within it. The history of Vietnam is far from insignificant to the Vietnam War, but, as it unfortunately was for those leaders, it is beyond the scope of current expedience. Briefly, the French colonization of Vietnam began in 1664, when a group of French religious officials and a group of French businessmen united under the guises of the Society of French Missionaries and the East India Company, respectively. A history of violence between France and Vietnam ensued. After the arrest of a French priest in 1845, for example, the French Navy shelled Da Nang, killing hundreds of people, to which the Vietnamese reciprocated by confiscating French Catholic property and killing a number of

Jesuits and Vietnamese priests, some of whom they cut in half lengthwise.²²² Chinese mercenaries and French Legionnaires provided security to French authority and property, and insurgent resistance against them found safe haven in the area around Hanoi, the all-but-impenetrable highlands, and the malaria-infested swamps and marshlands of the South. In time, the Emperor's Council of Mandarin was supplanted with a system of oligarchic clientelism in which select Vietnamese, termed *suplétifs*, would acquiesce to French authority in exchange for a favorable position within the polity. Insurrection against French authority was suppressed with wanton incarceration, murder, and terrorism.

At the Potsdam conference, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China agreed to carve the country in half along the seventeenth parallel, with Chiang Kai-Shek and his nationalist Chinese Kuomintang army taking control of the North. By 1941, Ho Chi Minh began to formalize disparate bands of insurgents into an organized revolution under the banner of the Viet Minh (long form Vietnam Doc Lap Don Minh Hoi, or League for the Independence of Vietnam), an organization that held six of Vietnam's provinces around Hanoi by 1945. While Ho was an admirer of the United States and its founding documents, and had helped the Office of Strategic Services (the precursor to the CIA) search for downed American planes, there could be no cooperation between the United States and Communists once the Cold War began to materialize.

There were some American soldiers alongside the French in the 1950's, but assistance mostly took the form of nearly three billion dollars in financial aid

²²² Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (Morrow Press, 1990), 2.

to suppress the insurrection, along with four million dollars a year "as a retainer for Emperor Bao Dai, who squirreled away the lion's share in Swiss bank accounts and foreign real estate."²²³ By 1954, after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the United States had shouldered most of the cost of the French military struggle, even while denying the French a full military partner, in concert with its own struggle between pragmatism and idealism described in Chapter 3. In essence, the United States funded the status quo until the Viet Minh rendered it the status quo ante. Thus, just as the U.S. pursuit of preponderance began in full swing, the Vietnamese people were achieving their independence for the first time in three centuries (although not for the first time—imperial Chinese campaigns had been expelled many centuries earlier). The hands of time conspired to connect the United States with Vietnam on unfavorable terms.

From the outset, U.S. leaders assumed responsibility for Vietnam, and 'French Indochina' more broadly, without assuming full ownership of it. This tenuous tightrope held until 1964, when the war in Vietnam was "Americanized" and Vietnam policy fell off the advise-and-assist wagon. In terms of the nation of Vietnam and its purpose within the Cold War, policymakers recognized from an early stage that it was *not* a vital interest in and of itself, significant instead for the perception of who held momentum between the West and Communism. This affected U.S. policy in Vietnam in two ways. First, in considering it a peripheral power, it dealt little attention to the problem of what would happen if the U.S. military were not able to establish dominance there and bring hostilities to a

²²³ Valentine 1990, 4.

decisive conclusion in quick fashion. Second, it largely ignored the particularities of the Vietnamese people, transposing instead American values on what their motivations for support of or resistance to American involvement might be. Compounding these two inherent shortcomings was the issue that once it committed to defeating Communism in Vietnam, defeat there would be a defeat for the American way of life against the expansion of Communism, in accordance with broader Cold War objectives.

The general consensus is that President Johnson, the "man of little background and much uncertainty in foreign affairs" in the words of Hoopes, had very little interest in Vietnam and only acquiesced to foreign-policy hawks in order to develop his Great Society programs at home. His own public statements on Vietnam often followed the same language as those he used in his Great Society deliberations, promoting equality, freedom, and social justice. Vietnam was therefore not only in the periphery in terms of the national interest, but also in the periphery of the most important decision-making mind of the war. Escalation took hold under Johnson, even as his overwhelming political calling was the development of social justice at home. As described by Walter McDougall:

Vietnam was the first war in which the United States dispatched its military forces overseas not for the purpose of winning but just to buy time for the war to be won by civilian social programs. Had the U.S. military been assigned the job of winning, Kennedy would never have consented to the 1962 Laos accord, which left that "neutral" country open to North Vietnamese infiltration, and Johnson would not have restricted U.S. ground and air action

against the real enemy, which was North Vietnam. Instead, General William Westmoreland was obliged to dispense his forces and to waste his firepower in search-and-destroy operations against the National Liberation Front, which was in fact Hanoi's cat's-paw and rival for control of the South. As Colonel Harry Summers has shown, this approach ensured tactical victories but strategic defeat, since it failed to isolate the battlefield, neglected to attack the enemy's center of gravity in North Vietnam, and indeed assigned the offensive role not to the army and air force but to the CIA, USAID, and MACV pacification agencies "tasked" with building South Vietnam's economy and winning over its people. Vietnam was thus "the international equivalent of our domestic Great Society programs where we presumed that we knew what was best for the world in terms of social, political, and economic development and saw it as our duty to force the world into the American mold—to act not so much as the World's Policeman as the World's Nanny."²²⁴

While he overstates the apathetic attitude toward "winning" (nobody wants to lose, especially the most powerful state in the international system, and especially when that state has never lost a major war), McDougall's point that U.S. foreign policymakers never viewed Vietnam as central to U.S. grand strategy and never *desired* to fight a protracted war there is quite accurate. However, they *did* so; desire is all but irrelevant in the 'satisficing' world of statecraft. In President Johnson's typically rudimentary idiom, he cautioned himself against becoming embroiled in the world of foreign affairs when his true political *raison d'être* rested at home: "If I left the woman I really loved, the Great Society, in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the

²²⁴ Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 189.

world, then I would lose everything at home. All my programs. All my hopes and dreams."²²⁵

The 'imperatives' of the Cold War did indeed force themselves on U.S. foreign policymakers to a certain degree, and it is not entirely coincidental that Vietnam became their interlocutor. From 1954 onward, the United States assumed it could surmount the problems faced by the French, focusing instead on what the cost of keeping South Vietnam within the purview of the "Free World" would be. The American calculation was likely that Americans would succeed because they were American in the same way that the French thought they would succeed because they were French. Fredrik Lovegall examines this historical analogy in his exhaustive 2012 *Embers of War*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in History, writing of American "self delusion," "Somehow, American leaders for a long time convinced themselves that the remarkable similarities between the French experience and their own were not really there." There was, of course, a fundamental difference in the ideology of French colonialism and the ideology of American preponderance and anti-Communist sentiment. While Charles de Gaulle "spoke of the cohesion, the unbreakable bond, between metropolitan France and her overseas territories," President Roosevelt before his death planned for the postwar years "to promote Indochina's development toward independence under a degree of international supervision."²²⁶

²²⁵ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (Harper & Row, 1976), 270.

²²⁶ Fredrik Lovegall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012), 73.

The "Free French" movement was therefore a misnomer outside of France, just as American liberalism found itself undermined by the threat from Communism in the proxy battlefields of the Cold War. Lovegall identifies what he terms "The Long 1964" as the critical decision-making phase of mid-1963 to early 1965 that led to the "Americanization" of the war in Vietnam. He contends that as the paternal financial overseer of the French defeat in Vietnam, U.S. foreign policymakers believed their superior financial and military power would succeed where the French failed. The author also details the overreliance on conventional military power to resolve the conflict, even with full knowledge of the prior military prowess of the Viet Minh.

The question of how U.S. foreign policymakers estimated the capacity of the United States to transform the politics of Vietnam is a difficult one, because of the contradiction between their genuine concern a land war in the country would pose and their absolute conviction not to let Vietnam 'fall' into Communist hands. This Indicator has therefore focused on the international lens through which U.S. foreign policymakers viewed the 'problem' of Vietnam, absent which the nation would never have landed on U.S. radar. Every president from Roosevelt to Nixon and virtually every high-level FPDM official expressed both deep-seated reluctance to become heavily involved in an expansive ground-troop campaign and a relentless determination to prevent it from being overrun by Communist forces.

At the same time, there seemed both an undying faith in the invincibility of American military might even amid persistent concerns over the viability of

fighting a war against a determined enemy that could count on a substantial amount of support from the public and material and ideational support from multiple external sources. On the one hand, it was inconceivable that an army of peasants could defeat the U.S. military in open battle (and in fact they never really did). On the other hand, if the war were to be one of attrition, how many American lives would it be worth? U.S. foreign policymakers ultimately paid more in blood and treasure to lose than they ever would have to win. Based on that factor alone, the conclusion would follow that they clearly underestimated the cost that would be required to achieve victory, and, conversely, overestimated the return the investment of American intervention would produce.

Indicator II. The U.S. ability to control, bolster, and refine the host state of South Vietnam

James Carter argues that the failure of Vietnam was primarily a failure in statebuilding, a proposition finding ample evidence in its support. The GVN never lived up to its promises to its people; in fact, it made scarce attempt to promise anything to its people with any regularity, and provided even less. Carter describes the telescopic view of Vietnam from the American perspective: "Just as in Europe, any potential for postwar recovery depended on the restoration of substantial regional trade and commercial intercourse. Policy toward East Asia, then, had less to do with Vietnam and much more to do with larger, regional and global interests and concerns."²²⁷ Despite the fact that some scholars have

²²⁷ James Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

engaged in revisionist history in an attempt to portray the GVN in a more benevolent light, there never existed a viable state or an effective military in South Vietnam, except in Saigon and its immediate environs.²²⁸ Although it was by historical default anti-Communist, it certainly could hardly have claimed to have been democratic.

Carter contends that the failure of the Vietnam War largely resulted from the failure of "the state-building experiment and the related refusal to recognize that failure."²²⁹ The decision to commit troops en masse to Vietnam came long after the United States had (somewhat reluctantly) supported French colonialism and subsequently installed a friendly leader to head the new government in South Vietnam. The "invented" (in the words of Carter) state U.S. foreign policymakers purported to send troops to defend would not have passed common standards for a viable state. Corruption reigned supreme; the inheritance of French Catholic colonialism by default rendered its leaders nondemocratic in a nation of mostly Buddhists; it had virtually no presence outside of Saigon; outside of Saigon it relied primarily on the occasional ARVN incursions and mercenary peasant militias to maintain its authority. The ARVN itself was as corrupt as every other institution of the state and incapable of national coordination or operation.

An intervention to support any given regime is only as strong as the regime itself. This was nowhere more true than in Vietnam, where a handful of

²²⁸ For example, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* attempts to paint "a much more complex portrait of Diem."

²²⁹ Carter 2008, 13.

generals, coup plotters, self-ascribed members of the fading French aristocracy, opportunists, and other forms of ineffectual officials occupied the highest echelons of Saigon, typically surrounded by sycophants and immediate family and employing a regime based on entrenched parochial interests. Leaders in Washington were somewhat aware of this unfortunate state of affairs, but had readily become accustomed to dealing with similar figureheads as the Cold War battlefields of the developing world turned hot and the need for establishing ties with nefarious characters became ensconced in this theretofore unchartered form of global confrontation. When Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai chose to appoint Ngo Dinh Diem as the leader of the newly formed Republic of Vietnam, the reaction in Washington was one of both cautious optimism and concern. Although Diem's idealism made him more reliable than other candidates that might have been more easily corrupted, his egomania, penchant for obstinacy, and distrust of anyone with whom he was not intimately familiar made him incapable of effectively heading a legitimate state.²³⁰

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, his absence from Vietnam in the four years prior to his appointment, which no doubt clouded the legitimacy a more locally oriented leader would have enjoyed, also endeared him to a certain segment of American politicians, since he spent a significant amount of that time in the United States. (Although Ho Chi Minh had also spent many years outside the country, he enjoyed much wider support among Vietnamese people North

²³⁰ Immerman 2011, 127.

and South). His Catholic faith combined with his steadfast hatred of Communism to appeal to the increasing coalition of American leadership that valued anti-Communist credentials over leadership efficacy or democratic ambitions. As U.S. Ambassador to France Douglas Dillon assessed of Diem, "We are prepared to accept the seemingly ridiculous prospect that this Yogi-like mystic could assume the charge he is apparently about to undertake only because the standard set by his predecessors is so low."²³¹

That Washington eventually sent signals to Saigon power circles that it would tolerate the removal of Diem and his replacement with General Duong Van Minh, who himself lasted only three months in power, did little to offset the problem of leadership in South Vietnam. Never during the war was a leader in power who commanded the loyalty of a majority or even a plurality of the South Vietnamese population. This was one of a number of fatal flaws in the overall U.S. strategy. A dictator who can control the entirety of his territory and population can survive without its support, but a leader that can claim neither leaves himself open to insurgence from within and invasion from without. This was the first letter in the alphabet of obstacles in Vietnam. At this stage in the trajectory of the amateur state of South Vietnam, the next step was to marry the state with a field-worthy army. Once the French had acquiesced to its autonomy, "Lightning Joe" Collins of the U.S. Army had been dispatched to ensure its funding, maintenance, and functionality, but the ARVN never achieved its

²³¹ Foreign Relations of the United States series, 1952- 1954, Vol. 13, Indochina, Part 2: 1608-10, "Douglas Dillon to State Department," May 24, 1954, in Immerman 2011, 127.

potential because it was always hamstrung by the weakness of the state it worked for.

Diem countermanded, circumvented, or otherwise undermined whatever limited, procedural democratic institutions existed in the country, wielding the fledgling ARVN into "what could only be termed a police state."²³² With the United States funding two-thirds of the administrative costs of the GVN and the establishment of MACV under Lieutenant General Samuel Williams, the task of state-building lay firmly in the hands of U.S. military leaders, charged as they were to construct a new state by Washington's anti-Communist political establishment. As U.S. leaders began a program of land reform and social development in concert with America's liberal values, they meanwhile facilitated Diem's consolidation of power, which included the displacement (due to become an enormous issue in the war because of the reverence the Vietnamese people held for ancestral territory) of neutral Vietnamese into the controversial Strategic Hamlet Program and the incarceration of tens of thousands of suspected opposition citizens and execution of countless more.

Although the fishing-net strategy of rounding up suspected infiltrators caught more ordinary civilians than actual VC cadres or North Vietnamese sympathizers, the campaign was enough to attract the attention of leaders in Hanoi. In 1959, the Central Committee enacted Resolution 15, codifying the need to launch a military campaign against the South. Clandestine Group 559 began

²³² David L. Anderson, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953–1961* (Columbia University Press, 1991), 131.

to construct what would become the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In September of 1960, The Communist Party's Third National Congress formally approved a plan of insurrection against the South, and the subsequently formed National Liberation Front convened near the Cambodian border to organize the foundations of an insurgent army. Thus the seeds of the Vietnam War were planted. Upon leaving office, Eisenhower, who had neglected to directly intervene in support of the French in 1954, had nevertheless advised Kennedy that the need to preserve both Laos and Vietnam was absolute, up to and including armed intervention, which was to some degree already underway.²³³ Thus the two countries headed straight for each other on the same track.

While the United States viewed the South Vietnamese government as an indigenous regime it could wield as a medium for prosecuting the war against Communism, the government in Saigon viewed its security and police forces as a way of maintaining its disproportional share of the country's political power and material resources. The extent to which the Cold War was essentially a societal (ideational) struggle from the U.S. perspective, rather than being a standard matter of direct national-security concerns, is evident in the inherently civilian aspect of the "other war" to support and improve civil institutions. However, in both the pacification programs and other similar initiatives, the efforts sometimes did more harm than good. For example, in 1954, Michigan State University began a program to cooperate with the *Sûreté*, the police force of the GVN, to

²³³ Fred I. Greenstein and Richard H. Immerman, "What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy About Indochina? The Politics of Misperception," *Journal of American History* Vol. 79, No. 2 (1992), 573.

more effectively assert its authority. Although "this early attempt at bureaucratic streamlining was undermined by Diem, who kept the various police and security agencies spying on one another," it nonetheless had a substantial effect:

In 1954, in the professed belief that it ought to extend the "American Way" abroad, Michigan State University (MSU) offered to provide the government of Vietnam with a huge technical assistance program in four areas: public information, public administration, finance and economics, and police and security services. The contract was approved in early 1955, shortly after the National Security Council (NSC) had endorsed Diem, and over the next seven years MSU's Police Administration Division spent fifteen million dollars of U.S. taxpayer's money building up the GVN's internal security programs. In exchange for the lucrative contract, the Michigan State University Group (MSUG) became the vehicle through which the CIA secretly managed the South Vietnamese "special police."²³⁴

The MSUG arrived under the guise of the International Cooperation Administration, the precursor to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which would later head many of the civilian programs of the war including pacification. The *Sûreté* had been taught by the French how to form counterinsurgency programs that routinely employed mass incarceration, torture, and wholesale executions, but they were to be informed by the MSUG how to better identify and expose enemy sympathizers. Subsequently, in the late 1950's the campaign to quash anyone suspected of Communist sympathies officially incarcerated at least 50,000 people who were sent to concentration (branded "reeducation") camps, but the actual, unofficial number may have been

²³⁴ Valentine 1990.

twice that.²³⁵ Diem's miscalculation was that in persecuting nationalists he would be persecuting many people who were indifferent toward Communism. Anyone who had fought with the Viet Minh against the French was considered a potential Communist sympathizer, leading to a growing correlation between nationalism and anti-Saigon sentiment. Partly because of its brutality and indiscrimination and partly because of its scope, many people feared the GVN's crackdowns more than the Viet Cong, which at least pretended to be a voice of the people, even while waging its own terror campaigns. Typical of the GVN, internal security was headed by a family member, Diem's younger brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, who would later institute the highly controversial Strategic Hamlet Program.

The unfortunate state of affairs between Saigon, its internal security, and the ARVN created an environment of fear and suspicion in South Vietnam that left it ripe for insurrection:

Diem and his family believed that casualties suffered on offensive operations against the Viet Cong had been a major cause of the abortive coup d'état in November 1960. The Ngo Dinhs were convinced that the ARVN paratroop officers who had led the attempt had plotted with oppositionist politicians because they had been disgruntled over these losses. The Americans saw the ARVN as an army with which to defend South Vietnam. The Ngo Dinhs, on the other hand, saw the ARVN primarily as a force-in-being to safeguard their regime. The first priority of the Ngo Dinhs was the survival of their rule. To hazard the ARVN in a war was to hazard their regime, and that was unthinkable. Control of the army had enabled them to crush their non-Communist opponents in the young years of the regime in the mid-1950s. They thought that even if most of the South were ultimately lost to the Communists, an intact ARVN would enable them to hold on to Saigon and the

²³⁵ Sheehan 1988, 478.

other major population centers long enough for Washington to send the U.S. Army and the Marines to rescue them. They assumed that the United States, as the preeminent power in the world, could not afford to let their anti-Communist government fall to Hanoi's guerrillas. That their attitude could prove expensive in the blood of Vietnamese was another of those thoughts that did not occur to the Ngo Dinh. They were willing to accept casualties in defensive actions because they saw these as unavoidable to maintain the outpost system that was the substance of their rule in the countryside. Most casualties in defensive actions were also inflicted on the SDC militiamen who manned the posts. The Ngo Dinh were not troubled by the deaths of these peasants. The stability of the regime was not affected, and the lives of the militiamen were cheap. They could be replaced by other peasant hirelings at the equivalent of \$10 a month in Saigon piasters.²³⁶

What the United States never understood was the pervasive sense of nationalism that transcended the artificially transposed division between North and South. The fact that many South Vietnamese neither sympathized with the Communist cause nor desired to be ruled by Hanoi could never completely negate the nationalist sentiment that ultimately propelled many Vietnamese toward confrontation with the foreign occupiers. The war to expel the French guaranteed Ho Chi Minh's place as a revered hero in modern Vietnamese history, and rendered Diem, who sat on the sidelines, an irrelevant figure to whom loyalty would have to be purchased or otherwise incentivized. Absent that political purchasing power, his regime, like other regimes in Saigon during the American involvement there, could never rely on any meaningful level popular support. This already weak support was further undermined by the kleptocratic, clientelistic governance characteristic of Saigon in general, as well as its

²³⁶ Sheehan 1988, 486.

wholesale repression against a large percentage of its population. The fundamental problem of statebuilding in Vietnam is summed up by William Hammond:

U.S. policy sought to strengthen South Vietnam by fostering the confidence and self-reliance of the country's leaders, an end easily frustrated if Americans began assuming functions proper to South Vietnamese officialdom. The president of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was also sensitive to any infringement on his nation's prerogatives. American policy makers believed that he would resent any attempt by American diplomats to become the source of news for South Vietnam and that he might even retaliate by curtailing the flow of information between his government and the U.S. embassy, a development almost certain to hamper the effort against the Communist insurgency in the countryside.²³⁷

In other words, the needs of the United States and those of the GVN were not aligned, and therefore even the perfect implementation of every initiative would never have engendered any lasting success for the United States, because even when means were aligned they were in advance of different ends. Richard Immerman describes the precarious situation under Diem during the advisory period, as well as the opportunity sensed by Hanoi to foment civil disobedience:

Beginning in 1959, however, Vietnam began its reascent to the top of the national security agenda. On the one hand, with land reform stalled and Diem's "rule by terror" producing the incarceration of tens of thousands of villagers in "reeducation centers" (an unspecified number were guillotined), unrest throughout rural South Vietnam intensified, as did sympathy for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North. On the other hand, Diem's internal security

²³⁷ William Hammond, *Public Affairs, the Military, and the Media, 1962-1968* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs, 1988), 11.

machine, although not particular about whom it caught its dragnet, took a toll on the Vietminh (referred to in Washington after 1959 as the "Vietcong"). Le Duan, who headed the Vietminh's Central Office for South Vietnam beseeched Hanoi for help. At the same time, in light of obvious signs that the unification of Vietnam would not come about through elections, momentum grew within North Vietnam's Communist Politburo to resume armed conflict. Le Duan's election as party secretary tipped the balance in this direction. At its meeting in Hanoi in January 1959, the Central Committee adopted Resolution No. 15. Although Resolution No. 15 emphasized the continued importance of political action, it stipulated that final victory would be achieved only through protracted and heroic struggle. It also proclaimed the need to create and coordinate insurgent forces in the South. Within months, southern commanders began to build a revolutionary base in Vietnam's central highlands; the clandestine Group 559 began to construct what would become the Ho Chi Minh Trail through the Laotian mountains adjacent to Vietnam; and the Vietminh initiated "spontaneous uprisings" from central Vietnam extending southward to the Mekong Delta.²³⁸

Thus the strategic conditions for war, and therefore the possibility of U.S. escalation, were made riper by the tactical success of Diem rounding up opponents, because the sweeps made more enemies than they captured at home and stiffened the resolve of Hanoi to support insurrection from the North. The effort to confront that enemy is discussed in the next section.

Indicator III. The U.S. ability to limit the power and influence of North Vietnam and the VC

Dale Andrade and James Willbanks describe the numbers of the fundamental strategic problem the enemy presented American forces along with their South Vietnamese counterparts:

²³⁸ Immerman 2011, 133.

In Vietnam, the U.S. military faced arguably the most complex, effective, lethal insurgency in history. The enemy was no rag-tag band lurking in the jungle, but rather a combination of guerrillas, political cadre, and modern main-force units capable of standing toe to toe with the U.S. military. Any one of these would have been significant, but in combination they presented a formidable threat. When U.S. ground forces intervened in South Vietnam in 1965, estimates of enemy guerrilla and Communist Party front strength stood at more than 300,000. In addition, Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese main forces numbered almost 230,000—and that number grew to 685,000 by the time of the Communist victory in 1975. These main forces were organized into regiments and divisions, and between 1965 and 1968 the enemy emphasized main-force war rather than insurgency. During the war the Communists launched three conventional offensives: the 1968 Tet Offensive, the 1972 Easter Offensive, and the final offensive in 1975. All were major campaigns by any standard. Clearly, the insurgency and the enemy main forces had to be dealt with simultaneously... Westmoreland's strategy of chasing the enemy and forcing him to fight or run (also known as search and destroy) worked in the sense that it saved South Vietnam from immediate defeat, pushed the enemy main forces from the populated areas, and temporarily took the initiative away from the Communists. South Vietnam was safe in the short term, and Communist histories make clear that the intervention by U.S. troops was a severe blow to their plans. In the end, however, there were not enough U.S. troops to do much more than produce a stalemate. The Communists continued to infiltrate main-force units from neighboring Laos and Cambodia, and they split their forces into smaller bands that could avoid combat if the battlefield situation was not in their favor.²³⁹

The war was essentially broken in half between these search-and-destroy missions that pursued and engaged the enemy and what was known as pacification, or the effort to protect the population in order to prevent them from siding with the enemy, defined by Kissinger as "the extension of the control of

²³⁹ Dale Andrade and James Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future," *Military Review* Vol. 86 No. 2 (March/April 2006), 9.

Saigon into the countryside."²⁴⁰ Part I gave an overview of the former; this section discusses the latter. The term "pacification" was somewhat of a catchall phrase that basically signified support to the people of South Vietnam who were not involved in VC activity. The CIA, USAID, the U.S. Information Service, and the U.S. Department of State were the most relevant bureaucratic arms of the U.S. government to implement pacification, in addition to the military. The strategy to find and kill the enemy, the traditional and more comfortable role of the military, took precedent in the escalation years between 1964-1967. The "other war" of pacification to "win the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people had been existent for many years prior to 1967, but had never received full institutional attention until that year.

From 1964-1967, pacification intelligence suffered from a lack of command. This changed in 1967 with the creation of the Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation Program (ICEX), which was renamed Phoenix in December of the same year. On May 9, 1967, National Security Action Memorandum 362, "Responsibility for U.S. Role in Pacification," established the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) command structure within the military. Prior to 1967, "stability operations were entirely uncoordinated with different civilian agencies all running separate operations. While they were theoretically coordinating with the military through the U.S.

²⁴⁰ Henry Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs* (January 1969), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1969-01-01/viet-nam-negotiations>

Embassy, this was not the reality."²⁴¹ McNamara had initially attempted to form an office within MACV, but the military never granted the Office of Civil Operations access and assistance, which eventually led to its disbanding and the establishment of CORDS. Vietnam was perhaps the first war in history that combined military, civilian, and intelligence agencies into a concerted effort to control, subdue, and appeal to a foreign population to such an extent.

As Ambassador and head of CORDS, Robert Komer was one of the central figures of the pacification program for much of the war. His comprehensive, thorough, and veritable reports throughout the war reveal as much about the strategic-tactical gap of the Vietnam War as virtually any other series of reports. On May 7, 1970, he and his team published (in classified format) the 259-page "first comprehensive systematic treatment of the pacification program:"

Consideration of all U.S. support for pacification under CORDS single management in May 1967 (to be followed by the parallel GVN consolidation over the next few years) inaugurated the first really comprehensive countrywide pacification effort on a scale commensurate with the needs of the highly atypical Vietnam War. This is not to denigrate prior efforts, especially the Strategic Hamlet Program or the RD Program which got going really in 1966. But none of them were on a large enough scale to have the necessary impact, and many promising small-scale programs were diffuse among competing agencies. Most of all, neither the U.S. nor GVN military were really backing pacification. It was regarded by them as essentially a civilian problem, to be handled by the remnant GVN civil ministries backed by the U.S. Embassy, AID, and CIA—whereas the military were chiefly focused on the "main force war."

²⁴¹ Jeremy Patrick White, "Civil Affairs in Vietnam," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/090130_vietnam_study.pdf

Yet most of the resources in country were controlled by the military (money, manpower, supplies, transport, the works). Without the military, territorial security in the countryside could not be expanded rapidly enough to exploit the anti-main force successes. Our solution to this problem was to saddle the military with pacification responsibility, and to create a unified civil-military management on the U.S. side under MACV. Reorganizing the Vietnamese was harder, but a major step toward it at end-1967 was the RVNAF reorganization, which helped put the RF/PF on the map as the essential territorial security component. Such a major restructuring and buildup took time, however; results down at the critical hamlet level were unimpressive in 1967.²⁴²

This excerpt illustrates the organizational deficiencies inherent in the pacification program, in addition to the overall results being "unimpressive." Komer's push to integrate civilian (pacification) and military organizational structure, given that nothing done outside of the military received the support, resources, or command that it needed, made logical sense. However, implementation came too late: by the time the unity of command in pacification programs were fully implemented, it was 1968, the year that Tet turned the tide of public opinion against the war. Furthermore, this unification met the inevitable institutional resistance such bureaucratic mergers always do. Major General Joseph McChristian, the MACV J2 commander from 1965-1967, predictably voiced concerns over the creation of ICEX:

On my last day in Vietnam, I became aware that a new plan for attacking the Viet Cong infrastructure was to be implemented. It was to be called the Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation for Attack Against the Infrastructure (ICEX) Program. Ambassador

²⁴² Robert Komer, "Organization and Management of the 'New Model' Pacification Program—1966-1969," May 7, 1970, Rand Limited Document, 52, <http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/documents/2006/D20104.pdf>

Robert W. Komer was to head the program as a deputy to the MACV commander. To put it mildly, I was amazed and dismayed. I called on Mr. Komer and General Westmoreland that last day and pointed out that I had not known about the program but that I was confident that the combined military intelligence system was out front leading the way against the infrastructure. I suggested that coordination was in order.²⁴³

McChristian was expressing the same dismay at the tactical level that Hoopes was at the strategic level of the infighting over turf that the bureaucratic discombobulation of the U.S. national-security infrastructure innately contained. On his *last* day in Vietnam, McChristian not only laments the integration of the pacification institutions, but also suggests that a new form of coordination is in order. In that statement lay the circular impasse of implementation that was charged with winning an already impossible war. It is not uncommon for an outgoing military commander to suggest significant reforms; this suggestion comes too late, and the new face that replaces the old commander comes in with his own agenda. When Hoopes says "our intervention in 1965 was misconceived, that viewed through cold, clear eyes it could not be justified on the grounds that a vital national interest was at stake," he does so in part because of the convolution of the U.S. foreign-policy 'apparatus,' as it is sometimes referred to in the literature, or institutional infrastructure. At every level, like a three-dimensional game of telephone, turf wars and regulatory complications muddle communication, policy creation and facilitation, and operationalization vertically in

²⁴³ Rosenau and Long 2009, 14.

terms of the chain of command and horizontally in terms of rank-wide implementation.²⁴⁴

Furthermore, every one of the hundreds of documents reviewed for this chapter produced by the United States, even those that specifically target the inefficiencies in the U.S. foreign-policy system, invariably characterize the same problem on the host government side as being far worse. Not a single instance was found in which the South Vietnamese government, bureaucracy, army, or leadership structure was estimated to be even marginally more effective or efficient than the American institutions partnering with them. Even accounting for national bias, these assessments appear to be genuine. This means that a highly-complex Vietnam War was being waged by the American military and its fellow U.S. institutions in an ineffective, inefficient manner to prop up a South Vietnamese government that was morally and institutionally bankrupt. Which in turn begs the question, who was the protagonist in the conflict? Who was fighting for what?

In South Vietnam the confusion over who was targeting whom for what reason knew no bounds and extended to every facet of the war. This confusion was perhaps no more evident in any program than that of Phoenix. Pacification had a darker side as well, which the name "Phoenix" would gain infamy for. The few dozen counterterror teams at the disposal of the CIA from 1964-1967

²⁴⁴ There are so many diagrams, charts, graphs, illustrations, and descriptions of the chains of command of different military and intelligence groupings, government agencies, programs, projects, and descriptions that they seem to defy quantification. There is not room here to offer even a summary of these various bureaucratic organizational clusters; suffice it to say that there are many.

morphed into a command that had a Phoenix advisor in all 44 provinces by the middle of 1968, with over 700 advisors in all.²⁴⁵ The Phoenix program was one of the key operational fulcra of the battle between South Vietnam and the VCI. Because there are too many battles of the war to document here, and because they rarely amounted to any lasting shift in the dynamics of the conflict, the Phoenix Program is examined because of the many metaphors between itself and the conflict overall. Douglas Valentine summarizes its organizational objectives:

Developed in 1967 by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Phoenix combined existing counterinsurgency programs in a concerted effort to "neutralize" the Vietcong Infrastructure (VCI). The euphemism "neutralize" means to kill, capture, or make to defect. The word "infrastructure" refers to those civilians suspected of supporting North Vietnamese and Vietcong soldiers... Under Phoenix, or Phun Hoang, as it was called by the Vietnamese, due process was totally nonexistent. South Vietnamese civilians whose names appeared on blacklists could be kidnapped, tortured, detained for two years without trial, or even murdered, simply on the word of an anonymous informer. At its height Phoenix managers imposed a quota of eighteen hundred neutralizations per month on the people running the program in the field, opening up the program to abuses by corrupt security officers, policemen, politicians, and racketeers, all of whom extorted innocent civilians as well as VCI. Legendary CIA officer Lucien Conein described Phoenix as "A very good blackmail scheme for the central government. 'If you don't want what I want, you're VC.'"²⁴⁶

Elton Manzione describes a mission he went on as a twenty-year-old SEAL in Vietnam in 1964 that illustrates the difficulty in targeting the right people. Ground

²⁴⁵ Andrade and Willbanks 2006, 14.

²⁴⁶ Valentine 1990.

forces, of course, and especially Special Forces, were supposedly the 'surgical' instrument with which to target VCI in lieu of the more clumsy missions utilizing conventional battalions backed by artillery and aerial bombing, but even when these most-surgical missions were executed with great care and skill it was still a highly complex process to kill the right people:

I go into the hooch, and I spot my person. Well, somebody stirs in the next bed. I'm carrying my commando knife, and one of the things we learned is how to kill somebody instantly with it. So I put my hand over her mouth and come up under the second rib, go through her heart, give it a flick; it snaps the spinal cord. Not thinking! Because I think 'Hey!' Then I hear the explosion go off and I know the gun is out. Somebody else in the corner starts to stir, so I pull out the sidearm and put it against her head and shoot her. She's dead. Of course, by this time the whole village is awake. I go out, waiting for Swetz to come, because the gun's been blown. People are kind of wandering around the hooch, and there were two young girls. I'd killed the wrong people.²⁴⁷

This account demonstrates the difficulties in fighting a guerilla war. This failed mission was after days of planning and employed the most highly trained soldiers in the U.S. arsenal. To avoid the use of guerilla tactics would concede the night, the countryside, and the initiative to the enemy who is willing to use those tactics, and yet to utilize them is to straddle the line between a time-honored military code and terrorism. In that sense, counterterrorism is in itself a form of terrorism, and these counterterror missions were seen as necessary to take the fight to the enemy and deny it political control of the villages. While Special Forces teams would take great care in intelligence gathering, mission

²⁴⁷ Valentine 1990, iv.

planning, and coordination with the South Vietnamese counterparts who usually accompanied these patrols, it was not possible to guarantee an attack on the right people because it was rarely clear who the right people were, and even when it was, it was still possible to target the wrong people. This was of course a different situation when the enemy chose to fight pitched battles, but when it did, its purpose was to inflict casualties on the American army rather than 'win' in traditional military terms.

In this way, the North would bleed the Americans out of their resolve to keep fighting a war that for them the outcome was in some ways irrelevant; it certainly was not a war of survival, and, ironically, the main motivation became the determination not to lose resolve for an otherwise irrelevant war. To add yet another layer to the irony from the Vietnamese perspective, Phoenix "was not a mechanism to end the war quickly, but a means to extend it indefinitely, with a minimum of American casualties" in order to "show success," according to one NVA commander.²⁴⁸ While the United States refused to consider "losing" Vietnam a possibility until it became clear that tens or even hundreds of thousands of American soldiers would have to perish, the enemy would not consider losing its own country for any price—this was the miscalculation to which Johnson's advisors referred in their interviews with Richard Neustadt. While the NVA and VC had only victory or death as possible outcomes, the Americans could leave whenever they wanted with only the shame of losing soldiers for nothing and the wounded pride of being defeated by supposedly

²⁴⁸ Valentine 1990, 50.

inferior forces. Therefore, to "show success" became paramount, which led to the 'body count' metric, which in turn fueled failure for the reasons discussed in Part I. And at the same time, the United States never stopped trying to "win the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people, even while reigning destruction upon them. This tactical paradox reflected the grand-strategic paradox of the 'liberal leviathan' pursuing preponderance.

Like virtually all programs in the Vietnam War, Phoenix was indeed successful at its tactical prowess; like virtually all other programs it failed strategically. The word "Phoenix" eventually became the most notorious word associated with the Vietnam War. Not My Lai, nor Rolling Thunder, nor Khe Sanh, nor Tet nor Hue conjure up the same emotions in the popular literature, even if those names were far more significant to the soldiers who fought there. A fair assessment would be to say that "Phoenix was neither the devastatingly effective program its supporters have sometimes claimed nor the merciless assassination campaign that its detractors have alleged," in the words of a RAND study to evaluate its purpose and effectiveness.²⁴⁹ The study was commissioned in 2009 by the Office of the Secretary of Defense in order to learn counterinsurgency lessons that could be applied to contemporary counterinsurgencies in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, although the authors assert:

²⁴⁹ Rosenau and Long 2009, 23.

Some analysts conclude that the lack of an insurgent shadow government in Iraq and Afghanistan makes a Phoenix-style anti-infrastructure program in those countries both unnecessary and unworkable. But insurgent documents captured in Al-Anbar—at one point, Iraq's most violent region—describe elaborate underground bureaucratic structures with functional elements devoted to intelligence and counterintelligence, media and propaganda, finances, recruitment, and religious affairs. The insurgencies in Afghanistan may not be as well organized or as highly bureaucratized, but they certainly have an apparatus for financing, intelligence, and recruitment that could be targeted in a selective fashion... Effective counterinsurgency today, as in Vietnam, calls for much more than defeating guerillas on the battlefield: It requires the ability to understand, map, and disrupt the insurgent infrastructure.²⁵⁰

The study aptly summarizes of the Phoenix program and Vietnam, "The Vietnam War must be considered an American failure," but "The pacification program in general, and the Phoenix Program in particular, met with success." In "Countering Global Insurgency," one of the most oft-cited counterinsurgency papers, one-time advisor to General David Petraeus David Kilcullen in fact called for a "global Phoenix program" to head the tip of the spear of the military-intelligence war against what Kilcullen labels the "global Islamist insurgency," citing Phoenix as "unfairly maligned (but highly effective)."²⁵¹ Although this dissertation does not compare the events of the three case studies per se, it does intend to compare the motivations for and understanding of their meta-event significance, and therefore these types of reports offer relevant evidence of how policymakers, military leaders, and scholars define and address national-

²⁵⁰ Rosenau and Long 2009, 25.

²⁵¹ David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Small Wars Journal*, November 30, 2004, smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kilcullen.pdf

security problems, which is a central inquiry of this research. This topic is therefore reviewed in further detail in Chapter 6, the case study on the Iraq War.

In terms of the wider pacification program, Komer later found it to be insufficient in the face of a determined enemy and a populace at best suspicious of the Saigon government and the foreigners supporting it:

Why has a cumulatively enormous U.S. contribution—on top of South Vietnam's own great effort—had such limited impact for so long? Why, almost regardless of the ultimate outcome, has U.S. intervention entailed such disproportional costs and tragic side effects? The reasons are many, complex, and interrelated. They include the unique and unfamiliar—at least in U.S. experience—conflict environment in which we became enmeshed. Particularly contrasting was the sharp contrast between the adversary we faced and the ally we were supporting—a highly motivated and ideologically disciplined regime in Hanoi and revolutionary Viet Cong apparatus versus a weak, half-formed, traditionalist regime in Saigon. We repeatedly misjudged the enemy, especially in his ability to frustrate our aims by his tactics and to counterescalate at every stage—right up to 1972. Another constraint was implicit in the incremental nature of our response, doing only what we believed minimally necessary at each stage.²⁵²

The "weak, half-formed, traditionalist regime in Saigon" could not contain the "highly motivated and ideologically disciplined regime in Hanoi" when faced with the incessant prospect of its ability to "counter-escalate." Komer tried his best, but could not overcome the logical fallacy of the overall effort. In 1966, he had authored a paper entitled "Giving a New Thrust to Pacification: Analysis, Concept, and Management," in which he had specified three areas to focus on:

²⁵² Robert Komer, "Bureaucracy Does its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam," RAND, August 1972, v, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R967.html>

security (protecting the populace), anti-VCI operations (targeting the enemy), and enlarging and streamlining the larger pacification campaign. He succeeded somewhat in the third effort; the effect, however, could never mitigate the shortcomings of the first two, for the same reasons conventional military operations failed. The population-protection programs that succeeded the progenitor of the Strategic Hamlet Program did achieve some success in some areas: A full 93 percent of South Vietnamese were judged to live in "relatively secure" villages, an annual increase of almost 20 percent from the middle of 1968, the year marred by the Tet Offensive (President Johnson had trumpeted the percentages of "secure villages" in his January 17, 1968 State of the Union Address). However, these were often artificially constructed villages that had removed the steadfastly ancestral-oriented Vietnamese from their homelands, widening the chasm between the war effort and the population and doing little to overcome the parochialism innate in Vietnamese culture.

In November of 1967, Westmoreland gave a series of talks in Washington in which he specified "indicators" of military success, predicting that a drawdown of the successful campaign could be initiated in earnest in late 1968. But in the January 1969 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Kissinger wrote that the Tet Offensive "overthrew the assumptions of the American strategy."²⁵³ By then, U.S. foreign policymakers knew that the fears they had held all along about a land war of attrition with a guerilla enemy in Asia had materialized. President Johnson chose

²⁵³ Kissinger 1969.

not seek reelection, and Richard Nixon was elected president, ushering in the era of "Vietnamization."

Confederate General George Pickett, who etched his name into history books by way of his infamous failed 'Pickett's Charge' through heavy Union fire at the battle of Gettysburg, was once asked how the Confederacy had failed to achieve victory. His reply, "I kinda think the Yankees had a little something to do with it," serves as a reminder that 'the enemy has a vote' in every battle of every war.²⁵⁴ Although American historians tend to see the history of the Vietnam War through the lens of the U.S. military and U.S. policymakers, the tenacity and fervent nationalism of the Vietnamese played a decisive role in the conflict, and tilted the balance in favor of NVA and VC forces. The war strategy in Vietnam has received more attention than it deserves, simply because U.S. objectives could not have been met by military metrics alone. The obsession over the "body count," or the drive to kill as many of the enemy as possible, may have created more of the enemy that it was able to kill. Figures 3 and 4 show U.S. troop strength in Vietnam and PAVN (NVA) infiltration of the South on an annual basis. They illustrate that the presence of the U.S. military had virtually no effect on Hanoi's ability to foment insurgency with their own forces (U.S. forces were more successful, at particular periods in the war, at targeting VC):²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Kerry Hotaling, *The Yankees Had Something To Do With It* (Christopher Matthews Press, 2015).

²⁵⁵ Associated Press, <http://www.ap.org/explore/vietnam-the-real-war/>

Figure 3: U.S. troops in Vietnam

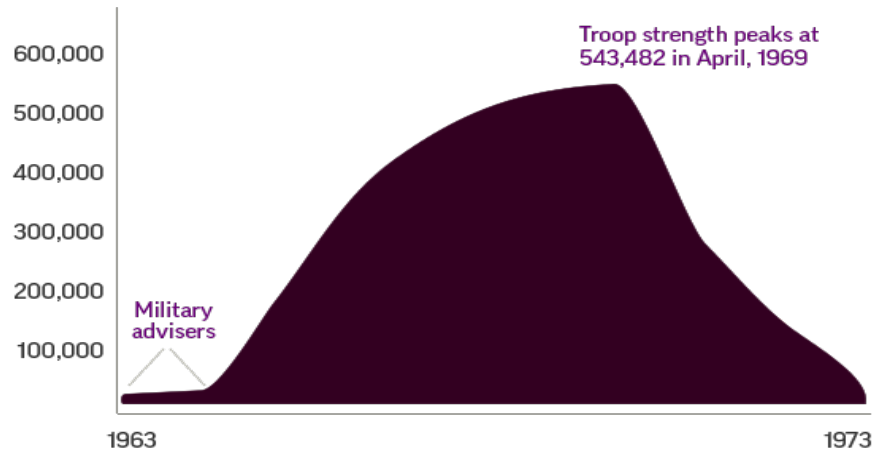
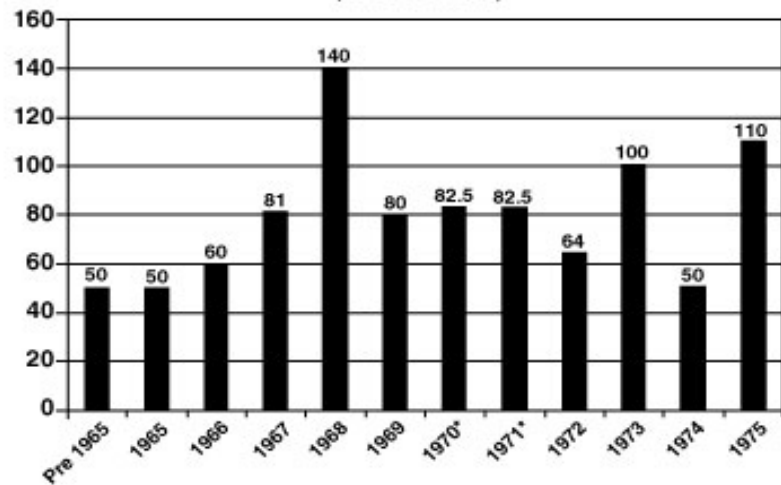


Figure 4: PAVN infiltration of the South: 1965 - 1975 (in thousands)



Indicator IV. Rationalization and operational learning

The Vietnam War is in many ways a conundrum for the IR scholar because the obstacles were so clear and inherent in the strategy that statesman and citizen alike almost had to construct an alternative reality to maintain faith in

it. (But while the statesman, or his predecessors, must deal with the policy even after failure, the citizen can turn away and simply vote differently). This alternative reality was heavily influenced by the ideology-driven grand strategy of preponderance and its Cold War progeny, Containment. On one hand, military and political leaders lied to themselves, each other, and the country at every juncture about the prospects for success and the state of the war to date. On the other hand, the public was not prepared to accept the reality that in spite of its substantial power endowment, the United States could not be omnipotent. Statesman and citizen alike began to abandon the war in theory after 1968; the statesman was still faced with picking up the foreign-policy pieces until a 'decent interval' had come and gone and the war was lost completely.

In some ways, there in fact was a new reality that even "the best and the brightest" failed to develop a viable prescription for. Only once before in history, in Korea, had a state engaged in such a bloody war while storing its most powerful weapons on the sideline—in this case, nuclear weapons. While the contemplation of releasing the thermonuclear genie from the bottle was a potentiality that terrified every sane individual, especially with the advent of MAD (mutually assured destruction), it simultaneously seemed unthinkable to send young men into battle hamstrung. But the use of nuclear weapons would have made little difference against a guerilla enemy. The United States could have eliminated North Vietnam from the map as it could have North Korea, but would have risked Soviet or Chinese nuclear retaliation. Furthermore, the total bombing over North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, which still constitutes

the most extensive aerial bombing campaign in history, far exceeded the destruction a few nuclear weapons would have created.

The real hamstringing, many in the military felt, was the delicate balancing act of trying to avoid confrontation with the Soviets, engender support of the South Vietnamese populace, and maintain support for the war at home while at the same time trying to fight and win a brutal guerilla war, in difficult terrain, in which identifying the enemy was a virtually insurmountable quandary. This is the 'holy trinity' that Summers discusses in his invocation of Clausewitz, with the compounding distinction that instead of only having to juggle the people, the government, and the military of the home state, U.S. foreign policymakers also had to deal with the people, government, and military of the state in which the United States intervened. This is the basic logical fallacy of regime-toppling and nation-building: if the state requires intervention, in what way is it worth supporting?

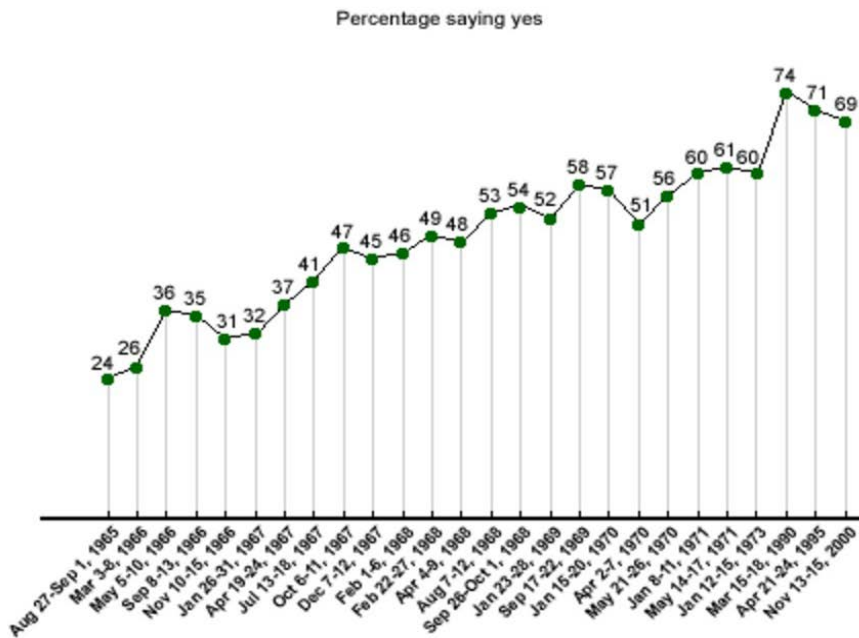
Among the untold ironies of this befuddling reality therefore emerged an environment in which the duplicity circulated by policymakers often transcended even their own knowledge of the 'situation' in Vietnam. They knew they were lying, but they did not always know the full truth, in part because, on multiple levels, the reality of it did not fit the reality of the American self-image—specifically, in strategic terms, the possibility of failure and the concession to Communist expansion. On a tactical level, policymakers could never reconcile the fact that the guerillas and NVA regulars could not defeat the Americans in battle with the fact that the Americans seemed to be losing the war, nor that this

intrinsically *nationalist* struggle they were facing transcended the immediate medium of Communism and therefore ensured that the American values the United States was supposedly upholding were in fact some of the same values the enemy fought for. That the VC sometimes employed terrorist tactics mattered little in this equation, given the totalitarian destruction U.S. fighter bombers reigned down from the air, the hundreds of thousands of civilians caught in the crossfire between the two opposing armies, and the self-serving impotence of Saigon. And while the detestable blight of Communism was easy enough to imagine a foe, this was less than half of the Communist-nationalist struggle in Vietnamese eyes North and South.

For the United States there were many firsts in this most perplexing of conflicts: the first loss of a major war; the first time American citizens could watch the war from their living rooms; the first time Americans were fundamentally divided about the moral implications of the war to such an extent; the first time the 'body count' became the almost singular metric by which to judge success. These newfound puzzles were reflected in public opinion polls. In November 1965, 29% of Americans thought the war would end in victory, 30% thought it would end in stalemate or compromise, and 10% expected a prolonged conflict. By May 1966, 54% expected a stalemate or compromise, and by February 1968, that figure grew to 61%. In May of 1967, the public was exactly divided about whether they knew what the United States was fighting for in Vietnam, at 48%

each.²⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, as shown in Figure 5 from Gallup, the percentage of those believing it was a "mistake" to escalate in Vietnam grew as casualties mounted (why this figure dropped 5% between 1990 and 2000 would be a subject for another dissertation):²⁵⁷

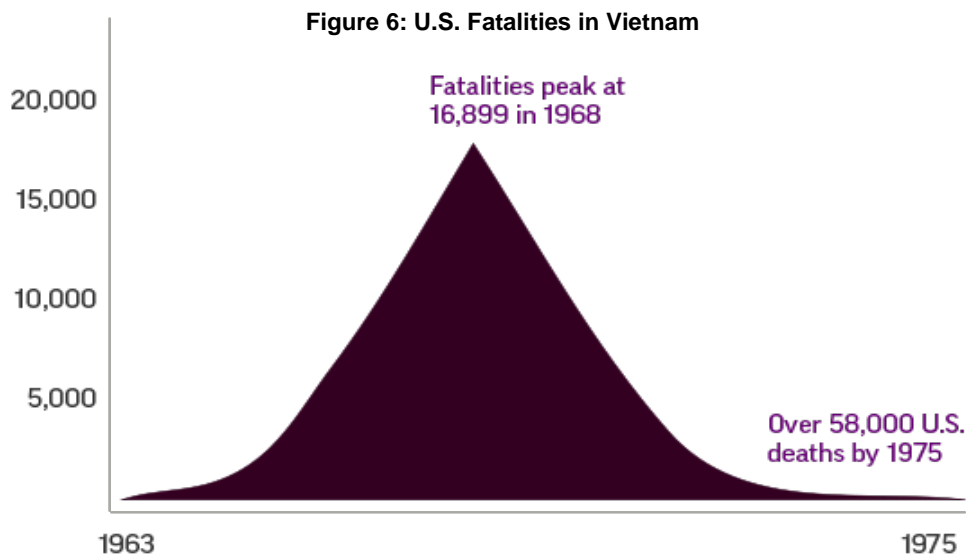
Figure 5: Gallup poll, "Was it a mistake sending troops to Vietnam?"



²⁵⁶ Eric Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996), 26.

²⁵⁷ Joseph Carroll, "The Iraq-Vietnam Comparison," Gallup, June 15, 2004, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/11998/iraqvietnam-comparison.aspx>

Figure 6 shows the annual U.S. casualties of the war:²⁵⁸



In evaluating the foreign policy of the Vietnam War and processing it through the OPM, A distinction must be made between the confusion of reality and the confusion caused by duplicity. Perhaps ironically, the misinformation the American people heard about the war was sometimes just as disingenuous within certain circles of the military and other areas of government even before being marketed to the public. This Indicator assesses feedback integrity and justification integrity. The deceit disseminated by U.S. foreign policymakers to the American people was but one link in a chain of delusion, mischaracterization, and outright lies. However, it is also the most important link. Foreign policymakers are the media through which a policy is settled upon, altered, and marketed to the public, and their words and deeds are more important than those

²⁵⁸ Associated Press, <http://www.ap.org/explore/vietnam-the-real-war/>

of the average citizen or soldier. Therefore, to categorize the Vietnam War only as a national "tragedy without villains" based on a particular set of terrible circumstances misses an opportunity to understand exactly how this FPDM failure came about.

Even a cursory review of declassified documents related to the Vietnam War reveals a systematic avoidance, rejection, and manipulation of the truth about the war. The review for this chapter has been more than cursory, and nothing reviewed for it has changed that characterization. What has been somewhat surprising is the extent to which this was a national crisis, just as the experience of the war for the average Vietnamese was a national crisis. Nevertheless, foreign policymakers are charged with successfully defining, clarifying, and pursuing the national interest, and they failed miserably at this task in the case of Vietnam. In part, this can be blamed on a nation wishing to conceive of itself as the preponderant power in the international system and unwilling to face its own contradictory demons. But it is the task for the statesman to lead the country in a prudent direction, employ its finite resources efficiently, and avoid unnecessary conflicts that will bring harm to the national interest. With respect to Vietnam, the statesmen in question did none of these things; in fact, they shunned their sacred duty intentionally because they refused to accept the reality of the situation presented to them. They could have attempted to fully grasp the indigenous complications in Vietnam and incorporated that into their calculations among themselves and in their conversations with the American public. They chose not too.

As mentioned in FPE Criterion I, the significance of John Paul Vann and his role in the Vietnam War for this chapter is twofold: first, as an advisor, he understood the tactical complications of the war that would lead to strategic defeat if they were not rectified. Second, as both a soldier and later as a civilian working for CORDS, he spent the remainder of his life until his death on June 9, 1972 attempting to proliferate understanding of the conflict to those who held the power to change it. As a soldier, Vann recognized the problems inherent in the ability of the United States to affect the local political and military conditions of South Vietnam, many of which have been highlighted throughout this chapter. Sheehan presents too many to summarize, but the paramount obstacles to success in the advisory stages of the war in Vann's view were: (a) the overrunning of the outposts, which were staffed by the peasant militia, (b) indiscriminate artillery shelling and aerial bombing, (c) maltreatment of the populace by the ARVN, (d) defining, identifying, and targeting the enemy, and (e) the disregard in the ARVN and GVN for professional and moral standards of state and security.

The (a) outposts were significant for two reasons. First, the fact that they were manned by peasants that stood guard like sitting ducks only for the pittance they were paid to staff the rural ramparts signified that the only loyalty the GVN could count on in much of the countryside was not loyalty at all, and certainly not Johnsons' 'Macy window ass-kissing' kind, but what amounted to indentured servitude. To much of the rural population of South Vietnam, there was no GVN

in functional terms, and what there was of it was less than appealing because of

(b) and (c), indiscriminate bombing and maltreatment of villagers. From *ABSL*:

If nothing was done to stop this drain of American arms through the outposts—and Harkins and his representatives were always prodding the training advisors to hand out weapons faster despite the warnings from Vann and other division senior advisors—then Vann would encounter increasingly better-armed Viet Cong in his shakily led campaign to destroy the Main Force and provincial guerrilla units. If his campaign was ever interrupted or lost momentum for some reason and the Communists were able to fully reconstitute their striking force and go on the offensive with impunity, the guerrillas would capture many more American weapons, build their strength far beyond current numbers, and become a foe more formidable than Vann cared to imagine.

There was an ugly side to this war and to his Vietnamese allies that went far beyond the everlasting problem of the Saigon troops treating their peasantry like an occupied population, stealing the chickens and ducks and rice and molesting the women... Nothing he had seen or heard of in Korea would have prepared him for the cultivated sadism with which the Saigon troops treated captives.

“Ziegler made a partial list in his diary of the techniques used by Thuong and his Rangers, cataloguing a dozen. Ziegler printed the title “Strong Methods” above the list in a translation of a French euphemism for methods of torture:

Wrap in barbed wire.

Strip skin off back.

Rack by use of vehicle or water buffalo.

Head in mud—1½ minute.

Shoot thru ear.

Hook up to EE8. [EE8 was the designation of the American-supplied battery-powered field telephone. The common method was to tape the ends of two wires from the phone to the genitals of a man or to a woman’s vagina and a breast. Shock was then administered as desired by turning the crank handle on the phone.]

Sit on entrenching tool. [The entrenching tool was the folding pack shovel the U.S. Army supplied the ARVN for use in digging foxholes. The shovel blade was thrust firmly into the ground. The prisoner was stripped of his pants and made to sit on top of the end of the shovel handle. He was then forced down on the handle.]

Knife strapped to back. [Thuong would tie the prisoner's hands behind his back and lash the Bowie knife to the wrists with the blade pointing inward toward the back. He would have the prisoner hauled up against a tree, place his hand on the victim's chest, and start pressing as he asked questions.]

Water treatment. [Water was forced into the mouth until the stomach swelled painfully, when it was beaten to induce more pain, or a wet rag was held over the nostrils while water was poured down the throat to create the sensation of suffocating.]

Calves beaten.

Knee in back, face down, dislocate shoulders.

Beat stomach until it collapses and indiv. vomits it out.

The willy-nilly killing and maiming enraged Vann, not only because it contradicted his ideal of his profession, but also because it struck him as the worst conceivable way to fight this war. A counter guerrilla war surely required the strictest possible controls on air and artillery."

A single shot from a sniper was enough to stop a battalion while the captain in charge called for an air strike or an artillery barrage on the hamlet from which the sniper had fired. Vann would argue with the captain and later with Cao that it was ridiculous to let one sniper halt a whole battalion and criminal to let the sniper provoke them into smashing a hamlet. Why didn't they send a squad to maneuver around the sniper and scare him off or kill him while the battalion continued its advance?

The province and district chiefs kept their 105mm artillery pieces and large 4.2-inch mortars, the equivalent of artillery, positioned freely so that they could rotate them 360 degrees and shoot in any direction. During one of his first operations in another division area, Vann had stayed late in the command-post tent to work on some notes of the day's events and had been alone with the Vietnamese duty officer and a few enlisted men. A voice came up on the radio. The duty officer picked up the microphone and, after a brief exchange with whoever was calling, walked over to the map, checked something on it, and then returned to the radio to give a quick reply.

"What's going on?" Vann asked.

"That was the district chief. He wanted to know if we have any troops in this hamlet over here," the duty officer said, pointing at the place on the map. "He says he's got a report from an agent that VC are in the hamlet and he wants to shoot at them."

"What did you tell him?" Vann asked.

"I told him we don't have anybody out there," the duty officer replied.

"But what about the people who live in that hamlet?" Vann asked. The duty officer shrugged. Several miles away a howitzer began to sound in the night."

As the spirit moved them day or night, the province and district chiefs and the major ARVN unit commanders would pick out places on the map—the ford of a canal or stream, a crossing of trails, a clump of water palm jungle, any place they guessed some Viet Cong might conceivably be at that particular moment—and would shoot at these spots. No air or ground observer zeroed the guns beforehand or adjusted the shelling after it started. The gunners calculated the direction and range from the grid coordinates on the map. The fact that the firing was done by the map, without being observed and adjusted, was a small gain for the peasantry. It is difficult to shell effectively from map coordinates alone, and the copies of French Army maps that the ARVN used were so outdated that the hamlet or other target might no longer be located where the map showed it. The irrationality of shooting artillery this way also did not seem to bother the Saigon officers, because nothing was done after a puzzled Vann pointed out this failing too.

Cao and the other Saigon officers, Vann concluded, wanted to kill these people and destroy their homes and slaughter their livestock, not on a systematic basis, but often enough to intimidate them. Their theory of pacification apparently was to terrorize the peasants out of supporting the Viet Cong. For this reason Cao and the province and district chiefs also did nothing to stop the torture and murder. They thought it useful. Their attitude was: "We'll teach these people a lesson. We'll show them how strong and tough we are." The only coherent reply he could ever get out of Cao when they argued about the air strikes and shellings was that the planes and the artillery flaunted the power of the government and made the population respect it. Vann had also been puzzled at first as to why Cao and most of his fellow Saigon officers did not feel any guilt over this butchery and sadism. He had come to see that they regarded the peasantry as some sort of subspecies. They were not taking human life and destroying human homes. They were exterminating treacherous animals and stamping out their dens. When Porter and Vann appealed to Harkins to stop this self-defeating slaughter, he turned out to be as dense in his own way as the Saigon commanders. Instead of using his influence to put a halt to the bombardments, he was furthering them. It had been dismaying for Vann to watch himself and Porter lose the argument.

As they flew across the countryside and passed over a Viet Cong-controlled area, Vann and Porter would call Harkins's attention to the marks of recognition—the ditched roads, the dirt barriers blocking the canals, the ruins of an outpost. When they stretched out the map between the seats on the plane or during the briefing at the stop ahead, Cao and the Vietnamese officer from Saigon would point to a “Viet Cong hamlet” here and a “VC arms factory” there. “We must bomb it,” Cao would say.

Having heard so many complaints from Vann and Porter, Harkins would ask if the place was not filled with ordinary people.

“No, no, they are all Viet Cong,” Cao would answer.

“Absolutely, all of them have been corrupted by the Communists,” the officer from Saigon would add.

The moment they were alone afterward, Porter and Vann would explain to Harkins that the “Viet Cong hamlet” was just like many other peasant hamlets in the Delta. The Viet Cong occasionally used it to stay in overnight, and it had a pesky squad of local guerrillas who gave the district chief trouble. The squad would probably escape unscathed if the place was bombed. They had hideaways into which they would jump as soon as the planes appeared. The several hundred other inhabitants would not be so well prepared, and some of them might also panic and get killed out in the open. The Viet Cong taught the peasants to dig cave shelters under the sleeping platforms rural Vietnamese cover with mats of woven straw and use as beds. This expedient gave the peasants a handy shelter right inside the house, unless that house happened to be one of those set afire by the napalm or the white phosphorus, called Willy Peter in U.S. military idiom. The family inside the little cave would not have the time or the battle training to evacuate the shelter. They would be asphyxiated. As for the “VC arms factory” Cao had also put his finger on, Vann and Porter would explain that they had intelligence reports that the Viet Cong were fabricating shotguns out of galvanized pipe in that particular hamlet.

Harkins would resist accepting what they had to say. He would look at them with disbelief when they said that Cao and the senior Saigon officer were not telling him the truth. They got the impression that the words “Viet Cong hamlet” and “VC arms factory” conjured up in his mind World War II images of a German barracks and a munitions plant. Harkins's trips out of Saigon did not extend to marching with the infantry. He therefore never saw anything to contradict these preconceived images. Nor could Vann and Porter get Harkins to agree that, as Vann summed up for Ziegler, the bombing and shelling “kills many, many more civilians

than it ever does VC and as a result makes new VC.” Vann and Porter would usually be overruled and the hamlets would be bombed. Harkins also did not stop the abuse of artillery. He could have forced restrictions on the Saigon officers by rationing shells.

It was not a question of some noncombatants, it was a question of mostly noncombatants, and this was not an ordinary war, Porter would counter. Porter had to be exaggerating, Anthis would say; the commander of the VNAF and the ARVN officers he met told him that most of the casualties were guerrillas and that the bombing was hurting the Communists a great deal. He was being deceived, Porter would tell Anthis, and try to set him straight with the latest report from Vann on how the bombing was driving “these people right into the arms of the Viet Cong.” Anthis would refuse to accept the possibility that his bombs could be a boon to the Communists. Porter would challenge again, if Anthis wasn’t afraid of the truth, why didn’t he come down and see for himself who his planes were hitting? Anthis would fall back on a legal argument. He and his people didn’t initiate any of the bombings. The air strikes were all conducted at the request of the country’s legal authorities—the responsible ARVN officers and the province and district chiefs. “But you wouldn’t honor the request for the strike if you thought you would kill “women and kids and old folks, would you?” Porter would ask.

Porter had enough seniority as a full colonel and a corps advisor to take on an Air Force general and get away with it. Vann did not. He was fortunate never to have had an opportunity to confront Anthis or he might not have remained at 7th Division long enough to become Harkins’ star advisor. He understood what Porter was up against with Anthis. Every service wanted as big a role as possible in Vietnam as soon as Kennedy committed the United States to the war. The more the Air Force bombed, the bigger its role. If air power was restricted the way it ought to be, the Air Force would not have much to do in Vietnam. It was in Anthis’s personal interest and the interest of his institution to believe that the bombing furthered the war effort, and so he believed it. Letting himself be confronted with the corpses of women and children would inhibit his ability to bomb with enthusiasm. Vann did not blame the Air Force for being the institutional creature it was. The fault lay with Harkins for not grasping the nature of the war and curbing institutional proclivities. The bombing was worsening with each month as Anthis and his staff steadily built the power of their hybrid Vietnamese-American air force.

All buildings were called "structures" in the reports of the raids. This term removed the distinction between a hut that had been erected by the guerrillas and the home of a peasant family or, for that matter, a pigsty. At the same time the term fulfilled the bureaucratic need to demonstrate that the air strikes were achieving tangible results, i.e., "structures" blown up or burned down. The official reports naturally presented all "structures" as guerrilla "structures." By September the fighter-bombers were blasting away an average of more than a hundred "structures" a week, and as far as Vann could determine from the evidence in his area the majority of them were peasant homes.

The Rules of Engagement, the regulations governing what, where, and when the aircraft could attack, permitted the Vietnamese forward air controllers in the L-19S to decide that anyone on the ground who ran was a Viet Cong.

After the strafing runs the FAC and the fighter-bomber pilots would tally a score sheet of how many "KBAs" the planes had dispatched. The initials stood for "killed by air." Once dispatched, or reported as having been dispatched, a KBA was ipso facto a dead guerrilla for Harkins' headquarters to add to the body count that was the fundamental measure of progress in the war. Vann coined a term of contempt for the forward air controllers. He called them "Killer Kings."²⁵⁹

These passages illustrate these problems with an unparalleled level of detail, due to Vann's military genius and moral fortitude and Sheehan's keen intellect and research moxie. In terms of the general (d) disregard in the ARVN and GVN for the sacred duties of statehood and security, the government and its military that Chester Cooper characterized as "ineffectual" were never designed to perform the functions of statehood nor to protect the citizens living within the territory of the state. By multiple definitions of statehood, there was in fact no state in South Vietnam save for in Saigon and its immediate environs; South

²⁵⁹ Sheehan 1988, 395, 404, 419, 421, 424, 432, 438, 440.

Vietnam was not even a state in technical terms except that it had been carved up like a country ham at Potsdam the way so many countries in the 'Third World' had been since the 'age of exploration' that gave way to colonialism.

The strategic crown of failure holding these tactical jewels together was Vann's valiant yet unsuccessful campaign to convince General Harkins, General Anthis, and others that the war would be lost if it were not fought in a different way. This campaign is displayed in unambiguous detail in *ABSL*, but there is not room here to include it. John Paul Vann's personal life was a disaster from his birth until his death, and yet he became one of the most respected officers in the Army and deputies of CORDS, even while challenging authority at every step of the way. He never lost faith in the military, the nation, or even the war, and yet in many ways he was its most vocal critic, at least in terms of the way in which it was being fought. Perhaps he was destined to symbolize everything Americans loved about themselves in the conflict that made them question what it means to be American.

He was not the only one with doubts. By the time public opinion shifted to the point of affecting the calculations of U.S. foreign policymakers in 1968, it was too late. Pacification intensification and "Vietnamization" efforts could never take shape because they were constructed on the debris of smoldering hamlets. The one element the United States needed in its favor— the Vietnamese populace— was alienated by indiscriminate incarceration and killings and the frivolity of the state in Saigon. Compounding this problem was the ruthless efficiency of the

enemy and the U.S. underestimation of its motivation and capabilities.²⁶⁰ Just as U.S. foreign policymakers would stumble on their words attempting to justify Vietnam policy to the American public, they could never justify it to themselves.

As described in FPE Criterion IV, every president involved in the Vietnam War in some fashion from Truman to Nixon advised against large-scale intervention in one form or another. Lovegall argues that Kennedy "privately doubted the validity of a crude domino theory" and "perceived from early on that there were limits to what the United States could achieve in that part of the world."²⁶¹ Kaiser further demonstrates that Kennedy's actions in Laos make plain that he "never regarded Southeast Asia as a propitious place to deploy American power."²⁶² At the same time, Kennedy himself stated that "Withdrawal would be a grave mistake. I know people don't like Americans to be engaged in this kind of an effort. Forty-seven Americans have been killed in combat with the enemy, but this is a very important struggle even though it is far away."²⁶³ Johnson, a domestic-oriented president who likely never gave a damn about Vietnam and wanted instead to invest valuable political capital on his Great Society

²⁶⁰ For some examples on the adolescent understanding of the enemy and the 'enemy image,' see Marvin Gettleman, Jane Franklin, Marilyn Young, and Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and America: The Most Comprehensive Documented History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), 188; CIA Agent George Carver, "The Faceless Viet Cong," *Foreign Affairs* (April 1966); Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (MIT Press, 1966), 382; and Douglas Pike, *War, Peace, and the Viet Cong* (MIT Press, 1999), Chapter 5.

²⁶¹ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 395–99.

²⁶² David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 102.

²⁶³ Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), 652.

programs, repeatedly insisted that to Americanize the war would be a mistake. In September 1964 he explained to a crowd in New Hampshire, "What I have been trying to do with the situation I found was to get the boys in Vietnam to do their own fighting, with our advice and our equipment." A month later in Ohio he infamously proclaimed, "We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."²⁶⁴ A hermeneutics expert need not be employed to comprehend the disingenuous nature of that statement.

Johnson's downplayed announcement to the American people that his administration had decided on a policy of escalation on July 28, 1965, mirrored the process of decision-making in his inner advisory circles in that it was never described in grandiose war terms but simply as granting a request to give the generals what they needed to be more decisive in the field of battle. Instead of addressing Congress with the fanfare of a televised address, which would have befitted a decision of such a magnitude, he instead arranged for a midday press conference to announce that a request for an increase in troops had been met. What was grandiose, however, was the idealism in the language he used for justifying this ostensibly (to the American public) minute resolution. He spoke of "dominoes," "commitment," and "credibility," arguing that allowing South Vietnam to fall would "guarantee" that "the battle would be renewed in one country and then another, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueller conflict, as we

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Richard E. Neustadt and Ernst R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 77.

have learned from the lessons of history." America would stand by "this small and valiant nation."²⁶⁵ Johnson's carefully chosen choreography allowed him to maintain both the image of restraint and the language of defender, as opposed to aggressor, even while committing several hundred thousand troops to a peripheral nation with an impotent, repressive government.

From the feigned Gulf of Tonkin incident to the fall of Saigon, there was very little to learn operationally because the dim prospects for success were known from the outset of escalation. In a conversation in 1965 about how many battalions to send to Vietnam, McGeorge Bundy wrote to McNamara that two of his primary concerns about a continued buildup were "What are the chances of our getting into a white man's war with all the brown men against us or apathetic?" and "Can we frame this program in such a way as to keep very clear our own determination to keep the war limited?"²⁶⁶ Based on an analysis of every recorded conversation and memo between the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Vietnam, H.R. McMaster demonstrates that inter-agency parochialism, a preoccupation with advancement, and an institutional failure to produce accurate and coherent advice to the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations left the words of military leaders unreliable at best. They were complicit in consciously adhering to decisions they knew to be detrimental to the national interest in order to placate President Johnson, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and other foreign policymakers, brushing aside concerns about Vietnam policy among lower-

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Immerman 2011, 162.

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Neustadt and May 1986, 81.

ranking military officers.²⁶⁷ At the same time, they knew that if they did not tell policymakers what they wanted to hear, their careers could be at stake. This contrasts sharply with the common view that the military could have won the war had it not been hamstrung by foreign policymakers in Washington.

A seismic chasm thus existed between commanders on the ground at the platoon level and the generals that reported to Washington, as evidenced by the saga of John Paul Vann. Information from the battlefield was so heavily filtered that by the time it reached the highest levels of government in Washington, reports often resembled their original wording about as much as the last in a sequence in the game of telephone. Recently declassified documents show that Nixon did not even read the President's Daily Briefs, the official intelligence briefing prepared for the president on a daily basis. These and other essential intelligence briefings from the CIA usually did not reach the president's eyes, and only did so once they had been filtered through Kissinger's typewriter, who would prepare memos of no more than four pages based on what he thought the President wanted to know.²⁶⁸ For a president that was inherently suspicious of dissent, as well as the CIA, this filtration ensured the president's ignorance of the information emanating from the theater that intelligence officials deemed most germane to the proceedings of the war. Philip Caputo's remark, "If that general's going to look at those bodies, we'd better hose the trailer down" epitomizes how

²⁶⁷ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

²⁶⁸ John Helgerson, *Getting to Know the President: Intelligence Briefings of Presidential Candidates*, Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency (Washington, D.C.: 2012).

the reality of the war was rinsed clean like so many fragments of bone and flesh.²⁶⁹

Between President Johnson deciding not to run for reelection on March 31, 1968 and President Nixon deciding to invade Cambodia on April 30, 1970, "the Vietnam War more or less disappeared from the mainstream of American political debate as a major issue," reflecting the collective understanding that the war in Vietnam had fundamentally shifted toward disengagement.²⁷⁰ Yet during that time support for the war continued to deteriorate. In President Nixon's memoir, he stated, "Over the past thirty months, Kissinger, Rogers, and I had carefully tailored our public statements to protect the secrecy of the meetings because we were determined to do nothing to jeopardize any chance they had for success," even while downplaying "any belief that we would succeed in obtaining" an agreement.²⁷¹

30 months was quite some time to be concealing the true facts of the war simply to avoid hampering negotiations, especially when confidence in the negotiations was low and monthly casualties were hovering around 100 KIA. On January 5, 1972, Nixon revealed to the American public that Kissinger had been maintaining secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese since August of 1969. While Americans welcomed the possibility of ending the war, it was still unclear what had been gained up to that point, and no peace agreement would come for

²⁶⁹ Caputo 1977, 176.

²⁷⁰ Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Penguin Press), 2002, 226.

²⁷¹ Nixon 1978.

another year. Furthermore, the secrecy surrounding the negotiations galvanized the sentiment that Nixon and other political leaders were not to be trusted. Indeed, their collective justifications for the war seemed to many like one giant grain of salt.

OPM Summary

How much did the grand strategy of preponderance fuel the impetus to act in Vietnam and the refusal to accept the great cost involved in defending the shell of a state in South Vietnam? Where was the intersection between that refusal and the estimation of U.S. capacity to control the situation within Vietnam? Why did FPDM officials adhere so vehemently to the status quo when it was so clearly failing to achieve its objectives? How did Vietnam differ from other interventions and why does it stand out as the most abysmal failure in U.S. foreign-policy history? The war has been approached from hundreds of different angles by highly capable scholars and students of the era. While this chapter has discussed many contending viewpoints as to how and why the event unfolded so unfavorably for the United States, there does exist a certain general consensus that transcends both realist and liberal critiques, as explain by David Anderson:

The realist analysis emphasizes that Moscow's Red Army was not in Southeast Asia, that the strategic value of the region to the United States was low compared with the importance of other areas, and that costs of protecting limited American interests there were very high. The liberal critique adds that although it is true that the leaders of North Vietnam derived their intellectual and revolutionary dogma from Marx and Lenin, they were striving for self-determination and social justice, goals that were not unlike

America's own core values. The liberal-realist scholars find from their examination of the origins of and rationale for the U.S. war in Vietnam that American military intervention in Vietnam was a flawed application of containment and based on a misinterpretation of the realities of Vietnamese history and identity. Although this thesis is widely accepted, there is considerable debate among scholars over why the containment strategy came to be misdirected.²⁷²

In real-time as well as in retrospect, the quagmire of Vietnam was both actual and theoretical. Even as early as 1966, before the effects of escalation had materialized, realists like George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau were arguing against over-committing in Vietnam because it was on the periphery and therefore peripheral to the national interest. Even the father of Containment policy recognized that U.S. resources were finite, that the Chinese were already preoccupied domestically with their own 'Cultural Revolution,' and that the Soviets were not indifferent about Indochina but were certainly more focused on Europe.²⁷³ Thus, to some degree, commitment to Vietnam was both espoused and denounced by both realists and liberals, for differing reasons, just as policymakers denounced intervention and then intervened. The main axis of confusion often came down to where exactly the interchange between material and ideational imperatives fell in FPDM calculations.

As in the theoretical sphere, the institutional arena faltered at every dimension of instituting policy and operationalizing the war-fighting and nation-building efforts. And the disjointed dysfunction in the institutional arena inevitably

²⁷² David Anderson, *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 3.

²⁷³ Larson 1996, 27.

led to problematic tactical issues, as described by James Wirtz in *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War*.

This interservice rivalry often affected the war effort, especially the air war over South Vietnam. In 1962, for example, the air force gained operational control of the light transport aircraft flown by the army. In early 1965, the air force prevented the army from operating Mohawk (light transport) aircraft in a ground attack role but failed in its effort to prevent the army from using helicopter gunships. On the eve of the Tet Offensive, the most divisive debate over command of the air war erupted when Westmoreland attempted to place marine air units under the operational control of air force tactical air control centers to increase the air support available to army units transferred to I CTZ and to facilitate air operations supporting Khe Sanh. In addition to interservice rivalry, U.S. officers were often preoccupied with controversies sparked by efforts to place South Vietnamese and Korean forces under Westmoreland's command.²⁷⁴

It is simply not possible for hundreds of thousands of people involved in an intervention and millions of people voting at the ballot box to have total informational and institutional purity. To illustrate the point, let us take a piece of information and counterfactually process it through the chain of command. Let us say a sergeant hunting down VC and attempting to 'pacify' South Vietnam by killing the enemy and protecting the villages, hamlets and population centers takes part in a battle in which he recognizes that several of his comrades were killed because the South Vietnamese RFPFs he is paired with provided intelligence to the VC with which they managed to lay a successful ambush against his platoon. The sergeant knows this for a fact; there is no doubt in his

²⁷⁴ James Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War* (Cornell University Press, 1994), 100.

mind. He takes this information to his commanding officer, a lieutenant, who provides a willing ear, having experienced the same thing and understanding the predicament. The lieutenant in turn explains this problem to the colonel of his battalion, as well as to his South Vietnamese counterpart.

The South Vietnamese colonel is already hamstrung by two constraints: the first cognitive; he cannot leave his own country, his knowledge of this prevents him from thinking of the conflict in terminable terms; the second bureaucratic, his commanding overseers are part of a military in which each colonel perpetuates a rival against another, a parochial system in which resources are granted to those who incur the fewest casualties and bribery above all grants promotion. On the GVN side, this piece of battlefield intelligence dies at this level: everyone knows the extent of VC infiltration whether it is publicly stated or not, and nothing can be done about it. On the U.S. side, the colonel forwards the information to intelligence officials and to the commanding generals over the course of the next few weeks at the few audiences they grant him.

The intelligence officials are already working overtime to neutralize VCI, but will act on the intelligence if they are given specific names and locations of suspects. The generals hear his plight; they do not deny that the VC make up perhaps 50% of the RFPFs in that area of operation, but there is little they can do, other than raise the issue to the deaf ears of the Saigon regime, which has a set of priorities incongruent with their own. They are not pulling out of that area; it is in a strategic location that the enemy cannot be allowed to operate freely in.

One of the generals mentions the problem at a luncheon a month later in Washington, D.C. to someone at the grand-strategic level. There are hundreds of people at this level, but this particular official has the ear of someone in the NSC, to whom he passes on the information. That official does not want to share any information with his counterpart, due to a longstanding feud over turf within the Council, but will see what he can do.

Another month later one of the president's advisors mentions to the president over a glass of scotch, "I heard some of the units fighting alongside our boys are 50% VC in X area of operation." How is the president, beholden to every form of bureaucratic, interest-group, ideological, and political-expedience constraint imaginable, to respond? In the time it takes him to decide to do nothing, hundreds of people have died, and the conditions perpetuating failure have become more ingrained than they were when the intelligence manifested. The president cannot pull out, his foot is already too far in; he will not expand the war, the stakes would then be raised too high with the Soviets and Chinese. Perhaps he can put the screws to Saigon to put more effort into the fight. But Diem has already declared, "The principle export of this country is anti-Communism."²⁷⁵ Where is the incentive for Saigon to end what is by far the largest influx of financial and military resources in the country's history?

This is, of course, a farcical caricature of bureaucratic information processing. It is not, however, far-fetched. This is the ideational battle that John Paul Vann fought until his helicopter crashed into a cemetery in Vietnam in 1972,

²⁷⁵ Sheehan 1988, 484.

a tragic yet fitting end for a man that gave his life for the ancestor-worshipping Vietnamese people and his view of the American way of life and warfighting. What those who were neck-deep involved in the bureaucratic jungle could not grasp was that the military and civilian institutions charged with implementing the Vietnam War performed exactly as they were designed to. In *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*, Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts contend:

America's war in Vietnam was obviously a failure. Whether the failure was strategic, tactical, conceptual, operational, military, political, diplomatic, moral, or all of these, will remain in dispute. But after decades of commitment to prevent Communist domination of the country, at the cost of many billions of dollars and many thousands of American and Vietnamese lives, virtually no one can credibly maintain that the effort was successful. By what seemingly perverse logic, then, can we argue that the system worked? The ironic logic is the central reason for this book, for now that the dust has settled, the conventional wisdom of most post-mortems still holds that America's failure in Vietnam was the failure of America's foreign policy decisionmaking system. Somehow the process of assessment, consultation, and decision must have gone awry. Given the results of the war, common sense suggests that U.S. leaders could not have realized what they were doing when they decided to do it. But this commonsense interpretation is simpler, and in a way more dangerously comforting in its implications, than the reality that those making decisions to increase U.S. involvement were aware that victory would probably not be the result. Of all the lessons of the war for Americans—and many of these lessons will prove to be as simplistic, confining, and misleading as the earlier ones of World War II and the cold war that prompted commitment in Vietnam—this paradox is the most fundamental. Without recognizing this point, it will be impossible to perceive accurately or to appreciate the other lessons of the war. Our argument is not a perfect one—the evidence indicates exceptions, particular ways in which the system did not work—but in general, and at the most crucial junctures, the argument is depressingly valid. The paradox

is that the *foreign policy* failed, but the *domestic decisionmaking* system worked (emphasis in the original).²⁷⁶

By arguing that the system worked but the foreign policy failed, the authors make two points critical to the OPM. First, they illustrate that the system is not designed simply to achieve foreign-policy success. This may explain why it never has. When Kissinger says of foreign-policy objectives, "Whether these goals are desirable is relatively less crucial" than the process of settling on and implementing *the* policy, rather than the *most prudent* policy, he defines this FPDM fallacy in no uncertain terms. When David Baldwin invokes the sarcastic Pyrrhic victory, "The surgery was a success, but the patient died," he illustrates the same point. U.S. foreign policy is fundamentally designed as an *output* of bureaucratic and ideological "superabundant energy," as Tocqueville described it, not as a *means* to achieve particular foreign-policy *ends*. Therefore, by any common definition of grand strategy, the United States is not pursuing the national interest. It certainly did not in Vietnam, and yet the "system worked." If the most successful state in the international system is employing a highly functional system and still succeeding in the larger picture, then there are more questions than answers for IR scholars with regard to the definition of, production of, and pursuit of the national interest. This is not to say that leaders want to fail, but rather that success is not always the central directive. The fact that the war was lost with no in-policy loss to the national interest (that loss more a function of

²⁷⁶ Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Brookings Institution, 1979), 1.

losses in human lives, financial expenditures, prestige, and pride) demonstrates this tragic paradox. Gelb and Betts argue further:

Vietnam was not an aberration of the decisionmaking system but a logical culmination of the principles that leaders that leaders brought with them into it. Radicals believe that the system produced bad policy because capitalism requires imperialism and counterrevolution. Reactionaries believe that the system produced bad policy because democracy requires compromise, and that overly accountable leaders lacked the autonomy and security to go to the unpopular extremes of either withdrawal or unlimited war. Both agree, in short, that the system worked yet produced bad policy because it was a bad system. For liberals, conservatives, and most Americans, the argument that a good system produced disastrous policy is understandably galling. But the painful reality is that if the system failed, it did so in ways almost unfavorable in a democratic regime and representative institutional pattern of policymaking, or because no system can compensate for errors of judgment (or felt needs to gamble on unlikely possibilities) *if those errors are pervasive among authorities* (emphasis mine). Failure of policy cannot automatically be the same as failure of the system; *otherwise substance and process are indistinguishable* (emphasis mine).²⁷⁷

Here, the authors recognize what many FPDM accounts do not: the FPDM process and the outcome of a policy must first be studied separately and then integrated analytically, in order to assess each on its own and then evaluate in what ways the former did and did not lead to the latter. This is the fundamental premise of this dissertation. To learn only about the outcome is to learn nothing about the FPDM process; to learn only about the process is to limit analysis exclusively to a study of organizational behavior; to understand process, outcome, and the interaction between the two, all three must be studied as the

²⁷⁷ Gelb and Betts 1979, 2.

unified science of FPE. The Vietnam debacle exemplifies the need for this science in uniquely typical fashion. The system worked because "(1) the core consensual goal of postwar foreign policy (containment of communism) was pursued consistently; (2) differences of both elite and mass opinion were accommodated by compromise, and policy never strayed very far from the center of opinion both within and outside the government; and (3) virtually all views and recommendations were considered and virtually all important decisions were made without illusions about the odds of success." The authors pack a lot into their contentions, but the two most significant takeaways from their three criteria of the 'successful' system are that it did in fact pursue a popular policy (an anti-war majority among the American populace was not achieved until after the Tet Offensive in late 1968) and that it was an understanding that success was unlikely and foreign policymakers stayed the course in spite of that understanding.

This leads the researcher to the conclusion that the maintenance of the system itself is prioritized in ideology, policy, and operation over the media of objectives the system purports to perform as a means to form any given policy. Domestic politics constrained alternatives to the status quo because of the dual imperatives of "Do not lose the rest of Vietnam to communist control before the next election" and "Do not commit U.S. ground troops to a land war in Asia, either," as described by Daniel Ellsberg.²⁷⁸ Ellsberg's "Pentagon Papers," or *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: A Study Prepared by the*

²⁷⁸ Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (Simon and Shuster, 1972), 101.

Department of Defense, as was its official title, revealed to the public in June of 1971 that the tactical lies U.S. foreign policymaking officials told them about the war itself were an inherent part of the faulty strategic thinking with regard to the foreign-policy means-end chain. There simply was no way to connect the search-and-destroy missions in Vietnam either to success in that war or to the overall national interest. His counterpart in the leak at *The New York Times*, Neil Sheehan, would come to understand and document the depths of the strategic-tactical gap all too well during the course of his encyclopedic research of John Paul Vann. It is perhaps fitting that Ellsberg's 1962 dissertation in the field of economics is a challenge to the rational decision-making model, arguing for distinguishing between risk and ambiguity as decision-making input factors.²⁷⁹

Robert Komer, involved in the military and civilian side of the war at every level as head of CORDS, Ambassador, and other positions, came to the same conclusion in 1972 that Gelb and Betts detailed in their exhaustive account:

Essentially both governments attempted to handle an atypical conflict situation by means of institutions designed for other purposes. Such constraints as institutional inertia—the inherent reluctance of organizations to change operational methods except slowly and incrementally—influenced not only the decisions made but what was actually done in the field. These constraints led to (1) an overly militarized response; (2) diffusion of authority and fragmentation of command; (3) hesitation to change the traditional relationship of civilian to military leadership; and (4) agency reluctance to violate the conventional lines dividing responsibilities. The conclusion is that atypical problems demand special solutions. Policymakers must be sure the institutions carrying out the policy can execute it as intended. Adequate follow-through machinery must exist at all levels, to force adaptation if necessary. Where the

²⁷⁹ Daniel Ellsberg, *Risk, Ambiguity, and Decision* (New York: Garland, 2001).

United States is supporting an enfeebled ally, effective means of stimulating optimum indigenous performance are essential.²⁸⁰

The argument that "rational bureaucracy does not necessarily have to serve rational purposes" therefore mirrors the idea that a foreign-policy outcome does not necessarily have to be rationally correlated with the FPDM process.²⁸¹ These are unintelligible perspectives to promulgate. The genius of Komer, Gelb and Betts is their ability to recognize the process, the outcome, and their intersubjectivity. Kissinger was fond of such platitudes, and in fact often spoke in conceptually circular terms in spite of his admittedly acute mental acumen. Making the point that political expedience, bureaucratic restrictions, and institutional inertia are factors in FPDM is redundant; everyone knows that this is the case. Promoting the idea that these are *more important* than the production of *the* agreed-upon foreign policy is irresponsible; promoting the idea that they are more important than the production of the *prudent* foreign policy is criminal. To be sure, the U.S. foreign policy system achieved remarkable things in Vietnam, but none of them did the effort any good. The skill and bravery of U.S. soldiers and the incredible destructive power of U.S. aerial bombardment were indeed the instruments of a veritable superpower high on its might. This superpower was fighting against itself in Vietnam. The United States foreign-policy system *had* been preparing for something monumental since it was attacked at Pearl Harbor, but it was *not* Vietnam that it was preparing for. The

²⁸⁰ Komer 1972.

²⁸¹ Francis Fukuyama uses this phrase in *The Origins of Political Order* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), although he is not making that argument per se.

'arsenal of democracy' was therefore misapplied in Vietnam via what Kaiser brands "The greatest policy miscalculation in the history of American foreign relations."

A major part of that miscalculation was a mischaracterization of the psyche of the average Vietnamese and, in particular, the psyche of the enemy. Gelb and Betts mention "ethnocentricity and misperception" as a common criticism of the FPDM analysis that fueled the obstacles to success in Vietnam. From the perspective of the sociopolitics of intervention, the ignorance of the local political, cultural, and social conditions of Vietnam highlights the focus on great-power conflict more broadly. Militarily, the focus on using traditional military tactics to fight a guerilla war, certain exceptions like Phoenix notwithstanding, represents the tactical component of the strategic-tactical gap in U.S. grand strategy. The tragic irony of the Vietnam War was that the U.S. became willing to expend great-power-conflict resources against an enemy that lacked them in a country where the national interest was in fact never at stake.

In fairness to certain elements within military and foreign policymaking circles, the idea behind efforts like Phoenix was to get closer to the source of the insurgency and improve battlefield intelligence. Had this been the main provenance of counterinsurgency, as was the initial purpose when Kennedy initially sent advisors to the country, the effort may or may not have been successful, but it certainly would have left a smaller footprint, saving resources and humiliation in the face of defeat. This is where the metric of *efficiency* comes into play. The willingness to 'pay any cost' to 'protect freedom,' simplistic slogans

too often reverberating in the discourse of official U.S. foreign policy and certainly present during the Vietnam era, leaves policymakers hamstrung in terms of both *limiting* and *maximizing* the amount of resources expended. Contrary to the assumptions of many foreign policymakers involved in this catastrophic blunder, the employment of fewer resources may in fact have led to a more favorable outcome, given that the aggressively violent nature of the American intervention fed weaponry to the Viet Cong and motivated many Vietnamese countrymen to take up arms. This is not to say that the United States would have succeeded in preventing the North from taking over the South, which is likely to have happened anyway at some indefinite point. But it may have been more effective, and would have saved a fair amount of resources, American and Vietnamese lives, and humiliation.

British military officers described the American militiamen they confronted during the American Revolution as "a very effeminate thing, very unfit for and very impatient of war," and American civilians as "a worthless lot, a rabble, without discipline and without courage, running away from battle, deserting to the British ranks, leaving Mr. Washington with no army at all."²⁸² What a difference a century makes: as the sun began to set on the British Empire, it would be this "worthless lot" of American power that would transpose the Pax Britannica with the Pax Americana. Roosevelt's "people of small stature" that were "not warlike" would in turn come to undermine that power by the way of the same

²⁸² Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783* (Cambridge, 1964), 30; Marion Balderston and David Syrett, eds., *The Last War: Letters from British Officers During the American Revolution* (New York, 1975), viii.

transformation from guerilla warfare to pitched regimented battle, combined with an absolute determination to expel foreigners from their native land. While it is now perceptible what effect the loss of the American Colonies signified for the British Empire, it is not yet clear what the loss *in*, not *of* Vietnam means to the United States. How Americans interpret the conflict conceptually still affects the U.S. encounter with the world in real terms.

Perhaps the two most distinguishable inferences garnered from this chapter are the trance-like myopia with which U.S. foreign policymakers viewed the situation in Vietnam and the complete inability of the state in Saigon to stand on its own. What caused this myopia is open to interpretation; this dissertation contends that it was informed by the pursuit of preponderance at every level due to the inability to think outside of that box and accept that Vietnam would be 'lost.' The problem of adherence to the status quo and the problem of the institutionally and morally barren GVN came together when U.S. war planners realized that the ARVN could not even make an attempt to fight the war effectively, let alone win it. They therefore took over the fight from 1965 onward, eventually relinquishing it back to the GVN through "Vietnamization" as the war came full circle, acknowledging that the price was greater than they wished to pay. There was no way to unify the two armies because the standards were so distinct:

Westmoreland and the South Vietnamese command believed the ARVN was better suited to work among and protect the indigenous population than were foreign-born troops. Yet since they perceived ARVN as demoralized, they had little choice but to have fresh, well-armed American troops engage the enemy's regular forces...

Command-and-control arrangements between U.S. and South Vietnamese forces reinforced the concept that the forces of each nation remained separate entities with distinct missions. In April, Westmoreland turned down the notion of encadrement, of placing American officers and cadres in charge of South Vietnamese units, because of the language barrier and the requirement of additional logistical support.²⁸³

In reviewing reports from the Vietnam War, one of the starkest realizations becomes just how predictable all of the problems of implementation were. And yet, even decades later, there is still much argument about why the war failed. In the same way that FPDM is often clouded by political expedience, bureaucratic necessities, ideology, the heat of the moment, groupthink, or just the endless confusion of statecraft, so too can the memory of that FPDM be confused even many years afterward. Just as cognitive biases and preference restrictions constrain and codify FPDM maxims, so too do accounts of that FPDM frame its understanding in both popular and scholarly analysis. This is in large part because whatever ideology, IR paradigm, political predilection, or general perspective you adhere to will inevitably determine to a large degree what happened, why it happened, how it happened, and what conclusions to draw from it. James William Gibson describes this confusion:

During the 1970s various liberal interpretations of what happened in Vietnam were considered definitive. Some claimed the great lesson to be learned concerned "the limits of power." The United States had expended too many men and too much money fighting in a country that wasn't so important after all. Other liberals viewed the war as a tragic drama fueled by hubris. Our political leadership, the best and the brightest of the land, made a series of "small decisions," each decision being "reasonably regarded at the time

²⁸³ Hunt 1995, 34.

as the least that would be necessary." But Fate intervened and lo and behold we found ourselves "entrapped in that nightmare of American strategists, a land war in Asia." It was a sad, sad story, says Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "a tragedy without villains." Curiously enough, the views of the Conservatives were not so different. They offered another way of "getting over Vietnam" without ever searching for the war. In November 1980, President-elect Ronald Reagan declared that Vietnam had been a "noble cause." The war had been lost only because of American "self-imposed restraints." We had not been sufficiently "tough," but no longer would be weak or timid. Reagan promised to "rebuild" our "defense" capabilities. He announced a new plan for spending \$750 billion for the military. A new Rapid Deployment Force was created for quick transport to the Third World. We were ready to go to war again. For months the news media talked and wrote about how the United States had finally gotten over the "Vietnam Syndrome." Never was the question raised about just what it was we were over. The Vietnam part of the "Vietnam Syndrome" was left blank. Perhaps the war was just a normal part of growing up for a young nation, a childhood disease like chicken pox, which leaves behind some small scars but builds character. In this way a strange consensus developed: it was okay to use the war as a point of departure for almost any discussion—whether on literature or Greek tragedy or foreign policy—but only as long as you didn't talk about the war itself. In this way the war became progressively displaced and repressed at the same time it was written about.²⁸⁴

To talk about it without talking about it is what Geoff Simons meant when he examined the war as an idea, and not an event, in his discussion of Vietnam Syndrome. At this point it is necessary to reiterate that the purpose of this dissertation is not to regurgitate old information in order to produce some cathartic exorcism in the reaction of the reader, nor to hoodwink the reader into normatively deploring any particular leader, but rather to make the case that the archetype of the stoic statesman rationally maximizing the utility-function in the

²⁸⁴ James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 5-6.

pursuit of a static, materially determined national interest is an inaccurate description of a much more human, much more complicated process. These foreign-policy blunders were chosen for case studies in part to illustrate that process.

If Vietnam Syndrome died with the perceived success of the 1991 Gulf War to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, the Iraq War resurrected the ghosts of Vietnam, as George H.W. Bush's multilateral effort to establish his "new world order," which accomplished its admittedly limited objectives, descended into George W. Bush's seemingly interminable tempest in the form of the Iraq War, perhaps the most egregious foreign-policy blunder in the history of the United States in terms of the national interest—only time will tell. While there is very little in common between the international conditions, motivations for *choosing* the particular country of conflict, or political climate of these two blunders, they nevertheless demonstrate in conjunction that two features remain immutable in U.S. foreign policy: the pursuit of the grand strategy of preponderance and the assumption that with great power comes the capacity to dictate the sociopolitical terms of other states. Gibson writes of the explosion of literature on the Vietnam War from 1983 onward (after eight years of mourning, presumably), "It was as if a legendary monster or unholy beast had finally been captured and was now on a nationwide tour."²⁸⁵ Along would come another monster exactly two decades later, and it now appears to be spawning new monsters of ever-increasing ferocity...

²⁸⁵ Gibson 1986, 2.

CHAPTER 6

The Iraq War: FPDM Prisms and the Man Behind the Curtain

The coalition did not act in Iraq because we had discovered dramatic new evidence of Iraq's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. We acted because we saw existing evidence in a new light through the prism of our experience on 9/11.²⁸⁶

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld
Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee, July 2003

I'm here for a reason, and this is how we're going to be judged.²⁸⁷

President George W. Bush prior to the Iraq War

Part I. FPE

Criterion I. Degree of fruition of primary and secondary objectives

On March 21, 2003, the day after the invasion of Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld set forth the preliminary goals of the invasion, or what he termed "aims and objectives we have for the days ahead:"

Our goal is to defend the American people, and to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and to liberate the Iraqi people. Coalition military operations are focused on achieving several specific objectives: to end the regime of Saddam Hussein by striking with force on a scope and scale that makes clear to Iraqis that he and his regime are finished. Next, to identify, isolate and eventually eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, production capabilities, and distribution networks. Third, to search for, capture, and drive out terrorists who have found safe harbor in Iraq. Fourth, to collect such intelligence as we can find related to terrorist networks in Iraq and beyond. Fifth, to

²⁸⁶ Todd Purdum, *A Time of Our Choosing: America's War in Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2003), 263.

²⁸⁷ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 57.

collect such intelligence as we can find related to the global network of illicit weapons of mass destruction activity. Sixth, to end sanctions and to immediately deliver humanitarian relief, food and medicine to the displaced and to the many needy Iraqi citizens. Seventh, to secure Iraq's oil fields and resources, which belong to the Iraqi people, and which they will need to develop their country after decades of neglect by the Iraqi regime. And last, to help the Iraqi people create the conditions for a rapid transition to a representative self-government that is not a threat to its neighbors and is committed to ensuring the territorial integrity of that country.²⁸⁸

The following day, General Tommy Franks, commanding general of the invasion force, reiterated these objectives, promising, "This will be a campaign unlike any other in history, a campaign characterized by shock, by surprise, by flexibility, by the employment of precise munitions on a scale never before seen, and by the application of overwhelming force."²⁸⁹ Use of the phrase "overwhelming force" was clearly intentional, given that Colin Powell and other military leaders had demanded just that as one of the lessons of the Vietnam War and a cornerstone of modern American war doctrine. Of course, these were all tactical objectives, as the Defense Department is charged with carrying out military policy, not creating it. As Harry Summers summarized of a particular attitude prevalent in the military, "The army doesn't make strategy." While this is technically true, the words and preferences of defense officials inevitably do affect policy to a certain degree. Both the military and the intelligence community

²⁸⁸ Defense Department Briefing with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and General Richard Myers, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 21, 2003, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2003/03/20030322094327relhcie0.3604242.html#axzz4Mhdb564t>

²⁸⁹ "Franks Holds Press Briefing," CNN Transcripts, March 22, 2003, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0303/22/se.22.html>

would become politically enmeshed in the Iraq War to a further extent than defined in their charters with respect to WMD, troop levels, and other matters. But in terms of establishing the war narrative, the Bush Administration set the tone. Its lofty rhetoric emphasized a more holistic approach to the Middle East more broadly, with establishing a "liberated," pro-Western Iraq as its primary policy piece within the regional grand-strategic puzzle.

Even though this war narrative was highly idealized in its choice of concepts and words, policy with regard to Iraq did establish particular objectives, including those specified by Rumsfeld and Franks. Chief among them, at least in terms of priority, was of course removing Saddam Hussein from power. This turned out to be the only aspect of the Iraq War that met or exceeded expectations. Coalition forces reached and secured Baghdad in one of the most rapid advances of modern warfare, and did so with remarkably few casualties. It would be difficult to classify this phase of the war as anything other than a resounding success. It took only days to reach Baghdad, and less than three weeks to sweep the country. This comprehensive battlefield accomplishment was due to myriad factors: weak morale in the Iraqi military and the decrepit state of its infrastructure; Saddam Hussein's strategic miscalculations and obsessive focus on internal rather than external threats; the rapid advance on Baghdad, leaving few opportunities for coordination of a counterattack; the skill and firepower of American ground forces; and the strength of aerial bombing. All of

these factors were compounded by the relative simplicity of fighting a war in the desert for the side with superior firepower.²⁹⁰

Given the open terrain and the shortcomings in Iraqi military capabilities, declarations by military officials that characterize the campaign as one of the most daring and impressive in history seem somewhat overstated. Nevertheless, this objective was in practical terms a clear success, even though Saddam Hussein and many other high-level targets were not captured until months into the conflict. The "shock and awe" aspect of the campaign may or may not have had an impact on Iraqi defections; it seems likely that defections would have been high regardless. What the blitzkrieg ground assault and leadership-and-chain-of-command aerial targeting did accomplish was the immediate decapitation of the Hussein regime, even if some of its leaders managed to flee for the time being. Many of the faces on the deck of cards representing wanted regime members American soldiers were dealt would evade capture for some time, but within days few were able to affect the country's situation in any meaningful way. What the otherwise successful blitzkrieg did not address was the total accounting of all Iraqi military forces, many of which were bypassed, a maneuver which itself bypassed standard military procedure—never allow the enemy to roam free and occupy your flank, even in a full frontal assault that quickly captures the flag. Many of these chickens would come home to roost, especially after the dismissal of the Iraq Army.

²⁹⁰ Stephen Hosmer, "Why the Iraqi Resistance to the Coalition Was So Weak," Rand, 2007, iii, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG544.pdf

The most important medium-term goal, and the fundamental muse for the war, was the location, capture, and disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). But the saga of Iraq's nonexistent WMD quickly became a game with a cat a no mouse as the aloof statements of Bush Administration officials promised WMD but delivered none. The narrative justifying the war therefore became 'the man behind the curtain' as the Bush Administration moved to justify the war on other grounds. This enormous balloon deflated a little bit each week as the American public and the world waited for a train to arrive that had never left the station.

This anticlimactic end was the result of a long chain of means whose mass-public forum began on February 5th, 2003, when Secretary of State Colin Powell, perhaps the most admired Bush Administration official and the one whose word carried the most legitimacy, made the official case for Iraq's pursuit of WMD in an impassioned speech at the United Nations. Powell claimed unequivocally that "the facts and Iraq's behavior show that Saddam Hussein and his regime are concealing their efforts to produce more weapons of mass destruction."²⁹¹ This assessment of the situation on the ground failed to convince many heads of state, including many allies in Western Europe, who found the assertions exaggerated and unworthy of a major military confrontation. Concerns among allies were compounded by Hans Blix's testimony at the same body nine days later, which was largely contradictory. Blix testified, "More than 200

²⁹¹ "Full Text of Colin Powell's Speech," *The Guardian*, February 5, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/feb/05/iraq.usa>

chemical and more than 100 biological samples have been collected at different sites," which produced no prohibited samples.²⁹²

The multilateralist element of the Bush Administration led by Colin Powell did manage to get Resolution 1441 passed, "Recognizing the threat Iraq's non-compliance with Council resolutions and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles poses to international peace and security."²⁹³ The resolution was left intentionally vague so as to receive a larger coalition of support and to deny anti-war leaders in the United Nations and the United States language with which to claim that Iraq was in fact complying with that and prior resolutions. In fact, the first declaration within the resolution was to recognize prior resolutions Iraq had been in violation of. Although roundly questioned the world over, Powell's assertions were consistent with virtually every public statement made theretofore by the Bush Administration.

President Bush's 2003 State of the Union Address, in which he famously singled out Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as an "axis of evil," also contained a false report of the soon-to-be infamous 'sixteen words:' "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."²⁹⁴ Later, the Bush Administration recognized that the report was inaccurate, and dropped it from the rhetorical casus belli. Generally speaking,

²⁹² "Briefing of the Security Council, on 25 November 2002: Executive Chairman's Visit to Baghdad," United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspections Commission, http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/new/pages/security_council_briefings.asp

²⁹³ Resolution 1441, United Nations Security Council, November 8, 2002, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/1441.pdf>

²⁹⁴ State of the Union Address, January 28, 2003, White House of President George W. Bush, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/01/print/20030128-19.html>

however, the Administration avoided specifics, proliferating in general terms the charge that Iraq was aggressively pursuing WMD and partnering with terrorists.

These claims were based in large part on the now-declassified October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), *Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, which stated categorically: "Since inspections ended in 1998, Iraq has maintained its chemical weapons effort, energized its missile program, and invested more heavily in biological weapons; in the view of most agencies, Baghdad is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program."²⁹⁵ The British government's public claims were almost identical to U.S. claims, as well as being equally vague. Tony Blair wrote in the Foreword to his government's version of the U.S. NIE, the 2002 *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*: "What I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, that he continues in his efforts to develop nuclear weapons, and that he has been able to extend the range of his ballistic missile programme. I also believe that, as stated in the document, Saddam will now do his utmost to try to conceal his weapons from UN inspectors."²⁹⁶

However, declassified documents reveal that the certainty with which Saddam Hussein was assumed to be in possession of WMD was greatly inflated by both intelligence officials and Bush Administration officials. In fact, Defense

²⁹⁵ *Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, National Intelligence Estimate, October 2002, 5, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB129/nie.pdf>

²⁹⁶ *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*, Digital National Security Archives, George Washington University, 3, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB80/wmd11.pdf>

Secretary Donald Rumsfeld estimated the low end of that certainty to be 0%, writing in a memo to Joint Chiefs Chairman Richard Meyers: "Please take a look at this material as to what we don't know about WMD. It is big. Our assessments rely heavily on analytic assumptions and judgment rather than on hard evidence. Our knowledge of the Iraq nuclear weapons program is based largely—perhaps 90%—on analysis of imprecise intelligence."²⁹⁷

The job of the intelligence community is to use hard evidence to make an assessment with a specified level of confidence, not to make assumptions based on a lack of hard evidence and peddle them as certainty. In 2004, weapons inspector Charles Duelfer simply stated, "Saddam Hussein ended the nuclear program in 1991 following the Gulf War," and "There were no credible indicators that Baghdad resumed production."²⁹⁸ But as with the adage that statistics can be inferred to produce any conclusion, so too can 'credible indicators' be produced in intelligence where there exists a viewpoint unwilling to accept their nonexistence. Confirmation bias plagued WMD intelligence gathering and analysis at every step of the way because Bush Administration officials pressed the CIA for confirming evidence and systematically dismissed and discredited disconfirming evidence.

²⁹⁷ Memo from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to General Richard Meyers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 9, 2002, Digital National Security Archives, <https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2016/02/03/colbert-uses-declassified-doc-to-grill-rumsfeld-it-is-big/>

²⁹⁸ "Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD," September 30, 2004, https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004

"Conclusion 1" of the March 2013 "Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction" states: "Most of the major key judgments in the Intelligence Community's October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), *Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, either overstated, or were not supported by, the underlying intelligence reporting. A series of failures, particularly in analytic trade craft, led to the mischaracterization of the intelligence."²⁹⁹ This metric for evaluation therefore can only be considered a monumental failure, since the most significant justification for war was null and void before the war ever began. To make matters worse, the intelligence community failed miserably at its two most important tasks, remaining apolitical and producing solid intelligence. The Bush Administration had inflated the threat to such an extent that the lines between the actual intelligence and the claims made about Iraq's WMD became so blurred as to be immeasurable. The Administration thus shifted its rhetoric to other justifications for war in Iraq, but by that time, there was a new problem in Iraq and public attention shifted to it: rampant insecurity.

The final goal enunciated by Secretary Rumsfeld was "to help the Iraqi people create the conditions for a rapid transition to a representative self-government that is not a threat to its neighbors and is committed to ensuring the territorial integrity of that country." This is an extremely vague reference to the absolute imperative of security and stability operations. Curiously, and highly

²⁹⁹ "Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq," Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Digital National Security Archives, George Washington University 1, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB254/doc12.pdf>

problematically, nowhere under the veneer of his eight objectives is a concern over security even mentioned in any substantive terms. But insecurity in fact became the *significant harm to the national interest* that a simple toppling of the regime and exfiltration from a safe, secure country left behind would never had entailed had it been quickly and effectively achieved. As many people had predicted before the invasion, the drive to the capitol proved to be a fairly easy task short-term against the dilapidated Iraqi military, while the secure occupation of the country would become a virtually insurmountable challenge long-term.

The Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) did manage to establish some basic services, but never retained enough resources to completely fulfill this task.³⁰⁰ The mixed success with which retired General Jay Garner oversaw Iraq in March and April of 2003 soon gave way to the leadership of Ambassador Paul Bremer III on May 1, when he was charged with developing a Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). He subsequently incorporated Iraqi leaders into the Authority to cooperate in formation of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), which took the baton from the CPA in July, just as the insurgency was picking up steam. The prevailing environment rapidly turned into "a local political power struggle overlaid with sectarian violence and fueled by fanatical foreign jihadists and persistent criminal opportunists."³⁰¹ This power

³⁰⁰ Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, (Cornell University Press, 2006), 18.

³⁰¹ Bruce Pirnie and Edward O'Connell, "Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2006)," RAND, 2008, iv, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG595.3.pdf

struggle and the American-Iraqi campaign to establish security is detailed in OPM Indicators II and III.

While the idea behind foreign policy evaluation is to assess any given foreign policy as it relates to the national interest, there is no way of avoiding the intersection between the foreign policy in objective terms and the foreign policy as perceived by the group of people promulgating it. In the case of the Iraq War, that group was primarily made up of the Bush Administration, and the perception of the foreign policy from the view of its core group of individuals was highly idealized and in fact almost cavalier toward how it related to the national interest. This is simply because it did not relate to the national interest in real terms. The United States stood little to gain in Iraq, and in fact the country is now much more tied to the national interest (in a highly problematic fashion) than at any time in history, including the 1991 Gulf War. It was therefore marketed in ideational terms to the American public and Congress, who accepted the connection between Iraq and the national interest on those grounds. However, this was not an act of simple deception, but of self-deception. While the progenitors of the Iraq War did in fact manipulate the truth and lie about the threat posed by Iraq, its supposed WMD, and its ties to groups that meant to threaten the United States, they believed that they could successfully remake the Middle East in a more modern, Western-friendly image, and that this would benefit the national interest.

The Iraq War was intended by its neoconservative protagonists to symbolize the zenith of the American social-engineering project in the Middle East. Instead, it now represents a nadir above which it would never reach.

Assessing this metric provides both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, there can be little doubt that toppling the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein did indeed motivate revolutionary and progressive people in other countries in the region, as the Arab Spring has demonstrated. On the other hand, the current conditions within Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the region signify that in no way has the Middle East in fact been democratized. Instead, extant U.S. allies have largely maintained their sociopolitical *status quo ante*, while sectarian strife has transformed from a dormant problem into a malignant regional firestorm.

As the architect of the Iraq War, the United States now finds its national interest transposed over a region in a manner much more acute than prior to 2003. Because of its position as the originator of this social-engineering project, the United States has now been forced to engage even further with the region just as the motivation to do so among the American citizenry is fading and just as the "Asia pivot" is meant to be hitting full stride. There is still not a single democracy in the Middle East.³⁰² Dictatorships and kingdoms that were U.S. allies prior to 2003 remain just as dictatorial, and U.S. enemies (chiefly Iran) have become emboldened by their influence in Iraq and Syria and the response against the Iraq War.

The ideational component of the Iraq War, which was its primary component, can therefore only be assessed as an utter failure. The message

³⁰² Israel is technically a democracy, but the status of non-Jews and non-Israelis within Israel increasingly problematizes its definition as a democracy.

sent by removing Saddam Hussein from power by military force, especially via the lightning-quick "shock and awe" military campaign that so swiftly removed his authority, may indeed have been received by other potential adversaries, including Iran and North Korea, that had been singled out by President Bush in his 2002 State of the Union Address. However, Iraq's descent into chaos and insurgency have all but eroded any victory in perception that lightning advance may have created. Furthermore, North Korea continues to flaunt its nuclear weapons program in the face of impotent U.S. threats against it, and Iran has taken control of the helm of the securitization effort in Iraq. In virtually every conceivable way, the Iraq War produced exactly the outcomes it meant to preclude in Iraq, in the region, and throughout the world.

In time, as WMD were not found and the justification for the war shifted, one alternative narrative became the need to "fight them over there so that we don't have to fight them here." This justification was one of a plethora of alternative justifications from mid-2003 onward, which included everything from humanitarian imperatives to hedging against Iran. Even if we set aside for a moment who "they" are supposed to imply, this is a highly problematic way of thinking, and yet the few policy and pundit stragglers that still cling to the Iraq War as a "success" consistently invoke this philosophy as evidence for why the United States has not been attacked again in any significant way since 9/11. But first, it is impossible to prove a counterfactual, so there is no way of establishing this as fact. Second, this assertion does not follow sound logic. The U.S. presence in Iraq was opposed by the Muslim community, and therefore

exacerbated the U.S. image problem in it rather than helping it. It is true that jihadists were attracted to Iraq because of the American presence, but since there were more of them available do to its presence, there is no way to link that presence with a lack of presence of the home front.³⁰³ Third, the price paid to dislodge Saddam Hussein in blood, treasure, and prestige, detailed in FPE Criterion III, was so enormous so as to render the argument moot. Indeed, more American soldiers perished in Iraq than civilians in the 9/11 attacks, and now continue to perish in the war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Criterion II. Corollary strategic consequences

On June 10, 2014, the gigantic expenditure of time, money, soldiers, and political capital invested by the United States in Iraq largely dissipated in days when a wayward band of Sunni jihadists that came to be known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, after only four days of fighting.³⁰⁴ In the hundred days between that date and September 23, when the United States began airstrikes on ISIS in Syria, the group established a self-described caliphate that covered hundreds of square miles between northwestern Iraq and eastern Syria, defeating the Iraqi army, the Kurdish Peshmerga, and the Syrian army on multiple fronts with adept military

³⁰³ The term 'jihadist' is used here as an admittedly generic term for a militant motivated by Islamist fundamentalism. It does not represent any singular individual or group. In the case of Iraq, it generally signifies a Salafi jihadist, whether Iraqi or foreign national.

³⁰⁴ 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria,' 'Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant' (the Obama Administration's favored term), and 'Islamic State' all refer to the same group. The term 'Islamic State' has been utilized by the group to appeal to would-be jihadists beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria.

tactics, ferocious battlefield tenacity, and a systematic campaign of execution, extortion, and terrorism that enveloped everything and everyone within its path. It instilled fear into anyone who opposed it via summary executions, public beheadings, crucifixions, torture, and a highly public media campaign to proliferate its name, purpose, efficacy, and ruthlessness. For one analyst, the word that best described the group that seemed to so revel in violence for the sake of violence was "bloodlust."³⁰⁵

ISIS successfully assumed the mantle of the only Sunni force capable of defending the faith against the Shia oppression of the Iraqi government, solidifying the sectarian rift unleashed by the U.S. invasion of Iraq a decade earlier. In desperate times, people back a winner, and ISIS, in spite of its austerity and brutality, seemed the only force capable of advancing Sunni interests in the face of the Baghdad government's Shia domination. While the group is certainly not universally praised among Sunnis, in large part due to the ruthless nature of its 'governance,' a nontrivial portion of the Sunni community within Iraq either openly supported it or tacitly approved of it as a wedge against the perceived inside-out power grab that replaced Sunni Saddam Hussein with a host of Shia partisans in Baghdad. The same is often true in Syria, where "ISIS is more popular in the Sunni towns and villages they have captured around Aleppo than many other rebel groups that are halfway to being bandits."³⁰⁶ In the wasteland of anarchy, fear alone is enough to stimulate inhabitants to back the

³⁰⁵ "The Rise of ISIS," Frontline documentary, October 28, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/rise-of-isis/>

³⁰⁶ Cockburn 2015, vi.

group that appears to be winning, even in the case that it is frowned upon ideologically—to resist can often mean mass slaughter, and ISIS has shown little restraint in that regard.

One of the most dire admonitions against a military intervention to topple Saddam Hussein was the concern that removing the regime, which had successfully (if brutally) asserted authority in the country, would expose a centuries-old sectarian rift within Iraq between Sunni, Shia, and Kurd; the Sunni-Shia divide dates all the way back to the death of Muhammad in year 632 of the Common Era. Even before the rise of ISIS, this fear had been realized in the form of Shia death squads operating with either the implicit approval of or direct support from the Iraqi government battling it out with disparate Sunni Arab tribesmen. In the early years of the insurgency, loose bands of militias targeted Sunni leaders, with Sunni groups forming in defense to retaliate.

By 2006, even Sunni groups that were "heavily armed and lightly supervised" were collaborating with the Shia-dominated government to facilitate extrajudicial killings in Sunni-dominated areas, while Shia death squads operated freely in Shia-dominated areas, in both rural and urban areas alike.³⁰⁷ The insecurity that took hold after the 2003 invasion led directly to the alienation of Sunnis, the bitterness of ex-army soldiers that had been disbanded by Paul Bremer's wholesale anti-Baathist purges, and the humiliating treatment of detainees in the invasion's aftermath. These nationalists and former Ba'athists

³⁰⁷ Dexter Filkins, "Armed Groups Propel Iraq Toward Chaos," *The New York Times*, May 24, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/24/world/middleeast/24security.html>

either partnered with foreign jihadists or fought them for the authority to fight the American-Iraqi government alliance. Many of the core fighters that would eventually form ISIS had been detained together at the U.S. prison at Camp Bucca, including Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al-Badri, who came to be known by his nom de guerre Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the organization's 'caliph.'³⁰⁸

By the time ISIS had conquered vast swaths of Iraq and Syria, leading to a consolidation of territory covering 80,000 square kilometers by the end of 2014, sectarian tensions had become so entrenched that going by Weber's definition of a state as having achieved the monopolization of violence left Iraq without a state at all.³⁰⁹ The current security situation in Iraq is dire, and the long-term outlook may be even more precarious (while government forces have made slow advances on Mosul and other ISIS strongholds, long-term sectarian strife is far from solved). The nonstate armed groups on both sides of the Sunni-Shia divide that emerged following the 2003 invasion and subsequent insurgency continue to operate at will. The force charged with liberating northwestern Iraq from ISIS—the same force that melted in the face of its advance—the Iraqi army, is incapable of retaking Mosul without significant help, and often even direction, from Shia militias backed by Iran and their leader on the ground, Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Quds force.

³⁰⁸ Terrence McCoy, "How the Islamic State Evolved in an American Prison," *Washington Post*, November 4, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/11/04/how-an-american-prison-helped-ignite-the-islamic-state/>

³⁰⁹ "Islamic State's Caliphate Shrinks by 14% in 2015," IHS Jane's, Monday, December 21, 2015, <http://press.ihs.com/press-release/aerospace-defense-security/islamic-states-caliphate-shrinks-14-percent-2015>

While a delicate balance currently exists between the Iraqi government, its Shia militias, Iranian commanders and fighters, the small contingent of U.S. Special Operations troops, and the Kurds, this balance will likely evaporate as ISIS is destroyed and Iraq returns to its previous state of virtual anarchy between its rival factions. That these groups are currently allied to fight a common enemy is not to suggest that the alliance is stable even in the short term: the Asaib Ahl al-Haq militia, known as the League of the Righteous, recently warned on its television channel, "If the U.S. doesn't withdraw its forces immediately, we will deal with them as forces of occupation."³¹⁰ When territory has been successfully taken back from ISIS, extrajudicial reprisal killings, torture, unlawful arrests, and wanton destruction of property have followed in its wake, blurring the moral war between ISIS and its multifarious adversaries.³¹¹ While the heinous nature of ISIS terrorism and its sleek usage of media make it profoundly clear how barbaric the group is, there is still no obvious moral high ground anywhere to be found. The Iraqi state and its proxies seem at best the lesser of two evils.

While ISIS is under siege in Iraq, it still operates relatively freely in Syria, where a half-million people lost their lives between 2011 and 2015, 11.5% of

³¹⁰ Raf Sanchez, "Iran-Backed Shia Militia Says it will Fight U.S. Marines Deployed to Iraq," *The Telegraph*, March 21, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/12200172/Iran-backed-Shia-militia-says-it-will-fight-US-Marines-deployed-to-Iraq.html>

³¹¹ "Ruinous Aftermath: Militia Abuses Following Iraq's Recapture of Tikrit," Human Rights Watch, September 20, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/09/20/ruinous-aftermath/militias-abuses-following-iraqs-recapture-tikrit>

Syria's population.³¹² Whereas the rebellion against dictator Bashar al-Assad may have otherwise been comprised of ordinary, relatively secular (or at least non-jihadist) groups, ISIS has largely intimidated all others to become the primary opposition force. The fact that Russia has largely avoided targeting ISIS in Syria, as Assad views the other groups as more threatening to his regime given that the United States and others oppose both he and ISIS, has only allowed them to further consolidate their rule there. While U.S. airpower has proven sufficient to prevent the group from traveling freely in armored columns (often made up of U.S.-supplied Humvees and tanks abandoned by or lost from the Iraqi army), it has proven equally insufficient to prevent it from maintaining its authority and buttressing its newly conquered territories.

Another significant problem with challenging Assad in Syria was recently described by Vice President Joe Biden in typically blunt Biden-esque terms: "Our allies poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against al-Assad," leading directly to the proliferation of groups each of these allies (specifically Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, or each of the Sunni Gulf states) is now in direct confrontation with, such as al-Nusra and ISIS.³¹³ To summarize, the security vacuum left by the 2003 toppling of Saddam Hussein, whose regime had successfully established order in Iraq and who posed no threat to the United

³¹² "Confronting Fragmentation," Syrian Center for Policy Research, February 11, 2016, <http://scpr-syria.org/publications/policy-reports/confronting-fragmentation/>

³¹³ "Vice President Delivered Remarks on Foreign Policy," Harvard University, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcKVctg5dxM>

States or any direct threat to its allies, has been filled in both Iraq and Syria by forces defiantly opposed to the United States and its interests, most notably international Sunni jihadists, Iranian-backed militias, and the Russo-Syrian alliance. This outcome was far from unpredictable and far short of surprising, as the FPE Criterion IV section discusses further.³¹⁴

Criterion III. Cost

Through FY2009, the war cost U.S. taxpayers \$683 billion according to the Congressional Research Service (CRS).³¹⁵ By FY2011, this figure had reached \$784 billion in constant \$FY2011.³¹⁶ However, this figure includes only direct combat costs and excludes the substantial costs of reconstruction assistance, diplomatic security, and all other costs by all agencies apart from the Department of Defense (DoD). Other estimates put the cost much higher, even when only considering direct military costs. Economist Joseph Stiglitz' exhaustive attempt to quantify the direct and corollary costs of the war estimated the cost of the campaign as *The Three Trillion Dollar War*, producing a book in 2008 of the same name. This estimate included indirect expenses such as caring for disabled veterans, replenishing military hardware, the price of oil, and macroeconomic

³¹⁴ Note: The "Arab Spring," though no doubt influenced somehow by the toppling of the region's most reviled dictator, is not covered in this analysis, as the role between it and the Iraq War is unclear and virtually impossible to establish scientifically.

³¹⁵ Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," Congressional Research Service, September 28, 2009, 4, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf>

³¹⁶ Stephen Daggett, "Costs of Major U.S. Wars," CRS Report for Congress, July 24, 2008, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/108054.pdf>

impact on the American economy.³¹⁷ In 2015, Stiglitz revised that estimate, raising it to an astounding \$5-7 trillion.³¹⁸

In December 2011, the last U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq, belatedly fulfilling a campaign promise by President Obama, and leaving the fledgling Iraqi army to fend for itself. According to the final report of the Special Investigator General for Iraq Reconstruction, the United States spent \$26 billion training, equipping, and staffing the Iraqi military and Iraqi police between 2003 and 2013, in addition to \$34 billion in nonmilitary reconstruction projects.³¹⁹ Iraq itself spent \$41.6 billion between 2011-2014 on its army, which by then totaled 350,000 soldiers.³²⁰ When considering that President Bush's economic advisor projected that the war would cost \$200 billion, and his political advisor Paul Wolfowitz argued that the war would "pay for itself," even the more conservative of these estimates are quite staggering. The Center for Economic and Policy Research has shown that the long-term effect of the post-9/11 military spending increase has damaged the economy by decreasing payroll employment, housing construction, and car sales, raising inflation and interest rates, and diverting

³¹⁷ Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

³¹⁸ "Joe Stiglitz Tells Democracy Now that War Cost Will Reach \$5 to \$7 trillion," October 27, 2015, <http://threetrilliondollarwar.org/2015/10/30/joe-stiglitz-tells-democracy-now-that-war-cost-will-reach-5-to-7-trillion/>

³¹⁹ "Learning From Iraq: A Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction," March 2013, ix, <https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/sigir/20131001083907/http://www.sigir.mil/learningfromiraq/index.html>

³²⁰ Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2015), ii.

precious resources away from sectors of the economy that tend to multiply GDP and standard of living indicators.³²¹ The Costs of War Project at Brown University assembles data on U.S. defense expenditures from 9/11 onward and maintains the following figures as shown in Table 7, with total defense spending totaling \$4.79 trillion, not including interest on previous expenditures and debt:³²²

Table 7: Summary of costs of war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and Homeland Security FY2001-FY2017

Federal appropriations and expenditures	\$Billions¹
Total Dep't of Defense spending on wars ²	1,630
Total State Department and US/AID spending on wars	112
War-related additions to Pentagon base budget ³	733
War-related veterans care and disability ⁴	213
War-related additions to Homeland Security ⁵	548
Interest on Pentagon war appropriations	453
Subtotal FY2001-FY2016 costs⁶	3,689
Estimate of future obligations Incurred for veterans care, FY2016-2053 ⁷	1,000
Dep't of Defense, request for FY2017	60
State Department/USAID, request for FY2017	6
Homeland Security, request for FY2017	37
Total costs to date⁸	4,792
Plus additional cumulative interest on past appropriations (FY2001-2013) by 2053⁹	>7,900

These figures include areas of operation other than Iraq, but Iraq is overwhelmingly the largest expense within them. Brown's Costs of War Project also keeps an estimate of war casualties. 4,489 members of the U.S. military

³²¹ Dean Baker, "The Economic Impact of the Iraq War and Higher Military Spending," Center for Economic and Policy Research, May 2007, 4, http://cepr.net/documents/publications/military_spending_2007_05.pdf

³²² Costs of War Project at the Watson Institute of International Affairs at Brown University, <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/>

died in Iraq between March 2003 and April 2015, along with 12,000 Iraqi military and police, 3,481 U.S. contractors, and 319 allied troops from other countries. It estimates 370,000 "direct war" casualties as a result of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

It is impossible to quantify the damage done to the image of the United States in the world as a result of the functionally unilateral (though technically multilateral) Iraq War, the lack of WMD found, the insecurity the power vacuum caused, and the hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties. While President Bush often trumpeted the "Coalition of the Willing," in reality this consisted of the United Kingdom and a token set of marginal U.S. allies. In the early years of the war, images of prisoners improperly treated and sometimes tortured made headlines around the world. General David Petraeus estimated the total number of detainees to be a whopping 27,000 at the height of detentions, quite a sum considering the lack of proper prison infrastructure and military police trained to control and care for so many prisoners. The photos that emerged from Abu Ghraib, the ongoing detentions at Guantanamo, and reports of CIA "extraordinary renditions" and "enhanced interrogation techniques," limited though the programs may have been, produced the perception that torture and excessive and/or illegal detentions were an inherent piece of the global war on terror (GWOT) strategy.

As ISIS began filming the public execution of prisoners, they did so with the prisoners dressed in orange jumpsuits, as Guantanamo Bay prisoners and some Abu Ghraib prisoners had been. The perception within the United States that abuses of prisoners were widespread in Iraq, Afghanistan, and at overseas

interrogation and rendition sites became cemented in 2012 with the release of the *Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program* published by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Based on the review of six million documents reviewed between 2009-2012, its primary finding was that "The CIA's use of its enhanced interrogation techniques was not an effective means of acquiring intelligence or gaining cooperation from detainees."³²³

Robert Kagan, one of the founding fathers of neoconservatism, lamented only one year removed from that ideological movement's centerpiece that "For the first time since World War II, a majority of Europeans has come to doubt the legitimacy of U.S. power and of U.S. global leadership." He described the shell of multilateralism that made consensus on Iraq-related issues difficult, as opposed to the 1991 Gulf War when multilateralism was pursued in earnest:

The situation was quite different in Iraq: although President George W. Bush bragged that his coalition was ultimately larger than the one his father created in 1991, it was of much lower quality. No Arab countries were willing to associate themselves with the occupation; many big NATO allies, such as France and Germany, similarly refused to join, and some that did, such as Spain, withdrew under pressure from domestic opinion or terrorist acts. The United States was wary of the United Nations in the weeks and months following the invasion and was not eager to seek a broader role for the organization until its plans started unraveling in late 2003.³²⁴

³²³ *Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program*, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, December 13, 2012, 2, https://fas.org/irp/congress/2014_rpt/ssci-rdi.pdf

³²⁴ Robert Kagan, "America's Crisis of Legitimacy," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 83, No. 2 (March/April 2004), 239.

The backlash against both the decision to go to war in Iraq and the feigned justification for doing so was fierce among both allies and adversaries. Indeed, the unification of these allied and adversarial actors would turn out to be one of the most incisive shortcomings of the war effort as well as its aftermath. Germany, France, China, Russia, Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, and Mexico all aligned against the war, with only a token level of support from countries eventually comprising the "Coalition of the Willing." Prime Minister Tony Blair, as the only prominent ally with a substantial enough military to substantively support the war, was to suffer mightily in political terms for years afterward.

Blair, who was vilified within Great Britain as a pawn of President Bush, successfully managed to convince the president with the support of Colin Powell that the United States could not afford to go it alone, and that he needed to go to the United Nations in order to win the backing of his British constituents. He was surprised to find Vice President Cheney alongside the president when he arrived at Camp David to discuss his multilateralist agenda, but the conclusion to at least attempt a U.N. resolution was eventually settled upon.³²⁵ The alienation felt by nations disregarded in the decision-making process produced an environment in which "the impression of a belligerent United States was reinforced by Washington's half-hearted approach to the U.N., the timetable of which was

³²⁵ Giles Radice, *Trio: Inside the Blair, Brown, Mandelson Project* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 158.

driven by military imperatives rather than diplomatic necessities."³²⁶ Having had the world behind it after the devastating attacks of 9/11, by 2003 virtually all of that goodwill toward the United States had been squandered.

Criterion IV. Availability and consideration of alternatives

There was enough to dislike about the policy of containing Saddam Hussein and his reign of terror over the Iraq people. When George W. Bush assumed office, lamentations over allowing Hussein to retain his position as dictator of Iraq after the Gulf War continued to reverberate in certain circles around Washington. Although far from an ideal outcome, President George H. W. Bush, along with his military and political advisors and the consultation of allies in the Middle East, had considered it more practical than assuming ownership of the entire country. Although sanctions have been shown to have little effect on the target state except under specific unique conditions, Iraq was particularly susceptible to sanctions given its overreliance on a single export product, oil, and international alienation. Sanctions are most effective where a country is highly dependent on international trade, has limited options in terms of substitutes for export products, and cannot rely on allies to circumvent the sanctions.³²⁷ All of these factors were present in Iraq, leading to an environment in which "the sanctions regime imposed on Iraq was unprecedented in its comprehensiveness,

³²⁶ Theresa Reinold, *Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect: The Power of Norms and the Norms of the Powerful* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 143.

³²⁷ Jean-Marc Blanchard, Edward Mansfield and Norrin M. Ripsman, *Power and the Purse: Economic Statecraft, Interdependence, and National Security* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

severity, and length, and in the enormous human and economic cost which it inflicted."³²⁸

A World Health Organization report assessed that "the quality of health care in Iraq, due to the six-week 1991 war and the subsequent sanctions imposed on the country, has been literally put back by at least 50 years."³²⁹ Every social indicator, from infant mortality and childhood education to life expectancy and rate of infectious disease, had risen dramatically. The war with Iran, the Gulf War, and the subsequent sanctions on the Iraqi economy had devastated the country's oil productivity output, infrastructure, health, and social well-being. Hussein, meanwhile, remained in power with as much of a stranglehold on the country as ever before. While his presence was a thorn in the side of U.S. objectives in the Persian Gulf, he was contained, his military lacked the strength to invade any other state again, and his WMD program had been shut down after the Gulf War.

These obstacles to Hussein posing a serious threat to anyone other than his own people notwithstanding, the Bush Administration would argue convincingly enough to persuade a majority of the American people and members of Congress, with the rubble of the Twin Towers in the rearview mirror, that sanctions had not achieved their objective and should be abandoned in favor of military intervention. After 9/11, and in many ways even before 9/11, the story

³²⁸ Abbas Alnasrawi, "Iraq: Economic Sanctions and Consequences, 1990-2000," *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 22, No. 2 (October 2001), 217.

³²⁹ "The Health Conditions of the Population in Iraq Since the Gulf Crisis," World Health Organization, March 1996, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/59845/1/WHO_EHA_96.1.pdf

of the decision to initiate the Iraq War was never about the delineation and discussion of alternatives, but rather how to sell the war to Congress and the American public and how to win it in the most efficient manner possible. As described by Paul O'Neill, Treasury Secretary under President Bush, the Administration was already on a war footing long before 9/11: "It was all about finding a way to do it. That was the tone of it. The president saying, 'go find me a way to do this.'"³³⁰

In April 1999, United States Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted war games on the "worst case" and "most likely" outcomes of an invasion of Iraq to depose Saddam Hussein. Among its findings were that any invasion force would encounter "rival forces bidding for power," "fragmentation along religious and/or ethnic lines," the antagonization of "aggressive neighbors" (principally Iran), and a "period of widespread bloodshed in which various factions seek to eliminate their enemies."³³¹ It further warned that any tenderfoot state would meet stiff resistance in its attempts to coalesce around a single government and that a swift exit strategy would be complicated by insecurity and sectarian divisions. These games were not conducted with the small, nimble force that Secretary Rumsfeld eventually employed, but with a full 400,000-strong invasion force, the figure that many military leaders later called for in the months prior to the invasion.

³³⁰ Michael Bohn, *Presidents in Crisis: Tough Decisions Inside the White House From Truman to Obama* (New York: Arcade, 2015), 230.

³³¹ Roger Strother, "Post-Saddam Iraq: The War Game," Digital National Security Archives, George Washington University, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB207/>

The other alternative in addition to invasion, of course, was maintenance of the status quo, which meant isolation of Hussein, sanctions, isolated bombing, a no-fly zone, and diplomatic pressure on the regime, which had collectively succeeded in both limiting Hussein to the confines of Iraqi national territory and preventing him from even attempting to initiate a WMD program, from fear that rigorous inspections would reveal just such an activity. As such, the most vociferous voice against maintaining that relatively pacific status quo, Vice President Dick Cheney, made it his mission to undermine just that approach. In speeches to troops, conversations with talk show hosts and pundits, privately to Bush Administration advisors, and in conversations with intelligence officials, he excoriated what he termed "appeasers" and stated repeatedly both that the threat from Hussein and his WMD had to be confronted militarily and that this mission would arrive quickly at a resounding success.

In August of 2002, for example, he told a Veterans of Foreign Wars congregation: "A return of inspectors would provide no assurance whatsoever of his compliance with U.N. resolutions. On the contrary, there is a great danger that it would provide false comfort that Saddam was somehow 'back in the box.'"³³² He paired this menacing opinion with the false claim that "there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies and against us." This claim went beyond any intelligence report, even reports that

³³² "Vice President Speaks at VFW 103rd National Convention," August 26, 2002, The White House of President George W. Bush, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>

assessed that it was likely that the regime had not entirely shut down its WMD programs. The approach to securitizing the Middle East was not invented on the fly by Vice President Cheney or any other Administration official, but rather a direct result of the grand strategy of preponderance expounded by the Bush Administration from its earliest stages, stated in no uncertain terms in the 2002 National Security Statement (NSS) and other official documents and policy statements.

Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia found himself dumfounded at the Senatorial podium on February 12, 2003, when his call to at least discuss the merits of invasion fell on deaf ears: "Listen. You can hear a pin drop. There is no debate. There is no discussion. There is no attempt to lay out for the nation the pros and cons of this particular war. There is nothing."³³³ With no attempt to delineate for the American people why the United States was going to war in Iraq, Byrd summarized in a few simple words the gigantic disconnect between what would become the most costly war since 1945, the most bloody since 1975, and the new breeding ground for Islamist terrorism and the debate about the foreign policy's value. Not only was it not clear how a war in Iraq would affect the national interest—good, bad, or neutral—but Congress barely discussed the matter at all, leaving anyone to guess as to what ought to be gained on such a monumental foreign-policy campaign. In comparison to the lack of intellectual interest in Congress as to what to do with the 'Iraq problem,' it seems somewhat

³³³ "Byrd's Anti-Iraq War Speech," C-Span, February 12, 2003, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4550037/byrds-anti-iraq-war-speech-february-12-2003>

unremarkable that the Bush Administration sought to go to war in Iraq. Many a presidential administration has sought to assert itself in times of crisis by launching a military campaign of some sort against a foreign adversary. What is more remarkable, however, is the aloof capitulation of Congress to invade a sovereign nation with whom the United States had already maintained a persistent, comprehensive, *successful* campaign of political isolation and deterioration of military capabilities.

The determination that the war was inevitable under the leadership at the time does not entirely discount the fact that there were in fact prominent voices warning against the dangers of invading and occupying Iraq. Barack Obama eventually ascended to the presidency based in part on his opposition to the war. In August 2002, Brent Scowcroft, who had been George H. W. Bush's National Security Advisor and maintained close ties to the George W. Bush Administration, argued in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed: "There is scant evidence to tie Saddam to terrorist organizations, and even less to the September 11 attacks. Indeed, Saddam's goals have little in common with the terrorists who threaten us, and there is little incentive for him to make common cause with them."³³⁴ Scowcroft maintained the same reservations that he had when the George H. W. Bush Administration, after much debate, decided to leave Hussein in power rather than take responsibility of the whole of Iraq. After all, who would want such a possession?

³³⁴ Bruce Bueno De Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Spoils of War: Greed, Power, and the Conflict that Made Our Greatest Presidents* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016).

As the war began to become a reality, a group of IR scholars initiated an unprecedented campaign to engage in political activism galvanizing around realist principles that, if adhered to, would reveal the impending conflict as an imprudent misadventure away from thousands of years of empirical evidence in international relations. This movement is particularly noteworthy given the disconnect between theory and praxis in international politics, a disconnect which itself has been the subject of scholarly inquiry and indeed informs this dissertation to a certain degree.³³⁵ In one of the few instances in which the academic community found itself ahead of political events, rather than responding to and debating over their aftermath, dozens of prominent IR academics came out against the war by forming the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy.

No lesser names than Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer, Richard Betts, Jack Snyder, Barry Posen, Stephen Walt, Robert Jervis, Charles Kupchan and many others united to form a platform of dissent against "worrisome imperial trends" that encouraged "other nations to form countervailing coalitions and alliances." The self-described "diverse group of scholars and analysts from across the political spectrum" argued for urgency in resisting the "imperial impulse," given that "imperial policies can quickly gain momentum, with new interventions begetting new dangers and, thus, the demand for further actions." Based on the Founding Fathers' notion that "republic and empire are

³³⁵ See, for example, Joseph Leggold and Miroslav Nincic, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: International Relations Theory and the Issue of Policy Relevance* (Columbia University Press, 2001), 4 and Joseph Nye, "Bridging the Gap between Theory and Policy," *Political Psychology* Vol. 29, No.4 (August 2008), 593-603.

incompatible,” the flagship statement of the Coalition assailed elements of the 'Bush Doctrine' and the 2002 NSS, particularly its reliance on preemptive strike, for its pursuit of a foreign policy “inconsistent with our traditions and values and contrary to our true interests.”³³⁶ While realists formed the basis of this assembly, liberal scholars also filled out its ranks, representing an unprecedented partnership of inter-paradigm perspectives that sought to transcend the theory-policy gap for a particular moral purpose.

Nevertheless, the voices of dissent were drowned out within the Bush Administration, in Congress, and in the public. Richard Haas, then director of policy planning at the State Department and aide to Colin Powell, recalled of a July 2002 conversation with Condoleezza Rice in her office in the West Wing, "I raised this issue about were we really sure that we wanted to put Iraq front and center at this point, given the war on terrorism and other issues. And she said, essentially, that the decision's been made, don't hold your breath."³³⁷ Before the NIE that Congress subsequently requested in September 2002, and without consultation with the Secretary of State, a select few Bush Administration officials had decided on going to war in Iraq. But when this was taking place, "no one had yet presented the president with a full range of options," and a Bush aide simply described the FPDM process with regard to Iraq as, "Sometimes, decisions happen as much as they're made."³³⁸ This way of thinking is eerily reminiscent of

³³⁶ "The Perils of Empire," Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy, 2003, realisticforeignpolicy.org

³³⁷ Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting It Right* (New York: Owl Books, 2006), 157.

³³⁸ Purdum 2003, 263.

the faulty FPDM that led to the Vietnam War. A decision is not a sentient entity and does not propagate itself; an individual or group of individuals must *create* it, even if those individuals are informed by certain conditional constraints. Saddam Hussein had been a dormant threat for more than a decade, and to characterize him as such a grave threat to national security that the decision to invade Iraq made itself is to make a needle out of a haystack.

The encyclopedic British 2016 Chilcot Report, also known as the Iraq Inquiry, found that a thorough examination of alternatives to war was purposively avoided by the Bush Administration.³³⁹ On February 5, the day of Colin Powell's U.N. speech, 20 members of Congress assembled at the Cabinet Room of the White House to hear the case for war against Iraq straight from the camels' mouths of President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The conversation was short on substance and long on blanket concerns about, as well as blanket prescriptions for, potential problems *if* (progressively *when*) war came about. Rice was the typically succinct, vague Bush Administration official: "I don't know what we will find exactly, and what period of time. Blix says he can't tell you they don't have them [WMD]... He's hiding a lot. I'm quite certain he's hiding a lot of it."³⁴⁰ Senator Carl Levin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, was perceptive enough to retort, "Blix also says he can't tell you they have them. You're inconsistent." Nancy Pelosi simply asked,

³³⁹ "The Report of the Iraq Inquiry," Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, July 6, 2016, http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/247921/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_executive-summary.pdf

³⁴⁰ Woodward 2004.

"Is war the best way?" Like many other Congressional leaders, she asked the right questions, but provided no answers of her own, ceding to the Administration. Senator John Warner told National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, "You got to do this and I'll support you, make no mistake. But I sure hope you find weapons of mass destruction because if you don't you may have a big problem." Then-Senator Joe Biden further added, "If we go in and don't find caches, we'll have a serious perception problem." The Senators were thus quite literally "hoping" that there were WMD in Iraq, even while cognizant of the threat that could pose to the invasion force.

The wish to maintain the perception of the moral high ground was obvious, but the "hope" for WMD also exposed an underlying flaw in the FPDM with regard to Iraq. The justification for invading and occupying a Muslim country in the heart of the Middle East was now contingent upon *hoping* for the existence of weapons so terrible that their use would almost certainly cause mass casualties for American troops. The flawed logic went that the perception that the justification for invasion was valid became more important than the actual existence of WMD. But if WMD were not as important as the perception of them, the whole justification would therefore be null and void. Wouldn't Senator Warner and Senator Biden be grateful to find no WMD in Iraq? Their nonexistence would certainly be a relief for the international community. In that fallible logic lay the exposure of a Constructivist threat-perception FPDM marketed as a liberal-realist threat. Iraq did not pose a threat to the United States. Even if it had been in possession of WMD, it is highly likely that Saddam Hussein would have found a

way to make a deal with the Americans to relinquish them, as Iran, Libya, South Africa, Argentina, and other nations have done.³⁴¹ And in fact, he did not possess them, precisely *because* he knew that their possession would justify an invasion.

Indeed, we now know that Hussein was so concerned with the American threat to his regime from the 1991 Gulf War onward that he believed that the CIA would know for certain that his WMD program had been dormant, and that his flaunting of sanctions, threats, and inspections would be accurately interpreted by the CIA as nothing more than hollow saber-rattling.³⁴² And this was in fact the consensus within most of the intelligence community, until an environment was created within it that incentivized WMD evidence from 2001-2003. And yet the consideration to stay the course with sanctions was never really considered by the Bush Administration, and neither Congress nor the American people questioned it. The war path settled on from within, the Bush Administration would then turn outward to contextualize its scope and stakes to the public and Congress via magnifying, distorting, and inventing Iraq's purpose within the U.S. national interest.

³⁴¹ These were of course all very different circumstances. The point being made is that it was not worth it for Saddam Hussein to provoke the United States by maintaining his WMD program. This is not only rational logic, but also backed up by the empirical evidence (see the following footnote). The United States knew that he had not been pursuing WMD for a decade. This did not, however, prevent the production of faulty intelligence by the CIA (with a tacit token of British confirmation), nor the enthusiastic trumpeting of that evidence by the Bush Administration.

³⁴² Valerie Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 48.

Criterion V. Context, scope, and stakes

It is conceivable that the Bush Administration would have pushed for a military intervention in Iraq to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein had the 9/11 attacks never taken place, given the significant influence of neoconservative ideology on the Administration and President George H.W. Bush's history of conflict with Saddam Hussein, including the 1991 Gulf War and an assassination attempt on his life.³⁴³ However, if such a push had ever commenced, it would have met with much stiffer opposition from the general public and from Congress, particularly Democrats. In his 9/11 address, even without having a full picture of what had transpired, President Bush was already preparing for a military response, warning adversaries that "Our military is strong, and it's prepared," and setting forth a striking policy making no demarcation between hostile states or nonstate regimes and terrorism: "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them," the president warned.³⁴⁴

The rhetoric produced by the Bush Administration and its counterparts in Congress made the case that nothing short of the existential physical safety of the American people, and the future of the free world more broadly, were at stake

³⁴³ President Clinton ordered the launch of 23 Tomahawk missiles against the headquarters of the Iraqi Intelligence Service on June 26, 1993, in retaliation for what he called "compelling evidence" that President George H.W. Bush had been targeted for assassination as "directed and pursued by the Iraqi Intelligence Service." David Von Drehle and Jeffrey Smith, "U.S. Strikes Iraq for Plot to Kill Bush," *Washington Post*, June 27, 1993, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/iraq/timeline/062793.htm>

³⁴⁴ "Statement by the President in his Address to the Nation," September 11, 2001, The White House of President George W. Bush, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>

in Iraq. It successfully convinced a majority of the American public, and a majority of U.S. lawmakers, that Saddam Hussein was harboring terrorists and seeking to produce and proliferate WMD, including nuclear, chemical, and biological agents. But the rhetoric did not match the reality, and as with the Vietnam War, but for a different reason, the stakes therefore increased from virtually zero to quite significant once the decision to militarize the policy took shape. Robert Brigham explains how Bush Administration officials were able to "speak to ideals and not to interests" as they made their case to the American people:

The main problem in Iraq, as in Vietnam, was that it was relatively easy for the president to speak to ideals and not interests when laying out his war plan before Congress and the American people. Heightened threat perceptions and the uniquely American impulse to strike out against potential adversaries led the United States to war in Iraq and Vietnam. In both wars, fear and the appeal to ideals all but completely quashed debate. It is remarkable that most members of Congress waited until the 2006 midterm elections to voice any serious opposition to the president's policies in Iraq. Congress finally held hearings in January 2007 to consider the Iraq Study Group Report, but even these deliberations were more publicity events than serious inquiry. Not one major policy revision came out of these investigations.³⁴⁵

The Bush Administration thus made scarce attempt to link Iraq to the national interest in any strategic terms as far as a direct line from Saddam Hussein to 9/11, because it knew there was none. What it did attempt to do was to characterize him as a threat in general terms and link that generalized threat to the security of the United States via the interlocutors of WMD and 9/11. WMD

³⁴⁵ Robert Brigham, *Iraq, Vietnam, and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 32.

thus became the basis for the war, and the pressure on intelligence agencies to produce the "smoking gun" combined with the Bush Administration's eagerness to receive it to foster an atmosphere unresponsive to anti-war evidence. That eagerness was married with the rage of the American people to justify invading Iraq. There was thus ample 'context' with regard to Iraq and the war against terrorism, but that context was invented in extremely ideational terms and made operational by the ignition of the spark of WMD.

Sometime between 1973 and 2003, the United States unlearned many of the primary lessons of the Vietnam War, chief among them how to perceive, conceptualize, and contextualize threats in the FPDM input process, as well as how to apply power in the FPDM output process. W. Edwards Dunning warned, "If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, then you don't know what you're doing." The Bush Administration never described the *process* of getting from 9/11 to WMD to Baghdad. They described their disparate parts and hoped Americans would bite and, in their rage, they sunk their rabid teeth into the *bounded rationality of mission*—where they were going and why they did not know, but only a hand basket would do in those uncertain, vengeful times.

The U.S. government is highly adept at producing exhaustive research reviews that are intended to put a particular policy issue, problem, or threat into the proper context so that FPDM can utilize the most accurate, timely information available. Indeed, that is one of its primary functions. The State Department, the CIA, and other bureaucratic arms can direct great resources to understanding a problem if they are instructed to do so. In both Vietnam and Iraq, perhaps

contrary to the intuition of those who watched each policy fail, this in fact took place. It was less pronounced in Iraq, in part because the shift to focus attention there was so sudden. But there were significant volumes to draw on nonetheless, especially given the history of antagonism between the United States and Iraq as a result of the 1991 Gulf War, sanctions, and aerial bombing. Renewed vigor had been instilled into the teams at foreign policymakers' disposal in 2001, with the aim of being prepared in the event of war, an event which the Bush Administration desired. But with regard to Iraq, as with regard to Vietnam, the enormous studies highlighting the complications in the country were dismissed in favor of highly idealized interpretations of each country's purported purpose within the national-security portion of the national interest of the United States. Dave Halberstam describes an in-depth review of the efficacy of the bombing of North Vietnam in 1964:

It was, in a classic sense, a pure study. It reflected the genuine expertise of the government from deep within its bowels, not its operational functions, not its ambitions, not its success drives. None of the staffers represented vested interests, and none really saw his future being affected by either a positive or negative study. They considered all kinds of bombing, quick tit-for-tat retaliations and massive, prolonged saturation bombing. They worked under intense pressure for about two weeks, eight hours a day, six days a week. When they finished they had a stack of papers about a foot high and the essential answer, which was no, bombing the North would not work. Basically, the study showed that the bombing would fail because the North was motivated by factors which were not affected by physical change and physical damage. The North Vietnamese were not hooked on the idea of economic growth determination (which was one of the great hang-ups of Rostow), but were determined to extend their regime's control to the entire country rather than maintain their industrialization. That was what

motivated them, and that was what they considered their unfinished business. They had invested a great deal in it and they would continue to invest in it; no North Vietnamese government could afford to do less. Hanoi, the study said, enjoyed the nationalist component of unity and the Communist component of control, which made for an organized, unified state.³⁴⁶

Iraq, of course, enjoyed neither unity nor control but for the ruthlessness of Saddam Hussein, thus compounding the obstacles of its occupation. The result of the bombing campaigns in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have been detailed in the previous chapter. The next two sections discuss this phenomenon with regard to Iraq. Bush Administration officials intentionally deceived themselves into believing that Iraq would be a walk in the park, even though none of the empirical evidence suggested that. The more doubt circulated amongst themselves and was subsequently transmitted to the American people, the less faith there would be that the war would be worth it. Both within the higher circles of leadership of the Bush Administration, the CIA, and the DoD, an environment was therefore constructed that would shun disconfirming intelligence and magnify evidence confirming Iraq's WMD program. Any intelligence analyst can testify that where to direct the siphons of information is just as important as deciphering whatever information is siphoned, especially in the information age when there is such an order of magnitude of capturable information.

The United States has the technological tools to learn virtually anything that is learnable, and can sequester virtually any information from virtually any

³⁴⁶ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993).

source if given enough time.³⁴⁷ If the president orders to find a shred of evidence that can be sold to proliferate the idea that some kind of WMD evidence exists, it will be found. If he says to ignore evidence to the contrary, it will be ignored. The seventeen intelligence agencies of the United States government are apolitical in theory; they can be partisan when the wind blows in partisan directions (the president, after all, appoints intelligence officials). The paltry evidence presented by Colin Powell failed to convince American allies of the need to confront Saddam Hussein militarily. The rest of the story is history. That history is further recounted in Part II.

The incentive to believe what was not otherwise believable was eventually processed through the American people and Congressional leaders like sausage through a grinder. By the time the American people realized the truth, Iraq policy had come full circle, and there actually was now a national-security threat coming from within its borders, a threat created by the 2003 invasion. That the Bush Administration turned its back on Afghanistan, where the veritable masterminds of the 9/11 attacks still wandered freely, in order to commit all its resources to a dormant benchwarmer was highly problematic. But that it left Iraq in such a state of sectarian strife and social disrepair that from it would spawn the fiercest terrorist threat in the history of the world is catastrophic. This foreign-policy outcome was a direct result of the strategic ineptitude of the Bush Administration,

³⁴⁷ Recent developments have made this phenomenon abundantly clear. Wiretapping, spying on foreign allies, the NSA programs exposed by Edward Snowden, the U.S.-Israeli Stuxnet virus, and many other tools and electronic surveillance and warfare initiatives are by now well known in the field of cybersecurity. See documentary *Zero Days*, dir. Alex Gibney (2016), for a description of the story of the Stuxnet virus, including a recounting by an intelligence analyst detailing the total sequester of Iran's electronic and nuclear systems by U.S. cyberwarfare technicians.

the tactical dismissal (as opposed to ignorance) of the social conditions within Iraq, the further dismissal of evidence against the case for Iraq possessing WMD, and the acquiescence of a berserk American public and its Congressional leaders seeking revenge in the wrong place. Ignorance must be distinguished from dismissal because of the exhaustive research planning at its disposal (discussed in OPM Indicators I and II). The leaders involved in the FPDM that led to the blunder in Iraq knew they were lying about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, even if they thought they were lying to justify the right choice.

FPE Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that the Iraq War resulted from gross errors in strategic judgment. These errors convinced Congress and the American public that Iraq represented a grave threat to the United States and the free world and had to be "disarmed." The tactical errors made in the invasion's aftermath, such as disbanding the Iraqi army, not furnishing enough troops to secure the country, and assuming that Iraqis would fall in line with the new state exacerbated the strategic error of invading the country in the first place. The war clearly caused significant harm to the national interest in prestige, cost, and direct security concerns in a country that did not present them previously, most notably in the rise of ISIS, which would render the 2011 withdrawal from Iraq a measure lasting only a few short years. The United States is still enmeshed in that conflict in both Iraq and Syria, which itself has metastasized into a stalemate with Russia, Iran

and Syria on the government side and the United States and rebels backed by its Sunni Arab allies on the other.

Despite some startling admonitions based on research and planning within the State Department and other agencies, including the DoD, planning at the highest levels accepted the incorrect declaration by Dick Cheney that U.S. forces would "be greeted as liberators." The corresponding assumption that initial military victory, which was indeed simple enough to achieve, would translate into political stability and the embrace of peaceful democracy fell flat. Once the insurgency took hold, the development of civil society and state-building took a backseat to immediate security concerns, and that culture of fear and suspicion based on sectarian loyalties continues to this day.

From a broad point of view, the challenges posed by global terrorism make traditional threat perception and military power calculations in many ways more difficult than in centuries past. There is little doubt that the Iraq War failed to address 9/11 and exacerbated Islamist fundamentalism by providing a breeding ground for Sunni extremism and feeding the narrative of the American anti-Muslim crusader, but this is an ongoing problem for the United States, and it must learn from the lessons of Iraq if it intends to address this threat effectively in the coming decades. Robert Jervis highlights an important factor in the largely irrational thinking that eventually coalesced around the necessity of immediate invasion:

The difficulties in coping with this fear [of terrorism] may be one reason why the American debate over whether to go to war in Iraq was so feeble. Also important were the president's political skill, the Democrats' desire not to look weak, and—a factor often overlooked—the fact that the draft has been abolished. The immediate danger in the war was to other people and to other people's children. But in another way the debate was typical, in that both proponents and opponents of invading Iraq displayed irrational cognitive consistency, motivated bias, and the refusal to face value trade-offs. Those who favored invasion rated the long term prospects of deterring Saddam as low, the likelihood of a fairly easy military victory as high, the regional effects of overthrowing Saddam as favorable, and the prospects for constructing a stable and even democratic Iraq as bright. Opponents disagreed on all four points. *Only a psychological explanation will account for this pattern, because the four factors being judged are logically independent from each other* (emphasis added). A world in which allowing Saddam to build his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) would be very dangerous is not necessarily one in which overthrowing him would be relatively cheap. But people want to minimize the costs they perceive in their favored policy. *In fact, many of the reasons they gave are rationalizations, not rationales, and come to their minds only after they have reached their decisions* (emphasis added).³⁴⁸

Just as President Johnson's advisors could not contemplate the potentiality that North Vietnam would not capitulate in the face of overwhelming American military might, the United States did not believe its overwhelming military might could not secure Iraq. Sherman Kent described the (short-term) intelligence failure of the Cuban Missile Crisis by simply remembering, "We missed the Soviet decision to put missiles into Cuba because we could not believe that Khrushchev could make such a mistake."³⁴⁹ The 1962 National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Khrushchev was too rational an actor to make

³⁴⁸ Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³⁴⁹ Wilhelm Agrell and Gregory Treverton, *National Intelligence and Science* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 45.

a decision so rash so as to place nuclear weapons 90 miles from Miami at the height of the Cold War. To what extent the word "rational" can be considered scientific depends on the mind of the observer, although some decisions clearly display a certain comfort with risk that others do not (assuming the decision-maker has accurate information and has accurately calculated that risk, which is in itself somewhat of an irrational assumption to make). Nevertheless, what is clear with reference to Iraq, as with Vietnam, is that the pursuit of preponderance fueled the motivation to liberalize the Middle East, and the dismissal of the strength and complexity of the indigenous response was once again greatly underestimated, as Part II brings into fuller light.

Part II. OPM

Indicator I. How U.S. foreign policymakers estimated the capacity of U.S. power to transform the politics of Iraq

President Bush predicted on October 7, 2002, "The lives of Iraqi citizens would improve dramatically if Saddam Hussein were no longer in power, just as the lives of Afghanistan's citizens improved after the Taliban," a view Dick Cheney had echoed two months earlier on August 26:

Regime change in Iraq would bring about a number of benefits to the region. When the gravest of threats are eliminated, the freedom-loving people of the region will have a chance to promote the values that can bring lasting peace. As for the reaction of the Arab 'street,' the Middle East expert Professor Fouad Ajami predicts that after liberation, the streets in Basra and Baghdad are 'sure to erupt in joy the same way the throngs in Kabul greeted the Americans.' Iraq is rich in natural resources and human talent, and

has unlimited potential for a peaceful, prosperous future. Our goal would be an Iraq that has territorial integrity, a government that is democratic and pluralistic, a nation where the human rights of every ethnic and religious group are recognized and protected. In that troubled land, all who seek justice, and dignity, and the chance to live their own lives, can know they have a friend and ally in the United States of America.³⁵⁰

What exactly "justice and "dignity" signify is of course different for an Iraqi than for an American. While it is a fair assessment that most Iraqis would have preferred a different leader, many Sunnis did not, and any regime can only be compared to another. What replaced Saddam Hussein was worse by virtually any measurable, but most importantly that of safety and security. As John Paul Vann had said of South Vietnam, "Security may be ten percent of the problem, or it may be ninety percent, but whichever it is, it's the first ten percent or the first ninety percent." The sweeping platitudes of "freedom-loving" people and "values that can bring lasting peace" said little about the actual social conditions within the state of Iraq. Indeed, that was the whole idea—social engineering from without that could only take place after military dislodgement of the regime. Although elections, a democratic political foundation, and sovereignty were all tremendous achievements in theory, the insecurity and sectarian violence that have characterized Iraq's internal environment since 2003 largely rendered these procedural accomplishments hollow. The enormous cost in blood and treasure also calls into question whether the modest progress in these areas was worth the cost.

³⁵⁰ "Report on Whether Public Statements Regarding Iraq by U.S. Government Officials Were Substantiated by Intelligence Information," Senate Committee on Intelligence, June 2008, 84, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB254/doc11.pdf>

Although President Bush built his campaign on ushering in his domestic-focused 'compassionate conservatism,' the 9/11 attacks allowed the foreign-policy hawks he brought with him into office to espouse a theretofore relatively unknown ideological bent now infamously known as neoconservatism, a set of core ontological assumptions that generally advocate a Manichean view of the world pitting good against evil, a penchant for unilateralism, reliance on military power as the arbiter of international conflict as well as the willingness to use it, disdain for excessive diplomacy, and positioning the United States as the singular preponderant power in the international system with the *unique ability and duty to right the wrongs within it*.³⁵¹ Many Bush Administration advisors entered his cabinet bitter about the way in which the 1991 Gulf War ended, with Saddam Hussein still in power, and viewed the 9/11 attacks as an invitation to correct that error.³⁵² A primer on the historical development and policy nuances of neoconservatism is beyond the scope of this research, but the impact of its tenets on this Indicator cannot be entirely omitted.³⁵³ The stark language of its propounders is unmistakable in documents such as the Bush Administration's 2002 NSS.

The 2002 NSS is one of the most idealistic statements of public policy in the history of official U.S. discourse. It is unequivocal in its declaration of the

³⁵¹ Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11.

³⁵² James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

³⁵³ For an introduction to the history of the movement, see Irving Kristol, *The Autobiography of an Idea: Neoconservatism* (New York: Free Press), 1995.

ideational triumph of Western liberal democratic capitalism and straightforward in its definition of the American purpose in the world. Beyond advocating the doctrine of preemptive strike, itself a violation of some of the basic tenets of realism, it also grossly oversimplified international threats and the strength of state and nonstate challengers, ironically even while propagating a policy of interventionism abroad. As if building on the premise of Francis Fukuyama's "end of history," the NSS declared that the "great struggle of ideas" that pitted "destructive totalitarian visions versus freedom and equality" simply no longer existed and "is over."³⁵⁴ U.S. national-security policy would henceforth "be based on a distinctly American internationalism" with an expanded mandate to utilize "unprecedented—and unequalled—strength and influence in the world" in order to "to help make the world not just safe but better."

Thus, even while dismissing threats to global order as peripheral and incapable of organized challenges, official United States doctrine was enshrined as the singular driver of international affairs and the party responsible for modernizing the world in its own image. Inherently contradictory in this philosophy of international relations is that if the defined threats are so severe, how can it be so that they are easy to confront? Conversely, if the war between good and evil has been won, why is there such a need to reignite it? This logical fallacy has been at the heart of the American grand-strategic pendulum for two centuries. There is perhaps no document in this dissertation that so unites the

³⁵⁴ "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," Department of State, September 17, 2002, 1, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>

pursuit of the grand strategy of preponderance and the overestimation of U.S. power to transform the politics of other states as the 2002 NSS.

The document was neither an anomaly nor a policy statement pulled from a vacuum, but rather a continuation of the modern (postwar) American tradition of assuming (a) that the world tends to divide between good and evil and (b) that only the United States can lead the charge to purge evil from the world. While there is ample precedent for the grand strategy of preponderance since 1945, as well as precedent for the occasional preemptive strike dating back even further, the 2002 NSS perhaps stated these tenets in more unequivocal terms than ever before, especially given the 'unipolar moment' that supposedly existed after 1989 and the enormous wound-up energy of 9/11. Stephen Westphal has found that preemptive attack had been used by Woodrow Wilson in Haiti in 1915, President Lyndon Johnson in the Dominican Republic in 1965, and Ronald Reagan in Granada in 1983. However, Westphal also concludes that "[n]o president has explicitly raised, emphasized, and moved the practice into a stated and used government policy."³⁵⁵

The strike-first mentality, buoyed by the attacks of 9/11, eventually became codified in what came to be considered the 'Bush doctrine,' or the doctrine of preemptive strike, based on the perceived threat from Islamist terrorists, their state or nonstate guardians, and the WMD they could get their hands on. Arthur Schlesinger described the Bush Doctrine as "striking a potential

³⁵⁵ Lt. Col. Stephen D. Westphal, "Counterterrorism Policy of Preventive Action," USA WC Strategy Research Project, April 4, 2003.

enemy unilaterally if necessary; before he has a chance to strike us. War, traditionally as a matter of last resort, becomes a matter of presidential choice. This is a revolutionary change. Mr. Bush replaced a policy aimed at peace through prevention of war by a policy aimed at peace through preventive war."³⁵⁶ But rather than a "revolutionary change," this was more a minor adjustment to longstanding policy. It was Schlesinger himself, remember, who said that "there is no older American tradition in the conduct of foreign affairs than unilateralism." The United States had always at least reserved the right to attack another state preemptively even if it only employed that right scarcely and selectively, in addition to utilizing force to expand the territory of the nation in the 18th century, protect overseas markets in the 19th century, and stem the flow of Communism in the 20th century. Even with regard to the Second World War, that most transformative of events for the United States, President Roosevelt prepared his nation for war long before December 7, 1941, even if he waited for the Japanese to fire the first shot.

On February 26, 2003, a month before the "shock and awe" aerial bombing portion of the invasion began, President Bush echoed the social-engineering language of the 2002 NSS by proclaiming: "We meet here during a crucial period in the history of our nation, and of the civilized world. Part of that

³⁵⁶ Arthur Schlesinger, *War and the American Presidency* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 21.

history was written by others; the rest will be written by us."³⁵⁷ Quotes by President Bush linking the role the United States in the world to the fate of all people everywhere were not the exception, but rather the norm. In discussing why he included the "axis of evil" phrase in his 2002 State of The Union speech, for example, he told Bob Woodward: "I believe the United States is *the* beacon of freedom in the world. And I believe we have a responsibility to promote freedom that is as solemn as the responsibility is to protecting [sic] the American people, because the two go hand-in-hand."³⁵⁸ This statement in particular revealed two enormous claims with regard to U.S. foreign policy. First, it declared that the objective of transforming the nondemocratic states of the world was as important as national security, which in effect denied the absolute existential nature of the duty of a leader to protect its constituent citizens. This muddles the meaning and purpose of the national interest to an unrecognizable extent. Second, it linked that protection to the effort to transform nondemocratic states, in effect proclaiming that there is no difference between the two.

The U.S. national interest, he exalted, was now to reinvent the trouble spots of the world. Those who propound the lens of examination that Bush radically manipulated U.S. foreign policy point to this type of rhetoric, as well as its operationalization in the Iraq War, as evidence. Although this claim is exaggerated, as evidenced by the quotes and actions attributed to the leaders

³⁵⁷ President Bush's speech at the American Enterprise Institute, quote from Henry Shue and David Rodin, *Preemption: Military Action and Moral Justification* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 90.

³⁵⁸ Woodward 2004, 55.

who came before him, it is not difficult to understand why many scholars adhere to it, because the idealized nature of Bush Administration foreign-policy discourse was so profoundly pronounced. In his June 1, 2002 speech at West Point, which is often cited as one of the most unequivocal and public declarations of the 'Bush doctrine,' he again declared, "Our nation's cause has always been larger than our nation's defense."³⁵⁹ In that speech, he told cadets that he would implement his brand of foreign policy according to that axiom, given that the "Cold War doctrines of deterrence and Containment" no longer applied to this new war against terrorism, which could only be won by employing a strategy to "confront the worst threats before they emerge."

President Bush was right that the nature of 21st-century threats had transformed security dynamics; he was wrong to apply the old tools of overwhelming force and interstate conflict to these changing dynamics. He was hardly singular in promoting a nebulous conception of the U.S. national interest, but he carried the normative idealization of the national interest to new heights. It was as far from the realist definition of a fixed set of zero-sum, relatively intractable, given material indicators as a president could travel. Had the Iraq War been a success, it is quite plausible that other regimes, possibly not North Korea but likely Iran, would have been the next targets.

In conjunction with this contention, Robert Jervis has attempted to contextualize the Iraq War as a product of a policy rather than a policy in and of

³⁵⁹ Brent Scowcroft, *Internationalism and Post-Vietnam War American Foreign Policy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 187.

itself, calling it "even more noteworthy as a manifestation of the Bush Doctrine" and summarizing that "the doctrine has four elements: a strong belief in the importance of a state's domestic regime in determining its foreign policy and the related judgment that this is an opportune time to transform international politics; the perception of great threats that can be defeated only by new and vigorous policies, most notably preventive war; a willingness to act unilaterally when necessary; and, as both a cause and a summary of these beliefs, an overriding sense that peace and stability require the United States to assert its primacy on world politics."³⁶⁰

There is significant overlap between what Jervis refers to as "primacy" and preponderance, as Chapter 4 teased out. While these four pillars are consistent with the postwar history of the OPM, and therefore far from a post-9/11 metamorphosis of U.S. foreign policy in general, they certainly represented an invigoration of the more hawkish, as well as idealistic, tendencies in U.S. foreign policy that the national humiliation of the Vietnam War had largely precluded until that time. In that sense, the Iraq opportunity, if it could be carried out successfully, presented a chance to exorcise the demons of Vietnam, along with planting a seed of democracy in the Middle East as a beacon of hope to the region and a wedge against the Islamist terrorism narrative. That Iraq did not expel 'Vietnam Syndrome,' from the American psyche, but rather further ingrained it, and that it perpetuated the Islamist terrorism narrative, now presents

³⁶⁰ Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 3 (September 2003), 365.

en enormous challenge to U.S. policymakers: the need to reconcile a transition back to isolationist sentiment among the American public along with the need to prosecute the war against Islamist terrorism, perhaps the first war since the Second World War that is *not* a war of choice.

Consistent with the lofty grand-strategic ambitions of the 2002 NSS was the military-strategic post-9/11 defense strategy "designed to eliminate the conditions that spawn asymmetric threats."³⁶¹ In terms of global military posture, this means preparing to intervene anywhere in the world where potentially hostile actors enjoy a safe haven. The problem with this perspective is that much of the world is dangerous, chaotic, and 'alternatively governed,' meaning that "the conditions that spawn asymmetric threats" are found in so many places that to plan for eliminating them all is all but unfathomable. As the poster child of this policy, the Iraq War did not hold up to its protagonists' hopes, and the Obama Administration has since shifted away from large-scale military intervention and counterinsurgency in favor of the 'targeted strike' of (suspected) Islamist militants. Thus an era that began with international social-engineering ended on the polar end of the spectrum, with the favored policy of the Obama Administration to kill from the air even before capturing, let alone invading and occupying. Indeed, the prevailing sentiment in prosecuting the war against

³⁶¹ Douglas Lovelace in Steven Metz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response," Strategic Studies Institute, November 2004, iii, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/pub586.pdf>

Islamist terrorism now is that to capture is to carry a vexatious burden.³⁶² This is not to say that Obama's approach to the war against terrorism has been pacific: his unprecedented drone campaign is discussed in Chapter 8, the concluding chapter.

In any case, U.S. policymakers at the highest levels of the Bush Administration were overwhelmingly confident that the Iraq War would swiftly be brought to a successful conclusion. The provenance of this confidence was not duplicated at the Pentagon or the State Department, which were much more wary of what might happen in the aftermath of the war, as well as the host of dilemmas that might erupt during the combat phase, including the potential for the use of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, as well as the possibility of oil wells being set ablaze, as they were in the previous confrontation between the United States and Iraq two administrations prior. In concert with the perennial concern war-planners always have for the potential for loss of military life and the unexpected potentialities of open conflict, and in concert with the cultural complications inherent in Iraq, the Department of Defense and State Department conducted research to define and describe what might happen if the Executive Branch decided that war was the only way. It did eventually decide this, as detailed in FPE Criterion IV, but it did not give these comprehensive reviews adequate consideration.

³⁶² In the documentary *Spymasters: CIA in the Crosshairs* (dir. Gédéon Naudet, 2015), various ex-CIA Directors discuss the evolution of the war against terrorism, including the development that it became much more feasible to kill suspects/targets rather than to capture them.

The DoD, to which President Bush eventually granted almost exclusive authority to plan for postwar Iraq, thus carried out significant preparation for the conflict as it would with any other in order to confront many of those potentialities. The exhaustive reviews performed at the lower levels of government, what Halberstam refers to as its "bowels," never received the full attention they deserved because the higher levels of government were focused on the sale of a war they had already set course on rather than how to successfully manage Iraq in the war's aftermath. Furthermore, the extremely detailed planning that was carried out was disregarded in order to facilitate a smoother chain of command of the country when Baghdad fell. The Bush Administration did not want to get mired down with bureaucratic entanglement, and thus left experts, particularly at the State Department, out of the planning for and early administration of post-conflict Iraq.

As James Fallows describes it: "The Administration will be admired in retrospect for how much knowledge it created about the challenge it was taking on. U.S. government predictions about postwar Iraq's problems have proved as accurate as the assessments of pre-war Iraq's strategic threat have proved flawed. But the Administration will be condemned for what it did with what was known. The problems the United States has encountered are precisely the ones its own expert agencies warned against."³⁶³ In practice, therefore, planning was neglected and thus operationally indecisive. Anthony Cordesman states simply,

³⁶³ James Fallows, "Blind Into Baghdad," *The Atlantic*, January/February 2004, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/01/blind-into-baghdad/302860/>

"The U.S. government failed to draft a serious or effective plan for a 'Phase 4' of the war: the period of conflict termination and the creation of an effective national building office."³⁶⁴ The fact that the final war plan presented to President Bush by General Tommy Franks included *no plan* for the postwar phase deposited much of the hope for a smooth transition to Iraqi democracy securely in the bureaucratic wastebasket. Some of it would eventually be recycled once the insurgency began in earnest; most of it would not. The dismissal of rich, country-specific cultural research Halberstam chides U.S. foreign-policymakers for during Kaiser's "The Long 1964" was precisely the type recurring in 2003, and led directly to the overestimation of U.S. power to transform the politics of Iraq.

Ironically, one of the few voices warning against invasion at a high level was the man who was eventually charged with selling the case for war at the United Nations, Secretary of State Colin Powell, who stated simply: "Once you break it, you are going to own it, and we're going to be responsible for 26 million people standing there looking at us. And it's going to suck up a good 40 to 50 percent of the army for years. And it's going to take all of the oxygen out of the political environment."³⁶⁵ In that conversation, Powell was urging President Bush to get the United Nations on board with any invasion that might take place. The president's response was to send Powell to do just that. If he desired it, so went

³⁶⁴ Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq: Too Uncertain to Call*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 14, 2003, 2, <http://www.comw.org/warreport/fulltext/0311cordesman.pdf>

³⁶⁵ "Ideas and Consequences," *The Atlantic*, October 2007, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/10/ideas-and-consequences/306193/>

the logic, go achieve it, especially since he was one of the most respected members of the Bush Administration.

He would expend virtually all of that reverential capital in selling a war to the United Nations that nearly every leader whom he addressed would come to condemn. In the end, Vice President Dick Cheney's pre-invasion claim that "we will in fact be greeted as liberators" won out over the voice of those advocating a more guarded approach to "disarming" Saddam Hussein.³⁶⁶ Failure to adhere to prewar admonitions on the postwar environment inevitably led to myriad complications in the invasion's aftermath. Francis Fukuyama, one of the chief architects of neoconservative doctrine, later lamented in his requiem on the nation-building effort in Iraq:

The administration did plan for a number of contingencies that did not occur, such as a humanitarian/refugee crisis and oil well fires; however, it was completely blindsided by the collapse of state authority in Iraq and the chaos that followed. This omission is a perfect example of institutional memory failure. Almost every postconflict reconstruction during the previous decade and a half, from Panama to East Timor, had been characterized by the collapse of local police authority and the ensuing disorder. Consequently, a great deal of thought and effort had been given to improving the so-called "civ-pol" function through the early deployment of constabulary forces. Unfortunately, few of the officials responsible for the Iraq reconstruction had personal experience with these earlier efforts, and they evidently expected that the post-Saddam transition would look like those in Eastern Europe in 1989. That misjudgment would prove extremely costly, as looters stripped government ministries bare and Iraq's infrastructure crumbled. Throughout its entire existence, the CPA was understaffed and had to spend considerable energy building

³⁶⁶ Dick Cheney on *Meet the Press*, NBC, March 16, 2003.

up its own organization rather than providing governmental services to Iraqis.³⁶⁷

This elegy, particularly ironic given the source, was as predictable (and in fact was predicted) as it was tragic. The idealized response to the existential threat of Islamist fundamentalism all but guaranteed the U.S. would experience a quagmire in Mesopotamia. CIA Director George Tenet's "slam dunk" assessment of Iraq's presence of WMD and Dick Cheney's giddy predictions on Iraq's reception of American troops illustrated a reality whose ultramodern futurism met no ally in the reality of postwar Iraq.

U.S. foreign policymakers not only overemphasized the assumption of rational-choice modeling in presupposing that Iraqis would not exercise the will to fight against superior firepower and technical military expertise, but also underestimated the ideological motivation for why many Iraqis did take up arms against them. Many Iraqi insurgents were motivated by a general sense of nationalism, rather than the fanatical religiosity that foreign jihadists brought with them. Insurgents in Iraq were often fighting for far more than a living wage or because no other economic opportunity existed, including those members of the Iraqi army that had been disbanded by Paul Bremer's executive decree. In a study on insurgents in Iraq, a team of economists examined 3,799 payments to insurgents by al-Qaeda and found that fighters were paid less than the

³⁶⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 11.

opportunity cost of their time, or less than an unskilled job in Iraq would pay.³⁶⁸ While al-Qaeda's interest in Iraq was of course transnational, this contradicts the image of the insurgent as an economic unit.

The rational-choice models that U.S. policymakers surmised in preparation for invasion therefore failed to hold up against a people—albeit a disparate, balkanized people with intense sectarian tensions—unwilling to accept the presence of foreign, Christian troops on Muslim, Iraqi soil. The fact that most Iraqis did not want Saddam Hussein in power did not mean that they wanted an American-installed regime in power. The calculation among U.S. foreign policymakers that Iraqis would buy the official narrative in the U.S. that it was Saddam or freedom—publicly stated by various U.S. leaders—failed to gain any understanding of the true animosity an invasion force would be met with. The fact that such ingrained sectarian fault lines did in fact exist only exacerbated the problem, rather than serving to unite the nation against the outgoing common enemy of Saddam Hussein. Thus the overestimation hubris of Vietnam was not exorcised but exercised in Iraq.

Indicator II. The U.S. ability to control, bolster, and refine the host state

The United States went to war in Iraq to enact "regime change" that would remove Saddam Hussein from power, eliminate his Ba'ath party from the government, and build a new government that would serve as a democratic example to other nations in the region. In that sense, the extent to which a new,

³⁶⁸ Benjamin Bahney et al., "Insurgent Compensation: Evidence from Iraq," *The American Economic Review* Vol. 103, No. 3 (May 2013), 518-522.

secure state that went beyond procedural democracy to functional democracy could be established would be one of the most fundamental benchmarks for success or failure in Iraq. U.S. policy was therefore tied inextricably to the idea and practice of nation-building, a concept that President Bush campaigned steadfastly against as a presidential candidate, telling voters in a 2000 presidential debate, "If we don't stop extending our troops all around the world in nation-building missions, then we're going to have a serious problem coming down the road, and I'm going to prevent that."³⁶⁹

As with other U.S. interventions in areas of (actual or perceived) strategic significance, state-building was a key component of the overall objectives. One of the tragic ironies of the Iraq case was that a (relatively) stable, orderly state was already in place under Saddam Hussein, with some social indicators such as education level higher than regional averages, as Dick Cheney alluded to in his speech on August 26, 2002. While the increase in nation-building campaigns after the end of the Cold War were largely directed at failed states, which were judged to be breeding grounds for terrorism and other nefarious activity, Iraq deviated from that pattern in that it was a robust, wealthy state, rendered less so because of Hussein's kleptocracy and wars and because of the sanctions those actions drew in response. And while the official justification for the war was cloaked in practical national-security considerations of disarming Iraq from WMD and preventing it from proliferating Islamist terrorism, the true motivations for the

³⁶⁹ George W. Bush in 2000 presidential debate, in Joseph Russomano, *Tortured Logic: A Verbatim Critique of the George W Bush Presidency* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011), 239.

war were more ideological, as the official discourse in 2002/2003 made plain. As such, the nexus between that neoconservative ideology and the actual prosecution of the state-building aspect of the campaign prevented effective execution in both the planning and operational stages.

As mentioned in the previous section, the tragic paradox of prewar planning for the postwar effort was that enormous resources were poured into planning for the postwar environment, but the most important concerns going into the conflict were brushed aside because the emphasis at the highest levels of the Bush Administration and the Pentagon was always on how to successfully convince Congress and the American people to go along with the war effort as well as guarantee military victory in the first few weeks of conflict, rather than addressing the glaring problems that the coalition was sure to experience once the early phases of conflict concluded. Further compounding the planning effort was President Bush's acceptance upon Secretary Rumsfeld's recommendation to bestow authority for planning to the Pentagon rather than the State Department and its diplomatic tentacles.

This was the first time since the Second World War that there were not two equally authoritative concomitant lines of direction between Defense and State. Unity of command was valued at the expense of delegating civil postwar efforts to the arm of government most experienced in doing so, the State Department. Thus, while State, USAID, Justice, and other agencies had all been planning for the postwar effort since President Bush's August 2002 Presidential Directive to begin doing so, none had the authority necessary to execute its plans

with the exception of DoD, and there was no coordinating central command on the diplomatic side to partner with that of the office of General Tommy Franks. Postwar planning ultimately fell to the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, which "had no prior experience with this kind of operation and had limited institutional capacity for setting up the kind of organization needed."³⁷⁰ Larry Diamond's characterization of this problem in Iraq is almost identical to Halberstam's characterization of the same problem in Vietnam:

Indeed, the administration of the occupation was highly centralized under Bremer personally, in a manner that impeded the flow of analysis and knowledge from the field, elevated a small circle of political appointees, and marginalized those with vast stores of knowledge and understanding about Iraq—not just the career U.S. diplomats, but also well-informed British experts, as well as Iraqis and Iraqi-Americans not tied to any specific political interest. This same centralization plagued the challenge of postwar reconstruction. The obsession with control was an overarching flaw in the U.S. occupation, from start to finish.³⁷¹

Johanna Mendelson Forman has identified four strategic imperatives in the reconstruction effort of any postconflict area with the objective of creating "a minimally capable state:" (a) security; (b) governance and participation; (c) social and economic well being; and (d) justice and reconciliation, analyzing post-invasion Iraq along those four areas of assessment. On security, as with other analysts, Forman cites the dismissal of the Iraqi army as "the single most costly error committed by the American-led coalition, with the second most costly being

³⁷⁰ Fukuyama 2006, 10.

³⁷¹ Larry Diamond, "What Went Right and Wrong in Iraq," in Fukuyama 2006.

the concomitant de-Ba'athification order in which "by the stroke of a pen, the CPA forbade thousands of mid-level party civil servants, including doctors and teachers, from participating in public life."³⁷² These decisions, made in small circles under the tutelage of high-ranking Bush Administration officials such as Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith and his cohort of inner-echelon confidants, were concocted and processed in such an encapsulated fashion that actors and events on the ground played at best a secondary role, if any at all, in planning and executing the post-invasion environment.

Presidential Directive 56, placing the DoD in charge of all Iraqi activities, while ensuring presidential chain of command leadership, all but guaranteed an ineffective governing processes by dismissing and alienating Iraqi counterparts in Baghdad and other administrative provinces. Throughout the CPA's reign from May 2003 until the handover on June 28, 2004, the disconnect between Iraq's administrators and Iraq's indigenous leaders grew so great that in effect there was no authority in Iraq that could represent any semblance of legitimacy. Out of the vacuum left by the lack of social and military authority in Iraq would breed an insurgency whose ferocity would forestall the installation of a consensus government. In turn, the institutions of civil society that were needed to buttress any security operations would be bypassed, because the U.S. State Department and the Iraqi "mid-level civil servants" most able to administer the basic civil functions of society were placed on the sidelines. These two decisions by the

³⁷² Johanna Mendelson Forman, "Striking Out in Baghdad: How Postconflict Reconstruction Went Awry," in Fukuyama 2006, 204.

Bush Administration, combined with the dismissal of the Iraq army, all but guaranteed a conflict-ridden transition and the continuation of decrepit Iraqi civil functions and infrastructure. It was far from unforeseeable that these actions would revert Iraq to a state of anarchy in which tribalism would dominate the sociopolitical environment.

The Future of Iraq Project (FOIP), the exhaustive organization that banded together disparate parts of the State Department, intelligence agencies, national security professionals, and Bush Administration officials, stated simply: "The people of Iraq are being promised a new future and they will expect immediate results. The credibility of the new regime and the United States will depend on how quickly these promises are translated to reality."³⁷³ While the FOIP contained an extensive amount of research and planning, it also suffered from some inherent weaknesses. Its greatest obstacle in its creation was that it was constantly being jumbled and hamstrung by inter-agency parochialism and rivalries. Although it contained an immense amount of information, it never could have succeeded in formulating a detailed plan at state-making or state-building because of its lack of institutional coherence. It was intended as a collaborative project with Iraqi exiles in order to plan for what complications might ensue should the United States invade Iraq.

Its greatest obstacle in implementation, however, was that it was never actually implemented. Paul Bremer had arrived in Baghdad to take full control of

³⁷³ Future of Iraq Project, Digital National Security Archives, George Washington University, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB198/>

Iraq over the interim transition before he had even heard of the FOIP.³⁷⁴ General Sir Michael Jackson, commander of the British invasion force, lamented simply: "All the planning carried out by the State Department went to waste."³⁷⁵ Two months before the invasion, President Bush authorized National Security Presidential Directive 24, which granted the DoD authority to oversee all reconstruction in Iraq. Whether to ensure that the chain of command remained intact or to militarize the overall process, this Directive guaranteed that the State Department, responsible for so much prewar planning, would be brushed aside once the invasion began.³⁷⁶ The Directive also placed ORHA under control of DoD, further establishing DoD as the preeminent authority on immediate postwar reconstruction. Ultimately, the FOIP lacked the specificity to be utilized as a practical guide to reconstruction, and the Bush Administration and DoD officials in charge of reconstruction discarded it anyway.

Thus, the ability of coalition authorities to control, bolster and refine the fledgling Iraq state could never take form because the revert to tribal survival orientations made state-building a secondary concern. Whoever owns Iraq must patrol 438,317 square kilometers of ethnic tensions between Sunni, Shia, and Kurd, each with loyalties to their own before that of the nation (with further intra-

³⁷⁴ Richard Bonney, *False Prophets: The 'Clash of Civilizations' and the Global War on Terror* (Oxfordshire, England: International Academic Publishers, 2008), 192.

³⁷⁵ Con Coughlin and Neil Tweedie, "General Sir Michael Jackson Attacks US Over Iraq," *The Telegraph*, September 1, 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1561891/Gen-Sir-Mike-Jackson-attacks-US-over-Iraq.html>

³⁷⁶ Nora Bensahel, "Mission Not Accomplished," in *War in Iraq: Planning and Execution*, eds. Thomas Mahnken and Thomas Keaney (New York: Routledge, 2007), 132.

sect divisions), along with borders on either side that have been subject to sustained warfare, most notably the 1991 Gulf War with Kuwait and the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980's.³⁷⁷ Few geographical barriers prevent foreign entry into Iraq's territory, and tensions with neighbors make border patrol difficult. In short, maintaining security in the country is no small feat. The strategy for removing Saddam Hussein from power failed to give these difficulties sufficient consideration.

Prewar planning underestimated the number of troops needed to secure the country's cities and borders, the extent to which Iraq's dilapidated infrastructure, which had been neglected by Saddam Hussein, needed rebuilding, and, most importantly, how much chaos would ensue from the removal of Iraq's dictator. It overestimated the extent to which Iraqi troops would rejoin the state after a swift military defeat (few did), the ability of Iraqis to govern their old country with a new state, and the expectation that ordinary Iraqis and ex-soldiers would accept the authority of the new state simply because it was no longer headed by a tyrant. In short, from the beginning of the U.S. occupation of Iraq in March of 2003, the new U.S. and Iraqi authorities in the country fell victim to "a serious underestimation of the work needed to secure, stabilize, and reconstruct Iraq after Saddam Hussein's regime had been toppled."³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

³⁷⁸ Steven Metz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *The Washington Quarterly* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter 2003-04), 27.

Indicator III. The U.S. ability to limit the power and influence of adversarial leaders and insurgent groups

Military planners were keen to avoid the mistakes of Vietnam in their calculations. For example, General Peter Pace, who would become Chairman of the JCS in 2005, described his disgust of the 'body count' metric for assessing success in war:

Not once in this building have we ever reported a number, probably because guys like me from Vietnam know what happens when you start counting. You completely skew the way people think, the way folks on the ground operate. What we want the people on the ground to understand is that we want to get the job done with the least amount of killing, but with whatever is needed to be done to protect our own guys. And asking for body counts...causes people to focus on 3-to-1, 5-to-1, 7-to-1. The purpose was not to kill X number of people, the purpose was to remove a regime. If you could do that without killing anybody, you win. If you have 1,000 people killed and you haven't done anything to replace the regime, you lose. So numbers don't count.³⁷⁹

Indeed, this mistake was not repeated in Iraq, but that incident of prudence was offset by other mistakes. By July 2003, only four months after the invasion, General John Abizaid, commander of all forces in Iraq, characterized the gathering insurgency as a "classical guerilla-type campaign."³⁸⁰ The conditions within Iraq by default pitted the disparate band of insurgents that united to fight the common enemy of the United States and the nascent Iraqi state against one another. To a certain extent, the various groups attacking American and Iraqi

³⁷⁹ Woodward 2004, 193.

³⁸⁰ Brian Knowlton, "Top U.S. General in Iraq Sees Classic Guerilla-Type War," *The New York Times*, July 16, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/16/international/worldspecial/top-us-general-in-iraq-sees-classical.html>

forces had to do so in order to be noticed or forfeit relevance to more aggressive groups. Unfortunately for the coalition, this incentivized even groups that may have been ambivalent toward the Americans to engage in open combat against them. Secular Ba'athists, local nationalist leaders such as Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, Iraqi soldiers now out of work, Iraqi nationalists, and foreign fighters seeking martyrdom came together in a way that never would have been possible without American troops on Muslim soil in the heart of the Middle East. Though these groups were by no means all aligned or in full cooperation, the necessity to seek relevance made the power struggle after March 2003 inherently a struggle of violence.

Furthermore, the fact the foreign jihadists focused the lion's share of their violence against the Americans cemented the ingrained perception that this was a war between foreign aggressors and a nationalist war to expel them, even if led by jihadists from abroad. What ensued in subsequent years was what John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt describe as *netwar*. "In this loose, ambiguous, and constantly shifting environment, constellations of shells or collections of individuals gravitate toward one another to carry out armed attacks, exchange intelligence, trade weapons, or engage in joint training and then disperse at times never to operate together again."³⁸¹ Thus, regime change in Iraq removed a national dictatorship and unwittingly replaced it with small-scale organizations that together formed a network worthy of the label of wholesale insurgency.

³⁸¹ Bruce Hoffman describing *netwar* in Iraq, in "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," Rand, 2004, 17, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2005/RAND_OP127.pdf

Those violent enough to exert their will—more often than not, foreign jihadists—hijacked the lead role in the effort to advance their own brand of global jihad, precisely the outcome U.S. policymakers went to war in Iraq to prevent.

The lack of prewar planning for the postwar environment and the series of missteps in implementing Operation Iraqi Freedom have by now been well documented. From March 2003 to December 2011 the United States fought, sometimes successfully and sometimes less so, to keep Iraq secure from domestic threats and safe from foreign jihadists. It left in its wake a fragile government reliant on Iran, the sworn enemy of the United States, and an army so innocuous it evaporated in the face of a small band of jihadists in the form of ISIS. In sum, as it relates to the national interest, there was no enemy in Iraq until the United States invaded it. Once that enemy materialized, it proved a most difficult adversary, even though it was heavily balkanized, and the United States was never able to vanquish it, as the rise of ISIS has illustrated. This Indicator therefore must be assessed as a strategic failure, even while achieving many tactical victories along the way.

As with the war against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army, tactical military victories never produced the strategic political victories necessary to fulfill the overall umbrella of strategic objectives. American forces and their Iraqi counterparts were never able to secure the country, and it remains insecure today as the state attempts to wrest Mosul and other areas back from ISIS. In spite of its experiences in Vietnam and other Cold War battlefields, "the broader U.S. national security system is not optimized for counterinsurgency support," but

rather more aligned to achieving overwhelming force against a state enemy on a conventional battlefield, as evidenced by the rapid advance on Baghdad and subsequent struggles in dealing with the insurgency.³⁸²

The transformations in war fighting sought by Donald Rumsfeld were not entirely indifferent from the 'flexible response' promoted by President Kennedy. But Rumsfeld's emphasis on a small, nimble force backed by overwhelming military firepower was only relevant in the first three weeks of the campaign, after which the nature of urban guerilla warfare complicated the security effort. Kennedy died before deciding whether or not to shift to a full-scale conventional military buildup, and Rumsfeld's push to modernize the American way of war appears to have been embraced by the preference for the "targeted strike" of the Obama Administration that emphasizes small groups of Special Forces, air power, and drone attacks rather than large, clumsy, conventional military operations.

In any case, with particular respect to Iraq, the history of the insurgency reads like a state-building manual in reverse. The veneer of a functioning state based on the monopolization of violence and a hierarchy of power in which those deemed non-hostile by the regime could more or less go about their lives imploded the day Baghdad was taken by coalition forces. The Sunni insurgency began almost immediately. Although Sunni leaders naturally "saw themselves as the target of the invasion," given that their interests were inextricably tied to

³⁸² Steven Metz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response," Strategic Studies Institute, November 2004, vi, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub586.pdf>

Saddam Hussein's minority Sunni regime, many did not actually take up arms until they witnessed Shia political domineering of the neophyte government begin to take hold.³⁸³ Others, however, fought the Americans from the first day of conflict. While U.S. leaders were quick to declare success in the overtaking of the country, the ensuing insurgency "forced the U.S. military to relearn counterinsurgency on the fly," in the words of counterinsurgency expert Steven Metz, given that the end of the Cold War had ushered in a pivot away from interest in and preparation for asymmetrical conflicts.³⁸⁴

Throughout the course of the counterinsurgency effort, the U.S. military did make some gains, but these were always offset by the sectarian nature of the Iraqi conflict, the lack of civil society functions, and the Iraqi reliance on the U.S. military to fight in its stead. In September 2005, General George Casey estimated that of 115 Iraqi police and military battalions, *one* was prepared to stand on its own without American oversight.³⁸⁵ By 2008, security had been improved somewhat, buoyed by the 2006 Sunni Awakening, in which Sunni tribal leaders in the "Sunni Triangle" allied against al-Qaeda with U.S. support, and the 2007 troop surge, which flooded Iraq's more volatile areas, particularly in Baghdad, with U.S. troops to quell the violence. But this only further stoked sectarian tensions. The further the U.S. was perceived to be allied with Iraq, the

³⁸³ Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Cornell University Press, 2006), 19.

³⁸⁴ Steven Metz, "Learning From Iraq: Counterinsurgency in American Strategy," Strategic Studies Institute, January 2007, v, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/pub752.pdf>

³⁸⁵ James Fallows, *Blind Into Baghdad: America's War in Iraq* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 150.

more motivated the Sunni population was to take up arms. But the more the U.S. distanced itself from the Iraq state, the less it could stand on its own. Thus the direst prognostications of the postwar environment transformed from an admonition into reality.

Sadiq al-Rikabi, a close advisor to prominent Shia politician Jawad al-Maliki, told an American reporter in June 2007, "The government's aim is to disarm and demobilize in Iraq, and we have enough militias now in Iraq that it is hard enough to solve the problem. Why are we creating new ones?" But the American view was that the Sunni Awakening was a resounding success. General Rick Lynch simply stated, "When you've got people who say, 'I want to protect my neighbors,' we ought to jump like a duck on a june bug." Lynch cited areas of the country such as Babil that were susceptible to al-Qaeda and other international terrorist groups because the Iraqi state was not providing security there.³⁸⁶ What was tantamount to treason for the Shia-dominated Iraqi state was thus a no-brainer for the United States. This is but one example in which U.S. interests and the interests of the Iraqi state, and many of the various factions within it, were not even remotely aligned—in fact, they were often diametrically opposed.

Even if we were to exclude the reign of terror of ISIS from the equation, the security situation in Iraq is now tenuous at best. A comprehensive report by Amnesty International detailing arms trafficking in Iraq from 2014-2016 found that

³⁸⁶ John Burns and Alissa Rubin, "U.S. Arming Sunnis in Iraq to Battle Old Qaeda Allies," The New York Times, June 11, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/11/world/middleeast/11iraq.html>

"militias allied to the Iraqi government have access to arms from at least 17 countries." Specifying the Munathammat Badr (Badr Brigades), Asa'ib al-Haq, Kata'ib Hizbullah, and Saraya al-Salam militias as among the chief recipients of arms among the government-sanctioned Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs), the report denounces the government's complacency in systematic atrocities: "The Iraqi authorities have helped to arm and equip the PMU militias and pay their salaries—they must stop turning a blind eye to this systematic pattern of serious human rights violations and war crimes."³⁸⁷ Aside from the moral question of extrajudicial detainments and killings, the issue raises serious concerns over whether the Iraqi state is simply operating as a governor of a disparate band of sectarian Shia militant groups, which raises further questions about the long-term stability of the country and region as well as the overall war against Islamic State. The fact that Iranian-backed militias are now on the frontlines of the fight against ISIS in Iraq presents concerns both for the U.S. national interest and for the future of secular Iraq.

Indicator IV. Rationalization and operational learning

The historical narrative of the Iraq War and the official narrative by the Bush Administration did not operate in the same galaxy. This is, of course, true to some extent with regard to Congress as well as the American public, who

³⁸⁷ "Iraq: End Irresponsible Arms Transfers Fuelling Militia War Crimes," Amnesty International, January 5, 2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2017/01/iraq-end-irresponsible-arms-transfers-fuelling-militia-war-crimes/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm_term=%2ASituation%20Report

hopped on the foreign-policy merry-go-round with little resistance. But the American public requires leadership and does not wish that the government lies to them, just as Congressional leaders want to believe that the CIA is correct when it gives an assessment about WMD. In addition, the Executive Branch has been setting foreign policy for many decades, as evidenced by the lack of a declaration of war (required by Congress) since 1941. But in none of these three arenas was there much common sense to be found. That begins and ends with the Bush Administration, even if meanders through the Congress, the public and the fourth estate on the way there.

21 Democrats and one Republican, Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island (who later switched to the Democratic Party) voted against the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) in the Senate, with 29 and 48 Democratic and Republican Senators, respectively, voting for the resolution; in the House of Representatives the Republican vote was 215-6 in favor, while the Democratic vote was 126-82 against.³⁸⁸ The tally recorded only two independent votes in total from both chambers, both were from Vermont, and both voted against the measure, Senator James Merrill Jeffords and then-Representative Senator Bernie Sanders. As was the Vietnam War, this was destined to be another *national* tragedy, with or without villains. No secret society hijacked U.S. foreign policy; the pantheon of leaders leading the nation into Iraq represented a majority of both Congress and public opinion.

³⁸⁸ Senate Vote, Senate Clerk, https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=107&session=2&vote=00237; House vote, House Clerk, <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2002/roll455.xml>

Whether it is therefore fitting or ironic that the nation went to war based on faulty intelligence, misinformation, misperception, duplicity, and outright lies depends on the eye of the observer. There can be little doubt that the intentional distortion of the threat by U.S. leaders influenced public opinion in favor of war, just as there can be little doubt that the American people were willing to go along with that false narrative if only to exorcise the demons of 9/11. Had this been the first time in history such an occurrence had been produced by the American political system, it could be understood as a singular phenomenon based on a sudden and overwhelming disorientation caused by a truly horrifying attack on the nation's soil. But we have seen this movie before, and while these two situations have very different circumstances, one development ties them together: the incorporation of otherwise irrelevant foes into the national-security threat-perception mechanisms of the state, a perception which is then distorted beyond comprehension.

Seldom before in history has the official discourse about a policy been so clearly opposed to its reality. Even with regard to the Vietnam War, U.S. foreign policymakers made little attempt to characterize North Vietnam as an existential threat, but rather an ideational threat. But with regard to the Iraq War, Bush Administration officials married the two in an unprecedented public-relations campaign: because Iraq's "evil" dictator possessed weapons of mass destruction, he should therefore be confronted as a symbol of dangerous tyranny so that the 'Middle East' could be democratized and made safe and "rogue" states would

understand that to stray from the international system, or U.S. authority, would be to risk annihilation: "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists."³⁸⁹

As the months following the invasion passed, no WMD were found, and soldiers were being killed and wounded on a daily basis, causing the White House to struggle to defend its prewar statements on WMD and to continue to justify the invasion and subsequent occupation on other grounds, in addition to scrambling to explain how it could have been so wrong about WMD in the first place. An exchange between a reporter at the White House and Press Secretary Ari Fleischer from July 7, 2003 is particularly symbolic of this effort, in reference to the infamous "sixteen words:"

Q : I just want to take you back to your answer before, when you said you have long acknowledged that the information on yellow cake turned out to be incorrect. If I remember right, you only acknowledged the Niger part of it as being incorrect—I think what the—

Mr. Fleischer: That's correct.

Q : I think what the President said during his State of the Union was he—

Mr. Fleischer: When I refer to yellow cake I refer to Niger. The question was on the context of Ambassador Wilson's mission.

Q: So are you saying the President's broader reference to Africa, which included other countries that were named in the NIE, were those also incorrect?

Mr. Fleischer: Well, I think the President's statement in the State of The Union was much broader than the Niger question.

³⁸⁹ This phrase from President Bush's 2002 State of the Union address painted an international picture in Manichean terms and incorporated those terms into the national-security policy of the United States.

Q: Is the President's statement correct?

Mr. Fleischer: I'm referring specifically to the Niger piece when I say that.

Q: Do you hold that the President—when you look at the totality of the sentence that the President uttered that day on the subject, are you confident that he was correct?

Mr. Fleischer: Yes, I see nothing that goes broader that would indicate that there was no basis to the President's broader statement. But specifically on the yellow cake, the yellow cake for Niger, we've acknowledged that the information did turn out to be a forgery.

Q: The President's statement was accurate?

Mr. Fleischer: We see nothing that would dissuade us from the President's broader statement.

Q: Ari, that means that, indeed, you all believe that Saddam Hussein was trying to obtain uranium from an Africa nation; is that correct?

Mr. Fleischer: What the President said in his statement was that according to a British report they were trying to obtain uranium. When I answered the question it was, again, specifically about the Niger piece involving yellow cake.

Q: So you believe the British report that he was trying to obtain uranium from an African nation is true?

Mr. Fleischer: I'm sorry?

Q: If you're hanging on the British report, you believe that that British report was true, you have no reason to believe—

Mr. Fleischer: I'm sorry, I see what David is asking. Let me back up on that and explain the President's statement again, or the answer to it. The President's statement was based on the predicate of the yellow cake from Niger. The President made a broad statement. So given the fact that the report on the yellow cake did not turn out to be accurate, that is reflective of the President's broader statement,

David. So, yes, the President's broader statement was based and predicated on the yellow cake from Niger.

Q: So it was wrong?

Mr. Fleischer: That's what we've acknowledged with the information on—

Q: The President's statement at the State of the Union was incorrect?

Mr. Fleischer: Because it was based on the yellow cake from Niger.

Q: Well, wait a minute, but the explanation we've gotten before was it was based on Niger and the other African nations that have been named in the national intelligence—

Mr. Fleischer: But again, the information on—the President did not have that information prior to his giving the State of the Union.

Q: Which gets to the crux of what Ambassador Wilson is now alleging—that he provided this information to the State Department and the CIA 11 months before the State of the Union and he is amazed that it, nonetheless, made it into the State of the Union Address. He believes that that information was deliberately ignored by the White House. Your response to that?

Mr. Fleischer: And that's way, again, he's making the statement that—he is saying that surely the Vice President must have known, or the White House must have known. And that's not the case, prior to the State of the Union.

Q: He's saying that surely people at the decision-making level within the NSC would have known the information which he passed on to both the State Department and the CIA.

Mr. Fleischer: And the information about the yellow cake and Niger was not specifically known prior to the State of the Union by the White House.

Q: What does that say about communications?

Mr. Fleischer: We've acknowledged that the information turned out to be bogus involving the report on the yellow cake. That is not new. You can go back. You can look it up. Dr. Rice has said it

Once the specious line of explanation is exposed, Fleischer abruptly ends the press conference, promising to return with further information. A week later, when questioned on the African uranium issue by another reporter in another briefing, Fleischer succinctly responded by offering, "We don't know if it's true. But nobody, nobody, can say it is wrong."³⁹¹ In other words, anything that cannot be proven to be wrong may be correct. Using this substandard benchmark for intelligence facilitates the justification of any policy a given policymaker wishes to promote, and that is exactly what happened in the case of Iraq.

The mushroom cloud of "bogus" WMD claims died a slow, radioactive death. Although there were certain acknowledgements about the faulty WMD intelligence and the inflation of the Iraq threat, there was also a continuation of claims of ties between Hussein, WMD, and terrorism for years afterward. After stating on Meet The Press on March 16, 2003, four days before war began, in no uncertain terms, "We believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons," Dick Cheney simply remembered, "Yeah, I did misspeak. We never had any evidence that he acquired a nuclear weapon" on the same television program on September 14, 2003.³⁹² But never was there a hint that this called into question the justification for invasion.

President Bush cited the CIA's 2004 report that found that Saddam Hussein had abandoned his WMD program in his book to repeat the false claim that "Saddam wanted to re-create Iraq's WMD capability... after sanctions were

³⁹¹ Fleischer 2003.

³⁹² Statements from Meet the Press, NBC.

removed and Iraq's economy stabilized," completely dismissing the fact that no weapons were ever found.³⁹³ The WMD fence-hopping understandably confused Americans. The public relations campaign to terrorize the American public into acquiescence was so successful that months after the invasion, one-quarter of Americans still believed not only that Iraq possessed WMD, but that they had in fact already been *found*, with a full half of Americans believing the falsehood that "Saddam was personally involved in the 9/11 attacks."³⁹⁴ While the misinformation campaign is partially to blame, there is no other statistic that so unambiguously illustrates the willful ignorance of the American public.

Some scholars blamed the media for the public's eagerness to embrace false beliefs. For example, Mary Cardaras attributes the ignorance of the American people to media "complacency:"

How could knowingly bad intelligence clear the way for war? In the absence of answers to these questions, the people did not hold the president to account because they could not hold the president to account. This was because the news media was largely complacent in their work. Information imparted to them by the Bush administration was largely accepted as face value and reported as such back to the public.³⁹⁵

But the media is an easy punching bag. If people do not believe what they see, they will turn the channel. It is not the media's job to assess CIA intelligence.

³⁹³ George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 270.

³⁹⁴ Purdum 2003, 263.

³⁹⁵ Mary Cardaras, *Fear, Power, and Politics: The Recipe for War in Iraq After 9/11* (New York: Lexington, 2013), 9.

That task is assigned to the Executive and Legislative Branches of government, and neither performed its task properly. What the media does do is facilitate how the issue is framed through what Robert Entman calls the two functions of "problem definition, which often virtually predetermines the rest of the frame, and remedy, because it directly promotes support (or opposition) to public policy."³⁹⁶ In these two areas the media put up little resistance, but it was hardly the media's role to reinvent the words of politicians.

Furthermore, the source of the misinformation and threat inflation was not the media, but the Bush Administration. And nowhere within that body was there ever any substantial remorse or responsibility to be found. Even the revered Colin Powell, whose U.N. speech made the case for war in Iraq, in addition to containing false information about Iraq's WMD, mentioned al-Qaeda operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who would eventually lead al-Qaeda in Iraq, 27 times, even though the intelligence community had not produced any credible evidence that there had been any collaboration between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda. Despite this fact, Powell continued to blame the intelligence community for the false information, characterizing his U.N. speech as "a great intelligence failure."³⁹⁷

Michael Morrell, who eventually served as CIA Deputy Director and acting Director in 2011 and 2012, when asked whether "they [Bush Administration

³⁹⁶ Robert Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 6.

³⁹⁷ Jason Breslow, "Colin Powell: 'U.N. Speech Was a Great Intelligence Failure,'" PBS Frontline, May 17, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/colin-powell-u-n-speech-was-a-great-intelligence-failure/>

officials] gave a false presentation of what you said to them," responded: "On some aspects... What they were saying about the link between Iraq and al-Qaeda publicly was not what the intelligence community" had concluded on its own.³⁹⁸ It does not take a non-proliferation or terrorism expert to recognize what "aspects" they gave a false representation of. The intelligence community, for its part, also failed miserably to remain apolitical, in accordance with its charter, and to provide solid intelligence. As with the failure to detect and prevent the 9/11 attacks, there was plenty of blame to go around. But of the five people most central to the Iraq War, George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice, none ever offered a complete about-face of their position in its creation.³⁹⁹

This is also generally true of its lower-level protagonists, such as Paul Wolfowitz, Karl Rove, Douglas Feith, Scooter Libby, George Tenet, and others. Rather than issue a mea culpa, each was quick to blame the others. For example, in his memoir, Donald Rumsfeld says of Paul Bremer, "His formal direction from the President to report through me was being ignored."⁴⁰⁰ Francis Fukuyama, who coined the "end of history" phrase whose spirit is invoked in the 2002 NSS, is one of those who did begin to question his assertions, perhaps due

³⁹⁸ David Corn, "George W. Bush's CIA Briefer: Bush and Cheney Falsely Presented WMD Evidence to Public," May 19, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/05/michael-morell-bush-cheney-iraq-war>

³⁹⁹ Cardaras 2013.

⁴⁰⁰ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011) 522.

to his academic nature, eventually regretting the lack of learning among his colleagues:

What is remarkable about this entire experience is how little institutional learning there has been over time; the same lessons about the pitfalls and limitations of nation-building seemingly have to be relearned with each new involvement. This became painfully evident during the American occupation and reconstruction of Iraq after April 2003.⁴⁰¹

Though he was not an official in the Bush Administration, he eventually recognized the questionable logic inherent in neoconservative doctrine.

Perhaps those most central to the Bush Administration had trouble regretting their position within the Iraq War because the mountain they made of a molehill in Iraq's WMD evidence was so fragile that to question any of it would bring down the whole house of cards. Much of the misinformation and confusion about WMD emanated from the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). This confusion and misinformation were present in its creation, alteration, and public characterizations. A 2014 RAND study summarized that the NIE "contained several qualifiers that were dropped... As the draft NIE went up the intelligence chain of command, the conclusions were treated increasingly definitively."⁴⁰² This politicization of intelligence information is precisely the opposite of how it is supposed to be treated, and this does not even account for its public

⁴⁰¹ Fukuyama 2006, 10.

⁴⁰² David Gompert et al., "Blinders, Blunders, and War: What America and China Can Learn," Rand Corporation, 2014, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR700/RR768/RAND_RR768.pdf

mischaracterization once the final report had reached the highest levels of command. One of the most controversial aspects of the NIE was the discussion of what Iraq's pursuit of aluminum tubes signified. Condoleezza Rice flatly stated on CNN that they "are only really suited for nuclear weapons programs," which is factually inaccurate.⁴⁰³

On the evidence surrounding the connection between Iraq and Al Qaeda, the declassified NIE cited "sources of varying reliability" and noted that "several dozen additional direct or indirect meetings are attested to by less reliable clandestine and press sources."⁴⁰⁴ When contrasted with Donald Rumsfeld's claim that the evidence linking Iraq with Al Qaeda was "bulletproof," or CIA Director George Tenet's assertion that WMD existence was a "slam dunk," the gap between the facts and the rhetoric becomes irreconcilable. David Kay, an Iraq weapons inspector who headed the Iraq Survey Group, believed the intelligence community did a "poor job" with the NIE, calling it "probably the worst of the modern NIE's, partly explained by the pressure, but more importantly explained by the lack of information they had. And it was trying to drive towards a policy conclusion where the information just simply didn't support it."⁴⁰⁵ In other

⁴⁰³ David Barstow, "The Nuclear Card: The Aluminum Tube Story—A Special Report; How White House Embraced Suspect Iraq Arms Intelligence," *The New York Times*, October 3, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/03/washington/us/the-nuclear-card-the-aluminum-tube-story-a-special-report-how.html?_r=0

⁴⁰⁴ 2004 edition of declassified National Intelligence Estimate, "Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction," Digital National Security Archives, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB129/nie.pdf>

⁴⁰⁵ "The October '02 National Intelligence Estimate," PBS Frontline, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/darkside/themes/nie.html>

words, the gap in information was filled by confirmation bias, breaking the first rule of intelligence.

The tragic genius in the Bush Administration's marketing of the Iraq War to the public was in being simultaneously vague and specific: vague in exactly what charges were being leveled against Saddam Hussein and how they corresponded to the 9/11 attacks, but specific about the overall threat posed by a multitude of hostile states and their supposed connection to terrorism and WMD, Hussein chief among them. The source of much of this vague specificity was none other than Donald Rumsfeld, whose Mr. Rogers-like demeanor and manner of speech caused the audience to respond at once understandingly and suspiciously. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from his speech in New York on February 14, 2003:

Now the connection between those kinds of weapons, terrorist states that have those weapons—and let there be no doubt they do—and terrorist organizations like the ones who attacked the Towers here in this city and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., that nexus has created something that's totally different. It must cause us as individuals to think fresh about these things. That's not easy to do. And to the extent people don't have the same sets of facts that they're working off of, they're very likely to come to different conclusions. It takes time for those facts and that information to seep out.⁴⁰⁶

What his speech did not mention was that *he* did not have those facts because they did not exist. He had snippets and snapshots of highly

⁴⁰⁶ Speech by Donald Rumsfeld, 11th Annual Salute to Freedom, Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum, New York City, February 14, 2003
<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/dod/sp20030214-secdef0024.htm>

questionable half-cooked projections that were twisted by confirmation bias at every step up the chain of command. When Administration officials were not suggesting that there was much that was unknown, and that what was unknown was dangerous, they were stating outright false claims about Iraq's WMD. Thus, in prepared remarks, they were specific about the threat Hussein posed without being specific about the evidence supporting that claim, and in unprepared remarks, they were intentionally opaque. At a press conference on February 12, 2002, Rumsfeld offered the following characterization of his approach the subject:

As we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know.⁴⁰⁷

This was not in response to an erudite question about the infinite nature of the metaphysical universe. The question was (in statement form), "There is no evidence of a direct link between Baghdad and some of these terrorist organizations." When asked if that was an unknown unknown, he responded, "I'm not gonna say which it is." The statement became so emblematic of the turbid discourse of the Bush Administration that it became the subject of a documentary film by Errol Morris, *The Unknown Known*, whose documentary *The Fog of War* on Robert McNamara is referenced in the previous chapter. Rumsfeld even named his memoir *Known and Unknown*. While Rumsfeld's

⁴⁰⁷ Retrieved from Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiPe1OiKQuk>

epistemological rant is logically plausible, as anyone in the scientific community can attest, it is hardly a viable explanation for one state invading another. A Google search conducted to reference this quote produced only one result in the top-ten attempting to utilize it for any rational purpose, and it came from a two-page 2009 entry of the *Journal of Experimental Botany*, perhaps where this type of logic belongs.⁴⁰⁸

OPM Summary

As summarized by Robert Brigham, "the main difference between the Eisenhower years and 2003" was not the desire to impart American institutions internationally but rather "the undying belief of Bush [Administration] officials in the efficacy of conventional military power to achieve its objectives. Few administrations have embraced the notion that the world could be remade by American military power as securely as the Bush team."⁴⁰⁹ The same could be said of the Vietnam War, with the difference being that Iraq was an immediate invasion and Vietnam was a slow build. What did not change between 1945 and 2003 was the assumption of the role of international arbiter and defender of the "Free World" American leaders (as well as citizens) embraced. The Iraq War certainly represented one end of the spectrum, but its opposite end is not so far away as many would imagine. The more internationally ambitious end that

⁴⁰⁸ David Logan. "Known Knowns, Known Unknowns, Unknown Unknowns and the Propagation of Scientific Enquiry," *Journal of Experimental Botany* Vol. 60, No. 3 (2009), 712-714.

⁴⁰⁹ Robert Brigham, *Iraq, Vietnam, and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 149.

produced the Iraq War gathered steam in the 1990's after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Robert Kagan and William Kristol argued in the Summer 1996 *Foreign Affairs* issue that "American hegemony is the only reliable defense against a breakdown of peace and international order. The appropriate goal of American foreign policy, therefore, is to preserve that hegemony as far into the future as possible." Their United States was one in which isolationists and declinists "absentmindedly dismantle the material and spiritual foundations on which their national well-being has been placed," instead of recognizing that "the main threat the United States faces now and in the future is its own weakness."⁴¹⁰ There can be no more lucid statement on preponderance than the assumption that U.S. power is truly unlimited, if only Americans would accept that fact of reality.

In 2000, Kagan and Kristol again railed against "flagging will and confusion about our role in the world," calling for a "benevolent hegemony" that wielded "the capacity to contain or destroy many of the world's monsters."⁴¹¹ Their mission rested on the ideological point of departure that "the re-moralization of America at home ultimately requires the re-moralization of American foreign policy." This perspective not only mischaracterized the nature of U.S. power and the transformative utility of power in general, but also built its presumptions on the ontological fallacy that national identity is drawn from

⁴¹⁰ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1996), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1996-07-01/toward-neo-reaganite-foreign-policy>

⁴¹¹ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Encounter, 2000), 4.

international mission, when the opposite is how a state is defined. A state cannot know what it means to pursue and how it means to pursue it without first understanding its own national identity. Conceptualizing national purpose and national security in global terms makes a grandiose assumption: the world can be engineered by the powerful. Both times the United States has employed the full arsenal of its financial, military, and ideational tools to this end since 1945, it has failed.

When Donald Rumsfeld claimed that "the coalition did not act in Iraq because we had discovered dramatic new evidence of Iraq's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction" but rather "because we saw existing evidence in a new light through the prism of our experience on 9/11," he conceded the ultimate tragedy of the conflict as a war of choice with no clear muse. This quintessentially Constructivist statement revealed that the narrative of the evidence was more important to Bush Administration officials than the evidence itself. This belief subsequently necessitated duplicity in the sale of the Iraq War to Congress and the American public. That the argument for war was based on ideology, some of it taking its provenance from the neoconservative movement but much of it from steadfast, enduring traditions in U.S. foreign policy since 1945, compounded the problem of clarity of purpose and mission. As Constructivist scholar Karl Schonberg has described it, "To understand the role of America in this period it is necessary to consider not just the relative power relationships between the United States and other actors in the international system, but also the ideational

framework through which U.S policymakers have viewed and made sense of the world around them."⁴¹²

In the eyes of many observers, Islamist terrorism, a term the Obama Administration avoided either out of excessive political correctness or out of concern that the proliferation of the term would alienate friendly Islamic allies (likely both), presents the most glaring challenge to American national security. If this is indeed the case, the Obama Administration's shift from invasion/occupation doctrine to the doctrine of targeted killing seems the least terrible in a cesspool of terrible alternatives. What we can learn based on the Iraq experience is to focus like a laser on the perpetrators of any attack on the United States or American allies rather than launching a social-engineering attempt to completely reformulate problematic (whether threatening or not) states and even entire regions.

Terrorism is far from a new problem. Terrorism against the Roman occupation of Judea helped spread the liberation cause and convince the Romans that they would pay an unspecified, unpredictable, but nonetheless frightening and annoying cost for its attempt at subjugation in that particular area two millennia ago. David Fromkin, writing in 1975 in response to what many inaccurately viewed as the new phenomenon of terrorism, understood even then the two fundamental necessities of fighting terrorism: (a) although it has to be confronted, never assume that it can be eliminated, and (b) never play into the

⁴¹² Karl Schonberg, *Constructing 21st Century U.S. Foreign Policy: Identity, Ideology, and America's World Role in a New Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

terrorists' hands by allowing them to dictate the terms of the battlefield and the narrative of the ideational conflict.⁴¹³ Fromkin also correctly predicted that the stakes involved in terrorism would rise exponentially, complicating the effort to curtail terrorist financing, occupation of land, operational capabilities, and ideational prowess. The Iraq War not only fueled the narrative of Islamist terrorism, but also provided it safe haven within the country, precisely the outcome it meant to prevent.

In the words of Barry Posen, "Officials in the Bush Administration convinced themselves that a quick application of overwhelming military power would bring democracy to Iraq, produce a subsequent wave of democratization across the Arab world, marginalize al Qaeda, and secure U.S. influence in the region."⁴¹⁴ But just as Bush Administration officials greatly exaggerated the threat from Iraq as they sought to rouse the nation into a war-footing frenzy, so too did they retroactively exaggerate prewar concerns about the ease with which security would be established in Iraq. When asked if his prewar projections were too optimistic, President Bush replied, "No. I think I was pretty well prepared for a pretty long haul."⁴¹⁵ This revisionist history was paired with constructing an alternative reality of facts on the ground in Iraq in the months after invasion. Even after the country had begun to fall victim to insecurity, President Bush was still

⁴¹³ David Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1975, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1975-07-01/strategy-terrorism>

⁴¹⁴ Barry Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2013), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2013-01-01/pull-back>

⁴¹⁵ Woodward 2004, 249.

invoking the lofty rhetoric of militaristic liberalization. On May 1st, 2003, more than one decade before the capture of Mosul by ISIS, Bush declared victory in Iraq:

Our commitment to liberty is America's tradition—declared at our founding, affirmed in Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, asserted in the Truman Doctrine, and in Ronald Reagan's challenge to an evil empire. We are committed to freedom in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in a peaceful Palestine. The advance of freedom is the surest strategy to undermine the appeal of terror in the world. Where freedom takes hold, hatred gives way to hope. When freedom takes hold, men and women turn to the peaceful pursuit of a better life. American values, and American interests, lead in the same direction: We stand for human liberty. The liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terror. We have removed an ally of al-Qaida, and cut off a source of terrorist funding. And this much is certain: No terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction from the Iraqi regime, because the regime is no more.⁴¹⁶

It was later revealed that the White House had furnished the "Mission Accomplished" banner for his declaration of victory aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, in contrast to statements by the Bush Administration that the Navy had provided the banner.⁴¹⁷ While a shameful photo op is one thing, every politician commits that type of transgression. The true crime of the distortion of reality before, during, and after the invasion was the inability to predict, recognize, and account for problems on the ground that would lead to insecurity in Iraq, thousands of dead American soldiers, and the development of one of the most

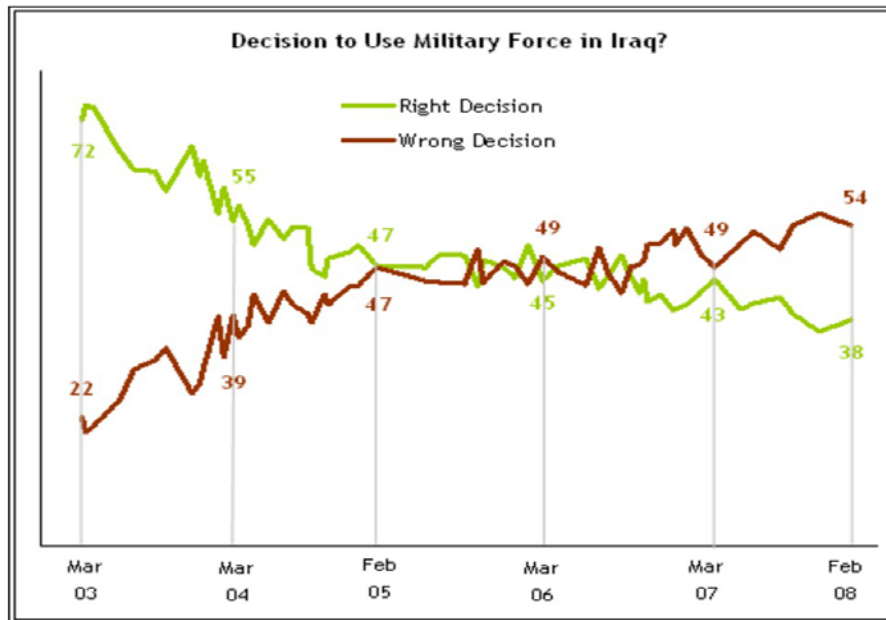
⁴¹⁶ "Mission Accomplished" Speech aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, CBS News, May 1, 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/text-of-bush-speech-01-05-2003/>

⁴¹⁷ Dana Bash, "White House Pressed on 'Mission Accomplished' Sign," CNN, October 29, 2003, <http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/10/28/mission.accomplished/>

significant terrorist threats in the history of the world. No international terrorist group has ever held so much land in addition to such a large audience.

If statements of the war's purpose, evidence to justify it, and rosy predictions of its successes to come were completely distorted by Bush Administration officials, which they surely were, why did Congressional leaders and the American people not put up more of a fight? If nine days after Colin Powell's speech Hans Blix had rendered Powell's contentions inaccurate, why was there not more of a backlash in America, even if there was abroad? 72% of the American people favored war in Iraq prior to the invasion.⁴¹⁸ That number did not lose its plurality until two years later, as shown in Figure 8:

Figure 8: Pew Research Center, "Do you support the decision to use force in Iraq?"



⁴¹⁸ "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008," Pew Research Center, March 19, 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008/>

What accounts for this disconnect between reality and perception in the case of Iraq? To attribute the Iraq War to the Bush Administration alone is to mischaracterize the views of the American people. An administration wishing to promote the demonization of a particular foe found ready ears among the public so soon after the most catastrophic attack on American civilians in the nation's history. Had the Bush Administration chosen Iran as the object of its rage instead, it is likely that a plurality of support would still have been present. Someone had blindsided the sleeping giant again six decades later, this time against a civilian complex, and rattling the cage of a small band of fundamentalists in a country less than 1% of Americans could locate on a map hardly seemed just reprisal. Never mind that fifteen of the 9/11 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia and that none of the four others were from Iraq, but from Lebanon, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates. Every one of the perpetrators of the attack was a citizen of a state with which the United States had benevolent relations, and yet the U.S. military would turn its guns on a state that had no involvement in it that did not possess a single weapon of mass destruction, nor any connections with Islamist terrorist groups that could threaten America. Recognized for the pragmatic dictator he was, Saddam Hussein was not even considered a legitimate Muslim in the Muslim community.

As with the "tragedy without villains" that the Vietnam War became, Iraq was *chosen* by U.S. leaders as the target for a new mission—against terrorism, so was the refrain—and again the nation acquiesced. But while South Vietnam

was under attack by Communist forces, Iraq neither possessed WMD nor maintained ties with any organization threatening the United States. And while a variety of factors limited U.S. casualties in Iraq to 4,424, the harm to the national interest is likely to be far greater as a result of the Iraq War than with the Vietnam War. 9/11 proved that Islamist fundamentalism is not just an ideational threat but also existential—perhaps not in the literal interpretation of the word, since jihadists will not be able to conquer the country, but in terms of the security of American citizens, infrastructure, and leadership compounds, which can no longer be taken for granted.

The two giants moats that protected the nation from attack before the advent of international terrorism are no longer relevant in the globalized age. And it is now beyond debate that the focal point of the American response to 9/11 has created far more terrorism than it ever could have prevented. Islamist fundamentalism is here to stay, and the United States will need to constantly assess the response to it as it machetes its way through the increasingly asymmetrical threats of the 21st century. One of the responses to another of these threats, the war against drugs, largely defines itself according to the *pursuit* and definition of that threat, rather than the elimination of the problem itself. Just as terrorism is a tactic, drugs are a social phenomenon, if a social blight, and the weaponization of the response to them carries the potential to further weaponize the response to that response, just as bleeding weapons from the remnants of French Colonial outposts under Diem and stirring the wrong hornet's nest in Iraq have demonstrated.

Donald Rumsfeld' FPDM "prisms" informed the conception of, planning for, and justification for the motivations and characterizations of the purpose and direction of the Iraq War. Prudent FPDM does not incorporate prisms. The further a statesman travels away from a strict definition of the national interest and the role of national security within it, the more he risks becoming mired in the smoke and mirrors of those prisms. The American people and their Congressional leaders did not pay sufficient attention to 'the man behind the curtain' because they did not object to the preponderant nature of American grand strategy and did not understand that power does not innately contain a capacity to transform the politics of other states. While the blunder of the Iraq War indeed blemished the neoconservative movement and the names attached to it, as evidenced by the collapse of the think tank Project for a New American Century, Brian Schmidt and Michael Williams explain why this should not be viewed as a "momentary aberration:"

The difficult and deteriorating situation in Iraq has no doubt damaged the neoconservative project, in some eyes fatally. Yet even if neoconservatism is no longer the power it was, it is important to be clear about its impact and its implications both for realism and for future debates over foreign policy in the United States and beyond. As we have shown, neoconservatism's impact cannot be reduced to circumstances alone. However important 9/11 and the location of specific individuals in the Bush Administration may have been, the ability of neoconservatives to influence the debate over Iraq also reflected a coherent intellectual position grounded in a specific philosophy of politics, a capacity to locate these arguments within powerful currents in American political culture, and an ability to use rhetorics and social networks connected to both. Obviously, the particular circumstances surrounding the invasion of Iraq will not be repeated, and the dire

consequences of the decisions made may make it more difficult to use these arguments, rhetorical moves, and political alliances in the future. But appreciating the diverse resources that neoconservatism was able to mobilize should make us cautious about seeing the run-up to the Iraq War as nothing but a momentary aberration. Neoconservatism as it has been expressed in foreign and domestic politics over the past two or three decades may or may not pass from the scene, but the political potential it reflects is rooted in much deeper aspects of American politics and political culture, and is unlikely to prove as ephemeral as many of the critics and obituary writers of the neoconservative moment are wont to wish.⁴¹⁹

The Iraq War, despite the various threats that it created that we now must confront, is not coming around again, as Schmidt and Williams point out. But at the same time, it is an inaccurate portrayal of the American identity and political system to suggest that the philosophies and assumptions guiding the failed policy have come and gone.

From a theoretical perspective, the FPDM of the Iraq War seems to exhibit all of the most imprudent elements of liberalism, realism, and Constructivism, with few of their more prudent qualities. It combined the Manichean, unilateral realpolitik of realism, the idealized messianism of liberalism, and the social-engineering of Constructivism into an unmitigated disaster not even the Vietnam War rivals in terms of harm to the national interest. In terms of the international perception of the United States, after 9/11, the United States enjoyed a level of sympathy perhaps never before seen in its history. The goodwill showered upon the United States, including by a majority of Muslims the world over, all but evaporated in the months after March 2003. By contrast, the environment of the

⁴¹⁹ Brian Schmidt and Michael Williams, "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists," *Security Studies* No. 17, 2008, 219.

Cold War was so diametrically opposed and morally murky that the crimes committed within it by both sides were more or less considered water under the bridge from 1989 onward (except, of course, for those caught in its 'hot' war zones). The fact that the United States came to be viewed by many as an imprudent, self-serving, imperialist power after 2003 is not simply ideational. It transforms into the existential via the narrative of Islamist terrorism, the most acute national-security threat the United States now faces.

CHAPTER 7

The Infinite Multidimensionality of Foreign Policy Analysis

I do the very best I know, the very best I can, and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.

Abraham Lincoln

The Battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September the 11th, 2001, and still goes on.

President George W. Bush on May 1, 2003, aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln

Square pegs, round holes, and FPDM

To evaluate a particular foreign policy, we must understand the FPDM process, the outcome, and the relation between the two. One cannot be determined by the other alone; they are fundamentally codetermined. If international relations are conducted in a multidimensional sphere in which unpredictable, dynamic, asymmetrical threats can come from any angle and any provenance, in many ways the policies produced by FPDM constitute a one-dimensional plane of constraints and restrictions on those charged with pursuing the national interest abroad. At the same time, the multitude of FPDM inputs, be they psychological, ideological, bureaucratic, interest-group, or otherwise, so disambiguate the FPDM process that how to study that process in relation to the

national interest leaves the researcher with too many tools in the toolbox, as shown in Table 9:⁴²⁰

Table 9: Major levels of analysis in FPA

Cognitive Processes	Effects of cognition, learning, emotion, illness, heuristic fallacies, memory, problem representation, etc.
Leader Personality and Orientation	Approaches include operational code analysis, studies of motivations, psychobiography, leader foreign policy orientation studies, etc.
Small Group Dynamics	Small group structures and processes, coalition theory, groupthink and newgroup analysis, etc.
Organizational Process	Examination of incremental learning, standard operating procedures, implementation issues, organizational culture, etc.
Bureaucratic Politics	Major concepts include turf, morale, budget, influence, interagency group politics, etc.
Culture and Identity	Approaches include role theory, nationalism and identity politics, investigation of identity through history and discourse, value preferences, action templates, etc.
Domestic Political Contestation	Examination of regime type, political interest groups, the two-level game, electoral politics, public opinion, media studies, etc.
National Attributes	Factors here may include geography, national resources, economic variables such as level of development or patterns of trade flow, etc.
Regional and International Systems	Regional and international distributions of power, anarchy and its mitigation by international regimes, longstanding enmities and friendships, etc.

Yet all of these tools are necessary for understanding that process. Thus, in a sense, the FPDM conditions leaders operate in are multidimensional, the foreign-policy issues they seek to address are multidimensional, but the foreign policies produced by the multidimensional FPDM process end up being one-dimensional outputs. The agreed upon foreign policy, or *resultant*, in *Foreign Policy Analysis* terminology, represents "the lowest common denominator outcome: the outcome upon which a majority of the participants in the process can agree," which produces a policy that "would probably not coincide with the one chosen by any

⁴²⁰ Valerie Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 44.

unitary rational actor."⁴²¹ (*Outcome* here is the FPDM output outcome, not the result of the implementation of the policy, or foreign-policy outcome). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Henry Kissinger described the process of establishing and maintaining any given policy as a negotiated bargain: "Whether these goals are desirable is relatively less crucial," and alterations to policies, once settled upon, is highly problematic because "the alternative to the status quo is the prospect of repeating the whole anguishing process of arriving at decisions." This operation applies a set of tools that is often incapable of responding to and dictating the terms of the system in which that toolset is applied. What follows as an outcome is therefore akin to using the skills required for a game of tick-tack-toe to solve a Rubik's Cube.

Whatever policy settled upon still has to be operationalized through whatever foreign-policy resources and institutions are available to the state. Even with perfect information (intelligence) and perfect policy operationalization, which is never the case, the *resultant* can never be created and employed with the singular formation of addressing the policy problem, because of these multidimensional FPDM input constraints and restrictions. This entire process is *before* the policy ever reaches its target environment, in which it will find a new host of obstacles that dwarf those encountered in the FPDM process. Once the policy meets the target environment, the need for assessment and reassessment is absolute, but the motivation to do so is minute due to the "anguishing process" of having to repeat the procedure all over again—it is not only frowned upon, but

⁴²¹ Hudson 2014, 114.

impossible, because the various input-parties will never again assemble as they did to construct the policy in the first place. Intelligence operatives have new tasks; Congressional leaders have new constituencies and issues to face; officials in the Executive Branch must respond to changing conditions, problems in other areas of the world, and problems on a higher grand-strategic scale than the one in question, which is itself often a peripheral policy-target environment (for various reasons, interventions tend to be in areas of the periphery); citizens have accepted the policy and moved on with their lives. The policy never again receives the attention it requires after those essential decision points have come and gone—"The Long 1964" with regard to Vietnam and 2002/2003 with regard to Iraq.

No matter how many Senate Select Committee on Intelligence closed-door meetings, House Armed Services Committee hearings, presidential cabinet assemblies, public inquiries, or formal investigations take place, no entity exists that can put the policy genie back in the box. The events of 1964 and 2003 make that painfully clear. The complexity of creating and subsequently operationalizing and implementing an intervention therefore inherently relies on a multitude of fortuitous inter-subjective, codetermined conditions to achieve its objectives. No matter how many factors contribute to the confluence of inputs that inform FPDM, a policy that can be widely understood, institutionalized, and sustained temporally must still be *specified* and reevaluated. It may take a 100,000-word document to begin to understand the social conditions within Iraq or Vietnam, but a presidential administration cannot concoct a 100,000-word policy that invents

tools to address the multitude of issues an intervention will face. No institutions of foreign policy are variegated enough to fulfill so many objectives within so many parameters, and the average citizen possesses neither the time nor the inclination to sift through miles of documents to understand any given foreign policy; hence the need for platitudes, sound bites, and the manipulation of the public perception (fortunately for the foreign-policy practitioner, these are skills required of any policymaker).

It cannot be expected, for example, that commanding generals speak the native language fluently, understand the local culture, recognize the strengths of the adversary, and recognize the weaknesses of the partner state politically and military, much less an ordinary private sent into a village. The target environment is therefore *by default* far more complex than the intervening policy attempting to control it, when the inverse would be much more likely to achieve success. A bovine will always have difficulty outmaneuvering its human domesticator for this exact reason. It is small wonder, then, that sweeping interventions are often domesticated by the sociopolitical conditions in which they are targeted, rather than the intervening authority domesticating local sociopolitical conditions. The partner actors in the target area utilize the intervention to their own advantage because their interests in many cases do not align with that of the intervening state and because they know they can get away with it.

Even when they do align, the local actor can still use its leverage to extract resources, vicarious authority, and vicarious legitimacy from the intervening state, limiting its own incentives to provide civil institutions and services to the

populace, thereby creating even more pressure on the intervening state to provide those institutions and services. In Vietnam, for example, advisors were assigned to ARVN units for one-year terms, which meant that "just as he was getting to know the ARVN commander whom he was advising, the American would have to leave and be replaced by a new one who probably knew nothing of the language or what was really going on and who could thus be manipulated or circumvented by the local ARVN leaders," leading to the common adage that Americans did not fight one war in Vietnam, but ten one-year wars.⁴²²

This problem is of course compounded by the potential of adversarial actors to wreak havoc on the intervening state's plans. If the total military and political strength of the intervening and partner state x is weaker than the military and political strength of the collection of adversarial actors y within the target area, t time will slowly bleed the motivation of the intervening state and force the partner state, which had its own agenda to begin with, to rely less on the intervening state and thus pursue its own agenda even further. This phenomenon alone is enough to problematize intervention, and indeed has done exactly that for many centuries. But it becomes further compounded by myriad other factors, many of which have been documented in the case studies. It is therefore of absolute importance that a state pondering intervention be fully aware of these inextricable eventualities and construct remedies to address them *prior* to intervening.

⁴²² Anthony James Joes, *The War for South Viet Nam, 1954-1975* (London: Praeger, 2001), 91.

The case studies have highlighted problems with the weakness of the partner state, the strength and determination of local adversaries with support from abroad, the phenomenon of the actions of the intervening state creating the opposite of their objectives, and the inherent ineptitude involved in operational learning and institutional policy adaptation. These are all problems in implementation, irrespective of the problems a given foreign policy may have in its construction, definition, and proliferation throughout the relevant foreign-policy agencies and institutions. Many of these factors are more pronounced than they were in 1945, when the United States decided to capitalize on the expansion of the Second World War by maintaining fixed interests, political institutions, and military installations abroad.

It is true that guerilla warfare, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism all existed prior to 1945, but the plethora of national-security threats have undergone a sea change in how they materialize and pose challenges to the material and ideational national-security objectives of the state. Combatting the Viet Cong with B-52 bombers was as effective as combatting Islamist terrorism by toppling a secular, non-religious dictator in a sovereign state, which is to say not at all. New threats require new strategies, tactics, and ways of thinking. The United States was late to shift to these new ways of operating because of the enormous ideational and institutional inertia created by the overwhelming victories of the Second World War. Not only are institutions of the state always slow to adapt, but where is the motivation to adapt when everything in the broader picture seems to be proceeding along swimmingly?

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who made a concerted effort to modernize the American military in spite of some of the problems this caused to commanders (such as minimizing troop levels in Iraq), was widely panned for his comment, "You go to war with the army you have—not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time."⁴²³ This was a farcical statement for two reasons. First, Iraq was a war of choice, and could have been fought at a later time; second, his insistence on minimizing troop levels had nothing to do with timing. Nevertheless, it was half true. "What I saw from 9/11 forward was Don Rumsfeld's shock and disillusion with intelligence," a covert operations specialist who worked for Rumsfeld recalled after 9/11. "He had been working for decades with an intelligence community that was focused on one question: the Soviet order of battle. But when the intelligence community had to move down the scale to low-intensity conflict, well..."⁴²⁴ The United States never adequately modernized the order of its military because it has largely maintained the same grand-strategic perspective since 1945.

This ideational and institutional inertia that catapulted from the launchpad of the Second World War facilitates the factors complicating intervention. The pursuit of preponderance and the belief that sheer material power can transform the politics of other states fuels a FPDM process that values output over prudence. The U.S. foreign-policy system exists in many ways to perpetuate

⁴²³ Helmut Sonnenfeldt and Ron Nessen, "You Go to War with the Press You Have," Brookings, December 30, 2004, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/you-go-to-war-with-the-press-you-have/>

⁴²⁴ Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 32.

itself, rather than to respond to particular policy issues or national-security threats. It is therefore unsurprising that it has not adapted well to new conditions. The *process* of seeking out monsters to slay has been systematically prioritized by U.S. foreign policymakers since 1945 over the need to deal with specific threats because the American identity relies on that process to assert itself on the international level. Voltaire mused in the 18th century, "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." This is the philosophy behind the tradition of mission in the history of U.S. foreign relations and the crusading spirit more isolationist tendencies have never been able to completely subdue: if no threats appear on the horizon, wade further into the depths of the sea; you are sure to encounter some eventually.

John Quincy Adams feared the United States wandering about "abroad in search of monsters to destroy." But the events of the Second World War convinced Paul Nitze and other U.S. foreign policymakers that the only way to achieve lasting security would be to achieve a "preponderance" of power. The United States indeed achieved a preponderance of power in the subsequent seven decades—but in spite of, rather than because of, its most ambitious foreign-policy campaigns. And while the United States remains the preeminent power in the international system, the overall balance of power is careening away from U.S. preponderance, irrespective of U.S. desires, objectives, and actions. If it wishes to remain the preeminent power, it would do well to recognize its limitations and de-idealize its international ambitions. Perhaps most importantly, U.S. leaders must recognize that the power of the United States is *not* defined by

its displays of military power alone. The failure of the wars in Vietnam and Iraq obviate this simple fact of power and prestige precisely because they did *not* bring about any substantial shift in the overall balance of power.

Chapters 3 and 4 described grand strategy as a means-end chain. If the stated objectives of grand strategy are limited and pragmatic, they can sometimes be achieved, even in a difficult, dangerous, and unpredictable world. When the objectives are sweeping, heavily idealized, Manichean, and transformational, they become much more difficult to reach, regardless of power endowment. One of the perceived constraints on the science of FPE is the obstacles the researcher must overcome to identify and explain the veritable motivations for and objectives of FPDM leaders. But these objectives are more discernible than is commonly thought. When we go back and analyze the Vietnam War and Iraq War, we do not find some hidden treasure trove of secrets that flips the extant perception of the war on its head (even while we do encounter misinterpretations and highly subjective historiography in the scholarly, policy, and popular literature). The data point to very similar motivations and objectives as were commonly held before the years have passed, the relevant documents declassified, and the memoirs written. The grand strategy of preponderance and the overestimation of sheer power to transform the politics of other states are open secrets. They are not hidden away in some arcane lockbox beneath a government building in Washington. Every major policy document of the last seven decades contains at least traces of each of the two, if not a full-blown endorsement of each as with the 2002 NSS. Even if FPDM leaders had

taken every effort to conceal their true motivations and calculations, they would still have to answer for their *actions*, which inevitably render their words, thoughts, espionage and statecraft secondary in the minds of the American citizens empowered with the ability to vote them into oblivion. Foreign policymakers are judged by their *actions*, not their thoughts, and should be evaluated along those lines. While intention is not irrelevant, it hardly constitutes the whole picture.

The reason many scholars have focused so diligently on the limits of U.S. power is because U.S. foreign policymakers have so often characterized U.S. power as omnipotent. But if there is one thing thousands of years of international relations have demonstrated, it is that there is no such thing as omnipotent power. Robert Gilpin notes that “no state has ever completely controlled an international system; for that matter, no domestic government, not even the most totalitarian, has completely controlled a domestic society.”⁴²⁵ Not the Romans in the Mediterranean, nor Ghengis Kahn in Asia, nor the Third Reich in Europe, nor the sunset-less British Empire, nor American preponderance have ever achieved anything remotely characteristic of global omnipotence. If for no other reason, this could be attributed to the simple idea that if x amount of individuals are willing to die to expel foreign occupiers, and those individuals effect y deaths on the soldiers of that occupying force, in t time the occupier will withdraw, realizing that the costs outweigh the benefits, and having the *privilege* of ending a war of choice in which the national interest is peripheral at best, and sometimes being

⁴²⁵ Robert Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 28.

negatively impacted by intervention. The key distinction between the American crusading spirit and those of her preponderance-seeking forefathers is that she often did so with a noble purpose in mind, which is to say securitizing and liberalizing the international system.⁴²⁶ But when you are on the receiving end of the most powerful military in the history of the world, intention is hardly a relevant factor.

U.S. grand strategy, IR theory, and change

At the center of the interchange between scholarship and praxis is the intention-result spectrum, otherwise characterized (in reverse) as the description-prescription spectrum. Realism intends to describe the conditions from the present backward, liberalism intends to normatively improve the world by developing theories and tools to facilitate its betterment, and Constructivism intends to shatter the fourth wall as would have a traveler on the Further bus with Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters in the watershed year of 1964. Classical and neo-realism, with their emphasis on human nature and a relatively fixed, materially and/or structurally determined national interest, assumes that a change in leadership or a change in ideas seldom brings a substantial change in foreign policy. Liberalism, for its part, is more of a paradox than commonly conceived in

⁴²⁶ Recognition must be given here that this a highly contentious assertion. Chapter 3 offers a discussion of literature on whether the U.S.-directed international order imposed after 1945 was benevolent or exploitative. It is likely that it was both, in contrast to, for example, purely colonial empires, which were unabashedly exploitative, even if claiming to be otherwise. The preference for anti-Communism over democracy During the Cold War, particularly in the 'Third World,' has been duly noted.

this regard. In theory, with its emphasis on the value of human liberty, its primary focus is in fact the individual.

However, in practice, this is a bit of a conundrum. Because the paradigm takes *standard ideals* as its defining characteristics, it is fundamentally trans-individual by default. An idea in one person's mind is irrelevant until they share it with another. Ralph Waldo Emerson observed, "Every revolution was once a thought in one man's mind, and when the same thought occurs to another man, it is the key to that era."⁴²⁷ While in theory liberalism espouses the value of one life, one body, and one idea-unit unto itself, in practice it specifies specific normative ideas based on specific international objectives—democracy to achieve self-determination, interconnectivity to achieve peace, the free market to achieve a medium through which individuals and groups of individuals can pursue happiness and variegated standards of living based on the intersection of personal ambition and societal efficiency. In practice, however, liberalism is intolerant of ideas, polities, institutions, and international processes that do not abide by those specific tenets.

It is therefore a fundamentally *international* paradigm at its core, which leads to an international situation in which the tenets of Democratic Peace Theory render relations between democracies and non-democracies virtually as antagonistic as those between non-democracies. In the words of E.H. Carr, "The doctrine of the harmony of interests thus serves as an ingenious moral device

⁴²⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Mind in History," in *The World's Best Essays, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, eds. Edward Archibald Allen and William Schuyler (St. Louis: Ferd P. Kaiser, 1900) 1623.

invoked, in perfect sincerity, by privileged groups in order to justify and maintain their dominant position."⁴²⁸ Perhaps this has been one of the reasons why the most powerful state in the history of the international system, which was also the first liberal, pluralistic, secular state, has had such a chaotic interchange with the rest of the world, especially nonliberal states. The United States, as the (supposed) peerless exemplar of liberal power, has had an especially difficult time relating to nonliberal powers, with certain notable exceptions during the Cold War when anti-Communism temporarily eclipsed liberalism as its international identity-creator. It may be the case that the only reason this 'liberal leviathan' has had such antagonistic relations with nonliberal states is because its enormous share of world power by diffusion creates more areas of overlap with nonliberal states than other less powerful liberal states have, inevitably leading to more conflict. Where the territory of the lion and the hyena intersect, the ground will be bloodied sooner or later. And while the magisterial king of beasts is unchallenged on an individual basis, he is often outnumbered by the tenacious hyena.

However, two things stand out about the United States irrespective of its substantial power endowment. First, no other state has pursued preponderance to the point of the United States even when accounting for its great power differential since the material and ideational demise of colonialism. Either this says something about the economy of scale inherently changing the behavior of a state—which would not only be a surprising development, but one which would

⁴²⁸ E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, in *The Realism Reader*, eds. Colin Elman and Michael Jensen (New York: Routledge, 2014), 42.

be impossible to test given the singularity of U.S. power since the Second World War—or there is some other factor at play. Christopher Fettweis notes that "the stronger a country gets, the more mistakes it seems to make."⁴²⁹ But this is due to the affordability of mistakes a large power endowment offers. This dissertation has demonstrated that the other factor is the pursuit of preponderance. Second, the United States seems to have chosen the blunders herein virtually arbitrarily—that is to say, without proper consideration for the role of the country chosen as it relates to the national interest—neither Vietnam nor Iraq had any in any substantial sense. The two most notable of these wars of choice utterly failed to achieve their objectives.

Therefore, either there is a terribly unscientific process for choosing these conflicts, or there is another factor at play. This dissertation has demonstrated that preponderance is the other factor at play *and* that there is a terribly unscientific process for choosing these conflicts. This is without even considering the extremely difficult obstacles that must be overcome if one state wishes to transform the politics of another. In other words, at each one of the input, output, operationalization, and implementation phases of foreign policy, the U.S. grand-strategic means-end chain contained neither theoretical nor applicable prudence as it related to these blunders. The theory of preponderance that has been guiding the nation for seven decades has not found effective application where it is applied with the most vigor. In fact, in the two most notable of these cases, that

⁴²⁹ Christopher Fettweis, *Making Foreign Policy Decisions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2015).

vigor was actually a source of the overwhelming response against it by armed indigenous and external actors. In Vietnam, investment of troops, bombs, and dollars was inversely related to objectives there. In Iraq, this phenomenon was even more pronounced. In Vietnam the enemy was singular—the North Vietnamese/VC alliance, with modest external assistance. In Iraq, the enemy was also singular in that it consisted of social conditions of fractionalization within the state, as well a modest external disruption in the form of Salafist jihadism. The problems producing this social condition were of course multifarious, but the United States was essentially fighting a singular war against this malignant *condition*.

In fact, the security vacuum left in the invasion's wake hardly signified anti-Americanism. Anti-Americanism was certainly a part of it, and anti-Americanism certainly achieved a stature that it had not held prior to the invasion (recall that the United States was drowning in international sympathy in the months after 9/11). But just as the 9/11 attacks had little (nothing) to do with Iraq, neither did its internal social conditions. Instead, Iraq descended into a cauldron of sectarianism, regionalism, and balkanization as one faction warred on another for its share of domestic-national autonomy. Ironically, this was both nationalist and anti-nationalist in nature. Groups were essentially fighting each other for a right to fight against the foreign Christian occupier, and at the same time fighting both with and against the fledgling Iraqi state. Shia fought Shia for control from within the state, and Sunni fought the state's oppression. He who could take the banner of the 'nationalist' movement in ideational and militaristic terms would be able to

take a larger share of political power within it in material, political, and territorial terms.

The international jihadism that overtook Iraq in the aftermath of March 2003 existed as but one of these rival factions, and could enjoy little local authority and sparse support in its early days of 2003-2004, for two reasons. First, in order to establish its name, it had to resort to brutal bombings and executions in order to be noticed, especially as the extant violence became further exacerbated. Second, as these groups were international in nature and did not exist in Iraq prior to the invasion, they could not rely on the solidarity of extant groups that did not resort to those barbaric tactics, in part because no such nonsense was permitted under Saddam Hussein's monopolization of violence (except of course by his own forces). As is always the fundamental conundrum for any terrorist organization, the brutality of the tactics of terrorism by default alienate a majority of the audience for which the attacks are engineered.

If the story had ended there, Iraq would have been a simple one-off foreign-policy disaster, the United States would have left it in disarray as it did South Vietnam, and the Americans would have moved on and forgotten about that sorry state of affairs as would have been its prerogative in a war of choice in which the national interest was not at stake. However, because of the sectarian rift exposed by the toppling of Saddam Hussein, the story did not end there, and Iraq *became* relevant to the U.S. national interest because there now was international jihadism there just as Vietnam *became* relevant to the national

interest because each American soldier killed there served as a call to arms to send *more* soldiers to die in Vietnam in his name. The United States created the perfect Petri dish for ISIS to emerge from the rubble of shock and awe: a weak, Shia-dominated state with an impotent military incapable of confronting the Sunni militant movement that predictably assembled after being toppled over by a nation still angry about attacks launched against it by barely more than a dozen members of states allied with that nation orchestrated by a nonstate group based in a country 1,800 miles away. This was not a crusade against Islam—as Saddam Hussein was not even religiously inclined—but to many in the Muslim community, and certainly to Salafi jihadists, it contained all the hallmarks necessary to perpetuate their narrative.

Had the FPDM process been perfectly designed, processed and applied with the express purpose of harming the national interest, it could scarcely have achieved such success. *Based on results alone*, it seems as if the leaders involved in both cases not only did not pursue the national interest, but did everything within their power to harm the national interest. Of course, this is not the case. It is the case, however, that the national interest was neither properly defined nor prudently pursued with respect to Vietnam or Iraq. For all of their frivolities, hypocrisy, dishonesty, and incompetence, these leaders did the best they could to pursue the national interest within the *bounded rationality of mission*. Whether the mission of pursuing preponderance at the international level, or the mission of transforming the politics of the state in question, cognitive biases and preference restrictions prevented these leaders from thinking

rationality. At the grand-strategic level, it was not possible for them to conceive of relinquishing South Vietnam or allowing Iraq to exist under Saddam Hussein. At the individual policy-level, it was not possible for them to conceive that their shortsighted plan was incapable of working.

At the grand-strategic level, this could be labeled a simple act of hubris; at the individual-policy level, this is a basic ignorance of what can happen when very different *cultures* collide. A paradigm that dismisses cultural factors is likely to fail at intervention; indeed, one that recognizes them is unlikely to undertake intervention. Somewhat paradoxically, American militant liberalism has taken a realist approach to the lack of differentiation in states as archetypical boxes, even while superimposing liberal projections of what foreign citizens desire; all this while utilizing highly Constructivist interpretations of the national interest as it relates to liberalizing the world through militancy (creating the material world through ideational inventions). Out of the wreckage of this paradigmatic salmagundi emerges a grand strategy confused about its own means-ends chain.

One phenomenon none of the major paradigms adequately address is that of change in the international system. Liberalism purports to; its emphasis on the determinative nature of ideals understands only a system base on those ideals. Constructivism, true to its form, embraces malleability to such an extent that so much potential change changes the nature of change, and thus change cannot be understood except in the absence of change. Marxism is so confident of its prognostications of cyclical class warfare that its predictability renders it

incapable of out-of-model change. Marxists have also yet to be tapped on the shoulder and reminded that their predictions have never historically materialized. Realism likewise only understands change within the confines of its highly parsimonious conceptual prison:

The realist theory of international political change is based on what can be called the law of uneven growth, in contrast to the Marxist law of uneven development. According to realism, the fundamental cause of wars among states and changes in international systems is the uneven growth of power among states. Realist writers from Thucydides and Mackinder to present-day scholars have attributed the dynamics of international relations to the fact that the distribution of power in an international system shifts over a period of time; this shift results in profound changes in the relationships among states and eventually changes in the nature of the international system itself. Underlying the operation of this law and its significance is the fact that power by its very nature is a relative matter; one state's gain in power is by necessity another's loss.⁴³⁰

This nonzero calculation of power feeds directly into the security dilemma, in which every state seeks to increase its relative power in order to increase its relative security. The rest is history. But change has been the only constant in the international system since the domestication of agriculture some ten thousand years ago in present-day Iraq. And change is occurring more rapidly now than at any time in history. Each of the paradigms has lessons and shortcomings for the change the international system is now experiencing. We have learned from Democratic Peace Theory that liberal states tend not to fight one another; however, they do fight other states at more or less the same rate, and

⁴³⁰ Gilpin 1981, 94.

modernization models have failed to bring about democracy in China and other partially liberalized economies in authoritarian states (President Nixon 'opened' China in 1972—45 years ago). We have learned from Constructivism that attitudes and ideas can most definitely contribute to the definition of interests, if not control them altogether, as evidenced by the European Union. We have learned from Marxism that people are concerned with class, as evidenced by the previous presidential election, even if Vietnam and China have moved to modernize their economies, if not their governments. And the primary strength of realism, understanding prudence in international affairs, has not quite been offset by its primary weakness, the dismissal of culture and state differentiation, throughout the course of this dissertation.

Conclusions drawn from the case studies

A summary of the FPE and OPM of each case study was contained therein; as such, another here would be redundant. A summation of the lessons provided by these case studies in correlation with their FPE and their relation to the OPM in aggregate now follows. The case study chapters were elected to illustrate the functionality of FPE, examine why and how blunders occur, and explore the connections between the OPM and the blunders its assertions might contribute to. The data suggest that the process of constructing alternatives and deciding on an initial choice of invasion or escalation is the most important factor in determining how the conflict will be viewed by policymakers in later years. In other words, once a policy course is set toward a substantial investment of

foreign-policy resources, alterations and deviations become difficult. The common illustration of the battleship being turned around as a metaphor for the lack of adaptation of government and its policies comes to mind. If a particular policy problem is framed as a must-win between good and evil, it will be difficult for policymakers to walk back that framing, as they would have to not only contradict themselves but also renegotiate through all of the different bureaucratic machinations (Congress, military services, public opinion, advisors) that had to be negotiated to initiate the policy in the first place.

Above all, these case studies illustrate a neurasthenia in the central decision-making system at the highest levels of leadership, especially in three determining *decision axes*: the interpretation of the problem, as it is detected in the foreign policy system's tentacles; the digestion of the problem through domestic governmental processes and the court of public opinion; and the construction of the policy response by way of arriving at a consensus. Once these three conditions have been met, they become so ingrained in the production of foreign policy with regard to a particular state, region, or issue that they achieve a critical mass whose momentum cannot easily be reversed. Proclamations that the enemy is evil—along with the imperative that it must be confronted—leave policymakers hamstrung in terms of more cautious options.

The overarching lesson from these blunders is to be more prudent when in the decision-making phase, before the policy carries so much institutional and ideational inertia that its course arrives at a point of no return. Policymakers must keep close at hand the absolute necessity to demand precise exaction and

unfiltered clarity in defining the three fundamental decision axes. It is perhaps for this reason that scholars gravitate toward the question of whether President Kennedy may have kept the United States out of a policy of escalation: such a conclusion would signify that it was the critical decision-making phase that faltered, rather than underlying conditions in the American foreign-policy system. In fact, both feature prominently in each of these cases. While these conditions are of utmost significance, in each of the examined cases, policymakers indeed committed grave errors of strategic judgment at each decision axis. These conditions, described in Chapter 3 and detailed throughout the case studies, are directly related to the *interpretation* of the policy problem (the first decision axis) and the *imperative* of response (as opposed to inaction).

The case studies elected are special cases—strategic blunders replete with a multitude of tactical shortcomings that result in total failure and significant harm to the national interest. They are by definition different from *normal* interchanges between one state and another in which the outcome is 'mixed-result,' or each state loses some battles and wins others (whether political or military). The purpose of utilizing these blunders as case studies is therefore to produce inferences about how the process of imprudent FPDM can lead to unfavorable outcomes via a host of FPDM fallacies. Nevertheless, while some are specific to the United States, some of the lessons from this volume can inform all interstate interactions, whether extreme or normal. Avoiding the same FPDM errors made during the course of these events should in theory lead to the betterment of any given policy, maximizing what the state is able to gain from the

other, even under conditions of cooperation in which the rising tide raises all boats. For even among partners the art of statecraft must still be adeptly employed, just as the art of diplomacy is never completely absent among adversaries.

Each Criterion and Indicator offers conclusions from the analysis of the case studies:

FPE

Criterion I. Degree of fruition of primary and secondary objectives

Redefine the interaction between intervention and the national interest.

The perpetual pursuit of monsters prohibits the development of foreign-policy tools, institutions, and processes capable of distinguishing unfortunate circumstances and events from existential threats. Conceiving of national security in global terms and threat hypersensitivity raise the costs of intervention and lower its return on investment by setting virtually impossible objectives and assuming that total victory is the only acceptable outcome.⁴³¹ Although he characterizes war as "a dramatically nonzero-sum activity," Thomas Schelling recognizes that "winning in a conflict does not have a strictly competitive meaning; it is not winning relative to one's adversary. It means gaining relative to one's own value system; and this may be done by bargaining, by mutual

⁴³¹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Choice and Consequence: Perspectives of an Errant Economist* (Harvard University Press, 1984), 269.

accommodation, and by the avoidance of mutually damaging behavior."⁴³² Chapter 5 noted that Robert McNamara attributed much of the damage of the Vietnam War to a lack of cooperation and communication between warring parties. Like many of the protagonists of the Vietnam War, as well as the Iraq war, he wished to blame the events on inevitable conditions, uncontrollable circumstances, and "what-ifs."

But this is not an accurate characterization of the conditions under which the two adversaries interacted. Neither was interested in the other's perspective because the perspectives were diametrically opposed, which is why secret negotiations continued for years even with President Nixon and Henry Kissinger expecting to gain little from them, and indeed gaining little from them and eventually losing control of Saigon to the Communists. Even while maintaining these modest expectations, the war was directed by its leaders in a fashion in which total victory was the expectation. What the United States was willing to settle for at the Paris Peace Accords was far short of what it had sought at the outset of the conflict, after expending far more in defeat than it ever would have even to achieve success—even after winning every battle of the war.

The same was true in Iraq. No militia or band of jihadists could challenge the American military in any open battle. But as with the NVA and VC, they managed to make the cost too great to be worth the effort. The words of Sun Tzu remind us, "To win victory is easy; to preserve its fruits, difficult." Likewise, Machiavelli's deliberations led him to the conclusion, "Everyone may begin a war

⁴³² Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Harvard University Press, 1960), 4.

at his pleasure, but cannot so finish it."⁴³³ After the spurious Gulf of Tonkin incident, and in the months after 9/11, the United States went to war at its pleasure, but could not finish it in accordance with its objectives. The fundamental lesson from Criterion I is twofold: do not characterize a particular policy problem in terms of good and evil or total victory and total defeat, and do not fight a war of choice as if it were a war of survival. *Fit particular policy objectives to the national interest, not the national interest to particular policy objectives*, which is exactly what the 2002 NSS did.

Criterion II. Corollary strategic consequences

All politics is local: do not conflate states in the aggregate or individually and do not apply grand-strategic lenses to local problems.

No two foreign-policy assumptions can be equally applied to any two different states. U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War exemplifies this grand-strategic shortcoming. Classical realism, with its emphasis on the generalities of human nature and hard power, and neorealism, with its emphasis on structural constraints, largely ignore the relevance of culture in international relations. Critical scholars accurately contend that "pure or unadulterated (Western) IR concepts do not correspond with many local realities."⁴³⁴ But in the case of intervention, culture is an essential component of the efficacy of the policy. By

⁴³³ Both quotes from Michael Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 150.

⁴³⁴ Arlene Tickner and David Blaney, *Thinking International Relations Differently* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 4.

imposing the concept of the 'ungoverned area' into security considerations, an intervening power mischaracterizes the area in question. There is no such thing as an 'ungoverned area:' "In reality, many so-called 'ungoverned spaces' are simply differently governed."⁴³⁵ In fact, in South Vietnam, as with many other Cold War battlefields, the state being 'defended' in intervention had little presence in the areas of the country where the enemy was active, which was precisely the problem with that state. It only controlled a tiny fraction of the country and ceded the rest as *alternatively governed areas*. William Odom wrote in 1992, soon after the Cold War ended:

Two things seem to be missing from the various lines of study of the problem that the Third World poses for U.S. security. First, there is seldom an effort to stand back and view the U.S.—Soviet competition in its broader context, to examine the assumptions and political values on both sides, to reexamine the record on both sides, and to relate the competition to the indigenous factors that cause wars in the Third World. Second, there has been little effective effort to integrate the military dimension of wars in the Third World with two other dimensions—external influences and indigenous politics. Mention of their importance and urgings that they be seen as important are numerous, but how they interrelate and how they affect U.S. strategy are integrating issues that are largely neglected.⁴³⁶

Odom recognized that to superimpose the perceptions and misperceptions of the global Cold War over indigenous local politics meant the misapplication of power in an intervention because such power would only be exploited by local

⁴³⁵ Anne Clunan and Harold Trinkunas, *Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty* (Stanford University Press, 2010), 17.

⁴³⁶ William Odom, *On Internal War: American and Soviet Approaches to Third World Clients and Insurgents* (Duke University Press, 1992), 5.

adversaries as well as partners. Robert Komer, whose writings are detailed in Chapter 5, argued that linking human rights with military aid in foreign policy was akin to "fiddling while Rome burns," even while he administered pacification programs in Vietnam.⁴³⁷ But the self-defeating perspective "Blowtorch Bob" Komer propounded was ineffective for exactly that reason: not understanding local conditions led to unsuccessful interventions because the two *were* related, but in precisely the *opposite* way. You could positively affect the overall balance of power by adeptly partnering with local actors, but you could not turn local actors into pure Cold War proxies because they already had their own set of local objectives.

Henry Kissinger concluded after the failure in Vietnam, "We probably made a mistake" by viewing Vietnam strictly through the FPDM prism of international Communism, lamenting of this myopia, "We perhaps might have perceived the war in more Vietnamese terms, rather than as the outward thrust of a global conspiracy."⁴³⁸ There is no other conflict in American history that has been subject to such histrionics, as Chapter 5 details. Kissinger's comment about the need to "perceive the conflict in more Vietnamese terms" is most welcome to the social scientist, but unfortunately came after the war, when it was needed before. This is the first lesson of the Vietnam War; the second being to understand the limits of the utility of even virtually unlimited military power. The

⁴³⁷ Walter Ladwig, III, "The New FM 3-24: What Happens When the Host Nation Is the Problem?" Council on Foreign Relations, June 10, 2014, <http://blogs.cfr.org/davidson/2014/06/10/the-new-fm-3-24-what-happens-when-the-host-nation-is-the-problem/>

⁴³⁸ Brigham 2008, 153.

third lesson of the Vietnam War is that the United States never fully accepted the first two, which were un-learned sometime between 1975 and 2003. The heavily idealized foreign policy of the Bush Administration is documented in Chapter 6, but the re-militarization of U.S. foreign policy began before that. On August 18, 1980, presidential candidate Ronald Reagan nostalgically addressed the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago, recounting, "For too long, we have lived with the 'Vietnam Syndrome.'" His Vietnam War requiem was entirely distinct from the depiction offered in Chapter 5:

Over and over again they told us for nearly 10 years that we were the aggressors bent on imperialistic conquests. They had a plan. It was to win in the field of propaganda here in America what they could not win on the field of battle in Vietnam. As the years dragged on, we were told that peace would come if we would simply stop interfering and go home. It is time we recognize that ours was, in truth, a noble cause. A small country newly free from colonial rule sought our help in establishing self-rule and the means of self-defense against a totalitarian neighbor bent on conquest. We dishonor the memory of 50,000 young Americans who died in that cause when we give way to feelings of guilt as if we were doing something shameful... There is a lesson for all of us in Vietnam. If we are forced to fight, we must have the means and the determination to prevail or we will not have what it takes to secure the peace. And while we are at it, let us tell those who fought in that war that we will never again ask young men to fight and possibly die in a war our government is afraid to let them win.⁴³⁹

This is not only a complete distortion of the events of the Vietnam War, but it is a perspective that continues in both the popular imagination and in some segments of the scholarly literature, some of which is discussed in Chapter 5.

⁴³⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago," The American Presidency Project, August 18, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=85202>

President Reagan, knowingly or unwittingly, completely ignores, and in fact lambasts, the most important lessons of the war. When he says "they," he is referring to the enemy. He does not name them by their actual political titles, as in Viet Cong, or North Vietnamese Army. He is promoting precisely the perspective that Kissinger realized was wrong by characterizing it as a "global conspiracy," in Kissinger's words. Nowhere in his statement is there any responsibility of any wrongdoing or even poor FPDM, except to say that political hamstringing lost the war, which is factually inaccurate.

If far more bombs were dropped on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia than all ordnance expended over the Pacific and European theaters in all of the Second World War, in what way was the military effort hamstrung? If this is to suggest that the air war should have been expanded into China, or the ground war into North Vietnam, which would have provoked the same Chinese response as did crossing into North Korea, Reagan is virtually pining for World War Three. His characterization of South Vietnam as a "small country, newly free" omits the role the United States played defending French colonialism, as well as the repressive tyranny of the government in Saigon. North Vietnam was not a "totalitarian neighbor." In fact, it did not take orders from Beijing or Moscow, and the idea of nationalist Vietnamese unification was popular in South Vietnam as well as North.

This mendacious misrepresentation of the most tragic war in American history not only dishonors the men who died there—which were nearly ten thousand more than the figure he offers—it all but guarantees that similar

tragedies will recur. What was "shameful" about Vietnam policy was not the brave soldiers who fought there, but the imprudence of the men who sent them there to fight a losing war. While the American public has been at least complacent in if not supportive of preponderance, the imprudent FPDM involved in the two foreign-policy blunders of the case studies require both self-deception, in terms of how U.S. foreign policymakers estimate U.S. capabilities to transform other states, and duplicity to the American people, in terms of how easy the campaign will be. John Mearsheimer's *Why Leaders Lie* explains that deceiving the public is an inherently democratic activity, because of the fact that voters in a democracy can boot leaders out of office if a policy is perceived to be contrary to the national interest.⁴⁴⁰ FPDM leaders therefore take great care to preserve their narrative of events as it suits their particular brand of political expedience.

Criterion III. Cost

Do not equate military power with political power.

The possession of power is not universally fungible across different applications of power. Military power cannot always buy political power, much less become the other. One of the common themes throughout these case studies in terms of the FPDM that led to blunder is the intentional magnification of preferred conditions, traits, and ideas with respect to specific policy issues and its concomitant depreciation of the threats obstacles to policy implementation present. This is especially evident in terms of defining the struggle and what

⁴⁴⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

resources are necessary and feasible in order to win. These problems are compounded by a conflation of global ideology and local realities. The cousin to Criterion III is Criterion V, which addresses context, scope, and stakes. When evaluating cost, it is necessary to evaluate the cost *in relation to the value of success*. As mentioned in Chapter V, it is unlikely that the United States would have paid the cost for success that it ultimately paid for failure in Vietnam. The same could be said of Iraq. Therefore, when evaluating the FPDM of the relevant leaders, it is necessary to evaluate what they estimated the cost of intervention to be in relation to what it turned out to be. The wider the gap, the less accurate the FPDM. While it is impossible to calculate with precision the cost an intervention will have, this is part of the job of responsible leaders.

Assuming that with a great power endowment comes the ability to transform the politics of other states is imprudent. The calculations of the Second World War and the Cold War—the destruction a fielded military can wield on another, for example, or the destructive capacity of nuclear weapons—are not relevant to the majority of today's conflicts. The theories and tools of great power politics cannot be applied to asymmetrical and/or nonstate threats. Even in Vietnam, when Kennedy touted 'flexible response,' the war still became the application of great-power military doctrine to such an extent that it became the most destructive bombing campaign in history, but it mostly destroyed the animals and trees of the jungle. In Iraq, with both the justification for invading the country and the prosecution of the war itself, great power politics were employed

again against a single individual and his tyrannical regime, with the same unfavorable results.

The argument could be made that the United States was in fact going to war against another state, but this was explicitly denied by President Bush in his war-eve address. Having already made the case several times that the war was not with the Iraqi people but with the head of state alone, President Bush was quick to equate Saddam Hussein with terrorism in moral terms: "America faces an enemy that has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality." He did attempt to warn that war would be long: "A campaign on a harsh terrain in a nation as large as California could be longer and more difficult than some predict." But "some" could have referred to the majority of his cabinet, with the exception of Colin Powell, the only member of it with combat experience. His claim, "We have no ambition in Iraq except to remove a threat" would be contradicted by events on the ground. His claim, "Our nation enters this conflict reluctantly" was as far from the truth as Baghdad from Washington.

Having applied the Manichean morals of the crusade, he lastly offered, "The only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force, and I assure you, this will not be a campaign of half-measures, and we will accept no outcome but victory."⁴⁴¹ This comment was a direct acknowledgement to the perception that political hamstringing prevented victory in Vietnam, which was not the case, and to the criticism of allowing Hussein to retain power during the 1991 Gulf War.

⁴⁴¹ President Bush's address to the nation on March 19, 2003, retrieved from Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WejYdT3Lof8>

Throughout the heavily idealized rhetoric and the constant demonization of Saddam Hussein by Bush Administration officials in the media, great care was taken to frame the relevant "issues, story line, and slogans" in order to manipulate public perception into a more warlike footing.⁴⁴² Entire volumes have been published on this disinformation campaign.⁴⁴³ Ultimately, when it came to the conflict itself, Defining victory would become as mercurial a prospect in this struggle as it was in Vietnam, and "decisive force" would again result in decisive defeat.

Cost is perhaps the most difficult metric to project while being the easiest to evaluate retroactively. When the deed is done, the financial cost can be calculated to the dollar. But before intervention takes place, the cost is somewhat a matter of conjecture. The estimation by Paul Wolfowitz that the Iraq War would "pay for itself" demonstrates how oblivious FPDM leaders can be to the costs of impending conflict. While they cannot be expected to predict cost to the dollar, the incentive on those promoting war is to depreciate its expected costs, and therefore other FPDM leaders and ordinary citizens must question these somewhat arbitrary projections. Applying military power to political grand-strategic objectives will inevitably carry high financial costs, in addition to provoking strong reactions from adversaries.

⁴⁴² Ray Eldon Hiebert, "Public Relations and Propaganda in Framing the Iraq War: A Preliminary Review," *Public Relations Review* Vol. 29 (2003), 243.

⁴⁴³ Joseph Russomano, *Tortured Logic: A Verbatim Critique of the George W. Bush Presidency* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac, 2011).

Robert Brigham reminds us, "The progressive impulse in American foreign policy has led to the realization in some circles that there generally is no political corollary to American military strength when the United States engages in nation building abroad."⁴⁴⁴ When President Kennedy pronounced in his inaugural address, "We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty," it is likely that he was both undecided about whether this was true with respect to 'Indochina' and somewhat ignorant about the costs ambitious foreign-policy campaigns could sustain.⁴⁴⁵ It is certain that he did not know that the full force of the American military *would* be applied to the deltas and jungles of Vietnam and *falter*.

The primary lesson of Vietnam, and one completely ignored by President Bush and his advisers, is that there is often no political corollary to America's overwhelming military power. In Vietnam, the armed forces of the United States fought with courage and valor. They never lost a major military engagement and they inflicted severe pain on their adversaries. Yet U.S. objectives in Vietnam proved illusive. The United States was never able to translate that massive military might into sustainable political results. Without a successful political war, there was little that could be done militarily in Vietnam to change the course of the war within acceptable risks and costs.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ Brigham 2008, xii.

⁴⁴⁵ "President Kennedy's Inaugural Address," January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/JFK-Quotations/Inaugural-Address.aspx>

⁴⁴⁶ Brigham 2008, 35.

Kennedy was inaugurated during a time of unbridled American patriotism and optimism. The Vietnam War would cause Americans to question everything they thought they had come to take for granted about American power, American morality, and the dynamic between them. If the 1991 Gulf War served as a cathartic exorcism of those questions, the Iraq War would cause them to revisit those doubts once again.

Criterion IV. Alternatives

No policy is inevitable.

This is the perhaps the most crucial of all the FPE Criteria, at least for a state with a great power endowment that can bear a very high cost of conflict. The manner in which the alternatives are created and processed through the FPDM system are absolutely essential in how the conflict will proceed and its prospects for success. By incorporating the respective policy issues into the grand strategy of preponderance, both the Vietnam War and Iraq War distorted the predictions, assessments, and costs calculated by the relevant leaders. They began from a point of victory, rather than striving towards it. They began from the assumption that 'Indochina' could not fall into enemy hands and that Saddam Hussein could not remain in power, rather than accepting it as a possibility. They began from the assertion that American military power could not be challenged. They began by assuming the NVA and VC would rapidly capitulate when they saw what they were up against and that American soldiers in Iraq would "be

greeted as liberators." ⁴⁴⁷ Beginning from a presumption of success is an imprudent way to achieve it. Worst of all, they linked the fate of South Vietnam to the fate of the Cold War, perpetuating the perception that a loss there was the loss of the Cold War. They did lose in Vietnam, they did not lose the Cold War, and the Vietnam War was not worth 1% of the cost incurred in blood and treasure in terms of the national interest. The same was true in 2003, when President Bush rashly linked the fate of Iraq with that of the "free world."

Arthur Schlesinger's assertion that the Vietnam War was "a tragedy without villains" represents a fatalist school of historiography that accepts particular events in history as inevitable. It may be the paramount lesson of history, as well as international relations, that every event everywhere in the world somehow simultaneously affects every other in an unpredictable symphony of surprises, especially in a world globalized by the astronomically expanding technological advancements in the transportation of material and information. As Captain Lawrence proclaimed in the film epic *Lawrence of Arabia* upon having rescued an outcast boy on an ostensibly impossible mission back through the Nefud Desert, "Nothing is written." Just as to deny the plausibility of constructing comprehensive, consistent methods and metrics to evaluate foreign policy is to ignore one of the basic necessities in international relations, so too is the exoneration of leaders because of presumed inevitability, a logical fallacy that reduces the value of scholarship and the general progress of humankind. If history is inevitable, then we cannot learn from it, and if we cannot learn from

⁴⁴⁷ This was one of a host of inaccurate predictions by Dick Cheney and his cohort.

history, then the future may as well be considered just as inevitable as history. This line of thinking is decidedly irreconcilable with the entire premise of this dissertation. FPE and FPA need more prominent roles in IR literature precisely because of the fact that decision-makers are *human* and their policies, both ideationally and practically, malleable.

It could hardly be said of the FPDM of the Iraq War that leaders "agonized" over it. In fact, discussion was tragically truncated. Senator Robert Byrd spoke to an empty audience during his lonesome rhetorical deliberations on the war in the Senatorial chambers. In contrast, FPDM leaders did indeed "agonize" over what to do with Vietnam. From March 10-24 of 1965, still part of the decision-making phase of "The Long 1964," Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton reported to Robert McNamara proportioned U.S. objectives in Vietnam as "70%—To avoid a humiliating defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor); 20%—To keep SVN (and the adjacent) territory from Chinese hands; 10%—To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer, way of life."⁴⁴⁸ At the time, there were less than 30,000 U.S. troops in country, and less than 500 soldiers had lost their lives there.⁴⁴⁹ And even with those modest (relative to what would come) losses, prestige was still of utmost importance. The U.S. thus fell victim to what Hilton Root termed the "commitment trap."

⁴⁴⁸ Blema Steinberg, *Shame and Humiliation: Presidential Decision Making in Vietnam* (McGill—Queens University Press, 1996), 101.

⁴⁴⁹ Christian Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and our National Identity* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016).

The trap the United States faces in Iraq exemplifies a recurring dilemma in U.S. foreign policy. Presidents have continuously coddled client regimes that are unwilling to make the political trade-offs necessary for national legitimacy. Despite American rhetoric about overseas reform and ambivalence about backing dictators, throughout the cold war many U.S. political leaders relied on one authoritarian regime to help defeat another more odious authoritarian regime. And there were the proxy wars, too, when the United States armed Iraq against Iran and the mujahedin against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Such myopic policies consequently impaired America's ability to forcefully advocate domestic reforms within those regimes. Once engaged, U.S. support weakened American demands for pro-reform quid pro quo terms. This is the U.S. commitment trap. Committed to the survival of allies but lacking the leverage to discipline recalcitrant regime leaders, America creates a strategic vulnerability that even weak client states can exploit. The commitment trap reduces America's credibility as a reform advocate. It binds the United States so that America cannot walk away from allies without eroding its credibility. Curiously, this trap isn't sealed abroad but at home—by the fears that have driven the U.S. electorate since the cold war.⁴⁵⁰

The United States has faced this problem everywhere it has intervened to prop up a weak state, as OPM Indicator II illustrates. Another memo from the *Pentagon Papers* discussing alternatives for Vietnam described a situation in which "the bombing campaign is reaching the point where we will have struck all worthwhile fixed targets except the ports," leaving Air Force commanders "no major military targets [remaining] to be struck in the North." With nowhere left to bomb in North Vietnam, the Air Force moved on to Laos and Cambodia and the Army pondered invading North Vietnam proper: "These new military moves against North Vietnam, together with land movements into Laos and Cambodia, are now under consideration by the Joint Chiefs of Staff." Even long before the

⁴⁵⁰ Hilton Root, *Alliance Curse: How America Lost the Third World* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 174.

Tet Offensive turned the tide of public opinion against the war, U.S. war planners knew the effort was futile: "With respect to interdiction of men and materiel, it now appears that no combination of actions against the North short of destruction of the regime or occupation of North Vietnamese territory will physically reduce the flow of men and materiel below the relatively small amount needed by enemy forces to continue the war in the South." The memo concluded that "there appears to be no attractive course of action."⁴⁵¹

In McNamara's memoir, he similarly recalled the 1967 JASON study mentioned in Chapter 6: "Since the beginning of the Rolling Thunder, air strikes on NVN, the flow of men and materiel from NVN to SVN had greatly increased, and present evidence provides no basis for concluding that the damage inflicted on North Vietnam by the bombing program has had any significant effect on this flow. In short, the flow of men and materiel from North Vietnam to the South appears to reflect Hanoi's intentions rather than capabilities even in the face of the bombing."⁴⁵² This was a profound statement about U.S. calculations. U.S. foreign policymakers were unable to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable developments that all the bombing in the world could not alter "Hanoi's intentions." At this point, it should have been obvious that the calculations the United States commenced the war with were no longer operable, but the war continued full-tilt for several more years. U.S. foreign policymakers could not

⁴⁵¹ *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, Volume 4, Chapter I, "The Air War in North Vietnam, 1965-1968," Mount Holyoke College, 1-276, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon4/pent4.htm>

⁴⁵² Robert McNamara, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 199), 342.

improve Vietnam policy because *the reality of the situation did not fit the preconceived notions with which they entered hostilities*. Disconfirming information was therefore useless because it was too late to change the course of events.

Criterion V. Context, scope, and stakes

Redefine the scope of the American grand-strategic means-end chain by avoiding characterizing the world in Manichean terms.

This *need not, should not, and does not* imply a renegotiation or compromise of American values. In fact, this *is* an American value—the freedom of every people to chart its own destiny through the course of its sociopolitical trajectory. In neither Vietnam nor Iraq did America control the moral high ground. The world is not flat, and its varying 195 nation-states contain differing levels of economic and social development, cultural preferences, democratic values, national identities, and foreign-policy customs. So many volumes have been published on the irony of the "arsenal of democracy," "empire by invitation," "liberal leviathan," "benevolent hegemon," or whatever term we choose to describe the engagement of the world by the United States that all sense of irony has dissipated and it has simply become a fact of life. The hypertrophy in American foreign relations has become problematic precisely because of the fact that republicanism is incompatible with interventionism. The ideational and material impulse to achieve *total security* by liberalizing the world produces an ideational and material backlash where it is applied in militant fashion. In the words of Colin Dueck, "The United States cannot be all things at once. It cannot

be the epitome of mortal virtue on a state scale and the international arbiter of world affairs; the consummate liberal utopia and the world's foremost war-initiator."⁴⁵³ It is therefore essential to deeply examine the context and scope of U.S. grand strategy in correlation with any particular foreign policy by explicitly defining how its stakes relate to the national interest. President Bush declared that it was "our responsibility in history" to "rid the world of evil."⁴⁵⁴ This is far too great a burden to place on any one nation.

Characterizing the enemy as an "Evil Empire or an "Axis of Evil" severely constrains the availability of policy alternatives for foreign policymakers, because of the perception that allowing evil to roam freely is not only weak but also a form of morally bankrupt appeasement. It therefore links the strength of the state to the ability to purge those evils from the world. In reality, there is no such thing as 'pure evil,' and conquering that evil may be much more difficult than policymakers believe. This characterization was particularly acute during the Cold War, when the bipolar world seemed divided, at least to the two protagonists, between inextricably dyadic poles, split along pervasively ideological terms. Richard Herrmann points out that this 'enemy image' subsided somewhat when this conflict came to its termination.⁴⁵⁵ But it experienced a revival with the 2002 NSS and President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address. The 'enemy image'

⁴⁵³ Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 30.

⁴⁵⁴ Speech by President Bush at National Cathedral, September 14, 2001, U.S. Department of State Archive, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ei/wh/15423.htm>

⁴⁵⁵ Richard Herrmann, "Beyond the Enemy Image and Spiral Model: Cognitive-Strategic Research after the Cold War," *International Organization* Vol. 49, No. 3 (July 1995), 415-450.

represents a "psychological construct as it signifies the actor's perception of the enemy," facilitating a process of demonization through which is created a "'bipolar' 'us' versus 'them' environment where 'good' is associated with 'us' and 'evil' with 'them.'"⁴⁵⁶ The Constructivist Copenhagen School of IR describes this type of discourse as a process of "securitization" whereby threats are interpreted, codified, and made public: "In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real, the utterance *itself* is the act."⁴⁵⁷ Whether we should accept the Constructivist premise that security exists primarily in the ideational sphere is up to the observer to decide. What is certain is that U.S. leaders would be wise to under-promise and over-perform rather than overpromise and underperform in relation to the pursuit of prestige and moral Puritanism in the international system.

OPM

Indicator I. The estimation of the capacity to transform other states

Recognize that even relatively unlimited power has limitations.

In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy ponders, "What is power?" to which he responds rather rhetorically, "Power is power. That is, power is a word the

⁴⁵⁶ Linn Normand, *Demonization in International Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 10.

⁴⁵⁷ Ole Waever quoted in Michael Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 47, No. 4 (2003), 513.

meaning of which we do not understand."⁴⁵⁸ In slightly less philosophical (more scientific) terms, James March's 1966 classic paper "The Power of Power" poses the question, "To what extent is one specific concept of power useful in the empirical analysis of mechanisms for social choice?" to which he offers the half-response, "The answer to the original question is tentative and mixed... the concept of power and a simple force model represent a reasonable approach to the study of social choice... on the whole, however, power is a disappointing concept. It gives us surprisingly little purchase in reasonable models of complex systems of social choice."⁴⁵⁹ Gilpin defines power in his discussion of *prestige*, part of the FPE Cost Criterion: "Prestige is the reputation of power, and military power in particular. Whereas power refers to the economic, military, and related capabilities of a state, prestige refers primarily to the perceptions of other states with respect to a state's capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise power." Prestige can "deter or compel other states to achieve its objectives," but at the same time, "the fact that the existing distribution of power and the hierarchy of prestige can sometimes be in conflict with one another is an important factor in international political change... prestige, rather than power, is the everyday currency of international relations."⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 1193, in Etienne Balibar, *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology* (Fordham University Press, 2017), 350.

⁴⁵⁹ James March, "The Power of Power," in Jay Shafritz et al., *Classics of Organization Theory* (Cengage Learning, 2016), 272.

⁴⁶⁰ Gilpin 1981, 31.

With respect to Vietnam and Iraq, the United States possessed *relatively unlimited* power (virtually unlimited material power vis-à-vis the target state). It could have destroyed each country, and everyone in it, hundreds of times over. But this would not have accomplished the objectives of inspiring anti-Communism or combatting terrorism, and would have provoked a response from other states. Therefore, power itself is becoming an increasingly problematic measure of means. The extent to which U.S. leaders have assumed that hard power innately wields the capacity to control the political processes and outcomes of other states cannot be overstated. Indeed, the literature cited in this research is riddled with implicit and explicit declarations that where there is military and financial power there must also be the ability to affect and control the politics of other states. What prevails in reality is the ability to have a say in those politics, just as the enemy has a say in any confrontation, as Confederate General George Pickett adroitly proclaimed. State power is a factor in any interstate interaction or confrontation, it is not necessarily *the* factor. For all the tactical pitfalls in Iraq, "the deeper problem was that the fundamental premise of the Bush revolution—that America's security rested on an America unbound—was mistaken."⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶¹ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 195.

Indicator II. The ability to support and bolster the host state

Do not intervene to shield an ineffectual government.

The paradox of intervention in support of a friendly government is that if it is worth defending, it should be able to stand on its own, but if it cannot stand on its own, it must be defended. Hilton Root addresses this exact problem when he refers to the "commitment trap." It is therefore up to the intervening state to calculate whether the state is worth defending, whether it can in fact be defended via successful intervention, and whether the cost required to successfully defend it is worth it. The calculations are the same whether the state is defending itself against adversaries foreign or domestic (though it is often a combination of the two). Just as an intervening state tends to believe that it can overcome the strength of local adversaries, it also tends to believe that its interests are aligned with local partners. The problematic manifestations of this paradox were highly acute during the Cold War, as the United States partnered with states of varying quality, often non-democratic, in order to fend off Communist expansion. In 1971, Robert Keohane described the "cruel and unusual paradox" of the case of the Lilliputian powers that are the "badgers, mice and pigeons—if not the doves—of international politics, and in many cases they have been able to lead the elephant."⁴⁶² In addressing the evolution of the U.S. military's 2006 counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24, juxtaposed with its 2014 version, Walter Ladwig envisions an interest-inverse interaction whereby "U.S. military

⁴⁶² Robert Keohane, "The Big Influence of Small Allies," *Foreign Policy* No. 2 (Spring 1971), 161-182.

assistance saps the host nation's motivation to defeat insurgents on their own or undertake the measures necessary to enhance their counterinsurgency prowess, while economic aid reduces an allied regime's incentives for fiscal reforms which would grow and strengthen their wartime economy."⁴⁶³ While the 2014 version of FM 3-24 recognizes that the intervening state and the partner state do not necessarily share aligned interests, counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine itself requires an intervention by an outside power. The 2014 version therefore simply limits the scope of the U.S. intervention, which is prudent, but nevertheless relies on U.S. COIN support to accomplish its objectives. But whenever military intervention is undertaken, it will face these strategic issues no matter how tactically adept its planners.

Indicator III. The ability to restrict the power of adversaries

Do not assume that more of the same means more success.

This is the all-too-common adage of the powerful state: more resources within the same parameters will achieve superior results. In fact, the opposite may hold true: it is entirely plausible, and, in the cases examined here, factual, that the intervention itself perpetuates precisely the problems its undertaking sought to prevent. Milton Friedman's quote, "If you put the federal government in charge of the Sahara Desert, in five years there'd be a shortage of sand," is somewhat more famous than his marginally more reasonable contention: "Almost

⁴⁶³ Ladwig 2014.

all government programs are started with good intentions, but when you look at what they actually achieve, there is a general rule. Almost every such program has results that are the opposite of the intentions of the well-meaning people who originally back it." ⁴⁶⁴ This is, of course, an extreme characterization of government waste. Many government programs are far more efficient, important, and effective. But these are extreme cases of blunder, and these statements apply. In both Iraq and Vietnam, the military effort was the source of the gathering response against it.

Pickett's assertion supporting the idea that 'the enemy has a vote' in any confrontation, "I kinda think the Yankees had a little something to do with it," illustrates this point. No matter how inferior the strength and firepower of the enemy, his will alone is a metric that is not only difficult to judge, but impossible to judge until the war is well underway. Not until the fight is on can the enemy's will be known. Chapter 5 quoted Roosevelt as describing the people of 'Indochina' as "not warlike." Nothing could have been further from the truth. The Vietnamese were in fact well versed in the art of war and had been repelling, or at least attempting to repel, invaders from the Chinese to the French to the Japanese for hundreds of years. The strategy and tactics used to inflict casualties on the Americans and break the will of the American people to fight were not plucked from thin air, but taken from the theoretical military doctrine of insurgency and guerilla warfare and put in practice by the Viet Minh against the

⁴⁶⁴ David Pratt, *The Impossible Takes Longer: The 1,000 Wisest Things Ever Said by Nobel Prize Laureates* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007), 125.

French. The lessons learned in Communist insurgency acquired during Mao Tse-Tung's experience in the Chinese Civil War would inform NVA and VC military doctrine later on. 'Chairman Mao' describes his evolution of guerilla warfare in stages:

The first covers the period of the enemy's strategic offensive and our strategic defensive. The second stage will be the period of the enemy's strategic consolidation and our preparations for the counter-offensive. The third stage will be the period of our strategic counter-offensive and the enemy's retreat. It is impossible to predict the concrete situation in the three stages, but certain main trends in the war may be pointed out in the light of present conditions. The objective course of events will be exceedingly rich and varied, with many twists and turns.⁴⁶⁵

The Chinese guerillas' experience honing patience, timing, resourcefulness, and leverage of the populace against an otherwise superior force paid dividends in Vietnam once the atmosphere of the Cold War brought the interests of the two countries more in line than they had been for the thousand years prior. Just as intervening states tend to assume that the interests of local partners are aligned with their own, they also tend to assume that they can overcome the strength of local adversaries. But the guerillas of South Vietnam, backed by their North Vietnamese counterparts, relied on a way of war that was more favorable to the conditions of the conflict than was the American way of war. While the Viet Cong relied on maximizing available resources and using time as a weapon, the U.S. military relied on superior firepower and short-

⁴⁶⁵ Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung* (Praetorian Press, 2011), 210.

term "decisive victory" as a crutch, and time was therefore against it over the long-term.

In Iraq, the sense of brooding nationalism that had been lying dormant under the authoritarian dictatorship of Saddam Hussein suddenly discovered flight in the total power vacuum that prevailed after the disbanding of the Iraqi army and the institutional purge of all Ba'ath Party civil servants. Those who had been unable to express a sense of nationalism now found it a *necessity* in order to preserve relevance in the fledgling Iraqi state. Political and religious sects and factions thus organized on those militarized terms, paradoxically linking the development of the state with its fractionalization. In both cases, the very presence of the intervention galvanized the militarized response against it. Furthermore, the simple condition of one state intervening in another creates such a confusion so as to create an overabundance of interests, perspectives, and overlapping alliances. Clausewitz describes the 'fog of war:' "If we remember how many factors contribute to an equation of forces, we will understand how difficult it is in some cases to determine which side has the upper hand. Often it is entirely a matter of the imagination."⁴⁶⁶ Mao's portrait of war as one in which it is "impossible to predict the concrete situation" and to always be prepared for "many twists and turns" fit perfectly with protracted guerilla warfare, and was the ideal counterpunch to the reliance on the quick, decisive battles of superior firepower employed by the American military.

⁴⁶⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 528.

Indicator IV. Rationalization and operational learning

Place more care into defining the national interest in painfully transparent terms with respect to a particular policy.

According to Arnold Wolfers, "It would be an exaggeration to claim that the symbol of national security is nothing but a stimulus to semantic confusion, though closer analysis will show that if used without specifications it leaves room for more confusion than sound political counsel or scientific usage can afford."⁴⁶⁷ As such, FPDM leaders would do well to exercise a higher level of caution in assessing the value of a given country as it relates to the national interest. Vietnam never held the significance to our national interest that we applied to it, nor did Iraq. These were wars of choice, chosen not at random but certainly arbitrarily, in which the national interest was superimposed over the respective country via the medium of the ideology of preponderance.

In a dangerous world, statesman must be borderline obsessive over the process of defining the national interest and seek to make that process as clear and scientific as possible. It is not in the national interest to have an extremely esoteric vision of grand strategy carried out by recondite leaders via clandestine methods and practices. Indeed, this has not been the problem with the grand strategy of preponderance, which has been openly and transparently pursued with little effort made to conceal it. Any encounter with another state, even a cooperative one, potentially carries with it disastrous consequences. It is

⁴⁶⁷ Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol," *Political Science Quarterly*, 68 (1952), p. 483.

therefore incumbent upon statesmen to engage in the world with extreme discretion. Even in circumstances of extreme benevolence, it is difficult to affect local conditions. Researchers at the London School of Economics, for example, found that that "no relationship exists between the levels of aid and rates of growth in recipient countries," resulting instead in "increasing the size of recipient governments and lining the pockets of elites."⁴⁶⁸

Rather than relying on a presumption of meliorism, U.S. grand strategy should be more focused on specifying more precisely what goals the nation seeks in its relations with others. George Kennan envisioned a stricter interpretation of the national interest than his preponderance-promoting colleagues. In simultaneously deploring "the histrionics of moralism" and advocating the pragmatism of pursuing "real possibilities for acting upon the international environment," his response to the "moral problem" of fending off the "two unprecedented and supreme dangers" of environmental destruction and catastrophic systemic wars was to strike a balance between morality, the national interest, and foreign relations:

This would be a policy founded on recognition of the national interest, reasonably conceived, as the legitimate motivation for a large portion of the nation's behavior, and prepared to pursue that interest without either moral pretension or apology. It would be a policy that would seek the possibilities for service to morality primarily in our own behavior, not in our judgment of others. It would restrict our undertakings to the limits established by our own traditions and resources. It would see virtue in our minding our own

⁴⁶⁸ Peter Boone, "The Impact of Foreign Aid on Savings and Growth," Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, 1994.

business wherever there is not some overwhelming reason for minding the business of others.⁴⁶⁹

The key passage in this excerpt is "primarily in our own behavior." The United States is at its most powerful as an exemplar of liberty to other states, rather than as the international dictator of liberty. In the modern world in which pacific, liberal norms are paraded and militarism is frowned upon, power becomes more powerful by creating an interdependence that relies on norms and best practices of liberal interaction. The two most militarized U.S. foreign policies in the last forty years, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, failed miserably. This says as much about changing conditions in the international system in terms of security, norms, and the value of hard power as it does about the United States itself. There has not been a direct great-power conflict since 1945. That does not mean it could not happen tomorrow, but it does mean it is unlikely to happen soon. Under these conditions, the most powerful state in the international system would benefit more from selective cooperative engagement than selective militarist engagement. Military power, for the time being, has been eclipsed by other forms of power as international currency.

At the height of the Cold War, in quintessentially Nixonian fashion, President Nixon pronounced, "When the president does it, that means it's not illegal." As the former President of the Duke University Bar Association, Nixon would have known this to be legally incorrect. But this train of thought has informed the inverse manner in which FPDM is conducted in the United States.

⁴⁶⁹ Benjamin Frankel, *Roots of Realism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 361.

The impulse to slay monsters abroad complicates FPDM because rather than responding to a policy problem with a proportional understanding of its place in the national interest and proportional tools with which to address it, it places the cart before the horse. The innate spirit of mission described in Chapter 3 so characteristic of the American collision with the world, especially since 1945, places emphasis on pursuit over capture. The chase *is* the game. It is therefore unsurprising that the *bounded rationality of mission* ensues within that overarching perspective. The leaders involved in the FPDM of these foreign-policy blunders willfully pursued a policy that was known to have a low likelihood of success, even while paradoxically overestimating U.S. capacity to affect local politics, because they molded reality into their preferred grand strategy of preponderance rather than molding a grand strategy around reality.

This bounded rationality of mission on the grand-strategic level correlates to the same problem on the tactical level. Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate this in detail. To offer another example, eight years into the war in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal entered a situation in which "there was no single effective campaign assessment" mechanism.⁴⁷⁰ He would also lead an effort in which the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence found that the availability of indigenous translators "remains essentially nonexistent."⁴⁷¹ The availability of linguists in Vietnam and Iraq was likewise a tiny fraction of the amount needed to interact

⁴⁷⁰ Jonathan Schroden, "Why Operations Assessments Fail: It's Not Just the Metrics," *Naval College War Review* Vol. 64, No. 4 (Autumn 2011), 90.

⁴⁷¹ "Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010," Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, July 22, 2009, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/111th-congress/senate-report/55/1>

with local communities and gather sufficient intelligence with which to protect those communities and thus win the war. The assessment by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence of prewar intelligence with regard to Iraq concluded, "Much of the information provided or cleared by the Central Intelligence Agency for inclusion in Secretary Powell's speech was overstated, misleading, or incorrect."⁴⁷² General Tommy Franks, who led the invasion force into Iraq, led a style of command that "tended to distort the information that flowed upward to him." One officer that worked under his command simply lamented, "I am convinced that much of the information that came out of Central Command is unreliable because he demands it instantly, so people pull it out of their hats. It's all SWAGs [scientific wild-assed guesses]. Also, everything has to be good news stuff.... You would find out you can't tell the truth."⁴⁷³ This preference for confirmation bias fit perfectly on the political side with the Bush Administration.

Where to in U.S. foreign policy?

The change/continuity in U.S. foreign policy debate continues, and many of its contentions remain in progress. Did the United States build the postwar international order based strictly on in its own interests, or did the 'benevolent hegemon' actually build something normative that transcends interests? Can that international order survive a world without a hegemon, or a world in which the superpower does not wish to arbitrate international affairs? Richard Haas

⁴⁷² "Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq," United States Congress, July 7, 2004, 253.

⁴⁷³ Ricks 2006, 32.

predicts that without forceful U.S. leadership, smaller countries will appease rising powers like China, the international system will revert to self-help, nuclear weapons will proliferate, and U.S. leaders defining the American national interest in very narrow terms will force other countries to do the same.⁴⁷⁴

John Mearsheimer contends that the United States is a regional hegemon, hegemonic only in the Western Hemisphere, while in Europe and Asia the United States is an offshore balancer.⁴⁷⁵ But the expansion of NATO after the Cold War (which Mearsheimer opposed on realist grounds), U.S. maneuvers in the South China sea, and the rhetoric emanating from U.S. foreign policymakers call this characterization into question. Charles Krauthammer, who heralded the 'unipolar moment' when the Soviet Union collapsed, recently declared that the triumphant era of liberal democracy "is over. The autocracies are back and rising; democracy is on the defensive; the U.S. is in retreat. Look no further than Aleppo."⁴⁷⁶ But prognostications of American decline are as oversimplified as were prognostications of the "end of history" and the triumph of post-Cold War American hegemony. The phrase "is over" juxtaposes paradoxically with the declaration in the 2002 NSS that the battle between tyranny and liberty "is over."

Paul Kennedy attributes the "fall" of great powers to imperial overstretch and fiscal irresponsibility, in addition to natural cycles in the distribution of power:

⁴⁷⁴ Richard Haas, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017).

⁴⁷⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁴⁷⁶ Charles Krauthammer, "After a Mere 25 Years, the Triumph of the West is Over," *Washington Post*, December 1, 2016.

Ideally, of course, "profit" and "power" should go hand in hand. Far too often, however, statesmen found themselves confronted with the usual dilemma: between buying military security, at a time of real or perceived danger, which then became a burden upon the national economy, or keeping defense expenditures low, but finding one's interests sometimes threatened by the actions of other states. The present large Powers in the international system are thus compelled to grapple with the twin challenges which have confronted all their predecessors: first, with the uneven pattern of economic growth, which causes some of them to become wealthier (and, usually, stronger), relative to others; and second, with the competitive and occasionally dangerous scene abroad, which forces them to choose between a more immediate military security and a longer-term economic security. No general rule will provide the decision-makers of the time with a universally applicable course of action. If they neglect to provide adequate military defenses, they may be unable to respond if a rival Power takes advantage of them; if they spend too much on armaments—or, more usually, upon maintaining at growing cost the military obligations they had assumed in a previous period—they are likely to overstrain themselves, like an old man attempting to work beyond his natural strength.⁴⁷⁷

The key line in this passage is "No general rule will provide the decision-makers of the time with a universally applicable course of action," which signifies that there are no absolute truths in statecraft, and decision-makers can seek to maximize their utility function but they can never guarantee wealth or security. The cyclical economic vision of changes in the balance of power over time implies a certain inevitability about the "rise and fall of the great powers," as

⁴⁷⁷ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

Kennedy terms it. George Modelski envisions these cycles in specifically predictable patterns, as shown in Table 10:⁴⁷⁸

Table 10: Modelski's Long Cycles (adapted from Modelski, 1981)

<i>Years</i>	<i>Phase</i>	<i>Military Buildups</i>	<i>World Economy</i>
1763–1792	Deconcentration	Rising	Expanding
1792–1815	Global War	Depleting	Scarcity
1815–1848	World Power	Rising	Expanding
1848–1873	Delegitimization	Depleting	Scarcity
1874–1913	Deconcentration	Rising	Expanding
1913–1946	Global War	Depleting	Scarcity
1946–1973	World Power	Rising	Expanding
1973–2001	Delegitimization	Depleting	Scarcity
2001–2030?	Deconcentration	Rising	Expanding
2030–2060?	Global War	Depleting	Scarcity

Kennedy's work was published in 1989, and Modelski's power cycle theory in 1981, before the coming of the (perhaps short-lived) 'unipolar moment.' But the studies were based on historical trends, and if those trends are to continue, the United States will need to be wary of 'imperial overstretch' and fiscal imprudence if it wishes to extend its current status as the world's preeminent power. At the center of this crossroads is the 'military-industrial complex' that President Eisenhower warned against in his presidential farewell address. At best, the gargantuan American military-industrial complex functions as a necessary system of military-hardware production processes and public-corporate partnerships in order to protect the private sector while ensuring that the United States government never gets militarily flanked by a rival power. At worst, it

⁴⁷⁸ George Modelski, "Long Cycles, Kondratieffs, and Alternating Innovations: Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy," in *The Political Economy of Foreign Policy Behavior* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981).

simply leads to a fiscal catch-22 in which “circulation of the ‘wheeling and dealing’ elites between and within the Pentagon, its contractors, the military brass, and government officials has become an ominously efficient vehicle for the waste and plunder of the citizens’ tax dollars appropriated by the Pentagon.”⁴⁷⁹ The truth is likely somewhere in between these two characterizations.

The absolute cost of maintaining preponderance, although perhaps made temporarily manageable by the relative size of U.S. GDP during the second half of the previous century, is made more costly in relative terms by its ineffectiveness. The U.S. economy may be capable of maintaining the status quo ad infinitum, or for at least a number of decades to come, based on current projections. But whether this is money well spent, when many U.S. standard-of-living indicators fall short of those in other industrialized nations, is one question Americans need to answer. Another is whether the money spent on maintaining the status quo is being used effectively. On December 5, 2016, the *Washington Post* published a story on a January 2015 internal Pentagon audit that “revealed for the first time that the Pentagon was spending almost a quarter of its \$580 billion budget on overhead and core business operations such as accounting, human resources, logistics and property management.”⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, *The Political Economy of US Militarism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 17.

⁴⁸⁰ Craig Whitlock and Bob Woodward, “Pentagon Buries Evidence of \$125 Billion in Bureaucratic Waste,” *Washington Post*, December 5, 2016.

The U.S. military is currently engaged in at least 190 military operations in a majority of the world's countries.⁴⁸¹ U.S. Special Operations Forces deployed to 138 countries in 2016.⁴⁸² Whether the average citizen is openly supportive of, barely cognizant of, or simply serving as a myrmidon to the prevailing status quo of American preponderance remains somewhat of an open question, given that public opinion vacillates depending on the perceived success of whatever foreign-policy engagement features most prominently in the headlines at any given moment. But seven decades of preponderance have ossified a credence in the citizenry that the world cannot survive without American direction, the viewpoint described by Richard Haas. Precisely to what extent this credence is inherent in the American mind versus perpetuated by the American leader is difficult to ascertain; the preceding chapters offer clear evidence that both phenomena have been operative for a long time.

Central to the viewpoint that the world needs a liberal hegemon to function properly is the concept of interdependence, a subject on which common ground between realists and liberals has sometimes been hard to come by. Like many inter-paradigmatic debates, it has at times suffered from overly simplistic parochialism. It is rudimentary to argue that interdependence produces conflict, just as it is rudimentary to argue the opposite. In the end, neither can be a law if even a general rule, as the *nature* of that interdependence, and the prevailing

⁴⁸¹ Matthew Gault, "Tracking America's 'Shadow Wars,'" Reuters, January 11, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-warcollege-11jan-idUSKBN14V1P0?sp=34>

⁴⁸² Niall McCarthy, "U.S. Special Operations Forces Deployed to 70% of the World's Countries in 2016," Forbes, February 7, 2017.

conditional circumstances of the era, will define whether it produces war, peace, or something in between. Engaging with a trouble world means more trouble under certain circumstances, while isolationism from a troubled world means more security under certain circumstances.

What the case studies illustrate is what happens when the conception of the national interest with respect to a particular policy issue becomes distorted. If the United States continues to perceive threats to the national interest where none exist—and to respond to these benign dangers in militarized fashion—it risks precisely the national quicksand described by Kennedy. Writing in 1976, Robert Jervis examined the power of perception and misperception as related to capabilities, threats, and intentions:

Differing perceptions of the other state's intentions often underlie policy debates. In the frequent cases when the participants do not realize that they differ on this crucial point, the dispute is apt to be both vituperative and unproductive. This has been the case with much of the debate in the United States over deterrence theories and policies. Although the arguments have been couched in terms of clashing general theories of international relations, most of the dispute can be accounted for in terms of disagreements about Soviet intentions.⁴⁸³

The beauty of Jervis' argument is in its simplicity of purpose and clarity of explanation. He is correct to assert that there is a limit to the utility of the "general theories of international relations," just as Kennedy is correct to assert that "no general rule will provide the decision-makers of the time with a universally

⁴⁸³ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 59.

applicable course of action." IR requires more depth as a field, more attention to the particularities of circumstances and conditions, and a richer appreciation for the exceptions to rules rather than to the rules themselves; one step in this direction is to recognize the differentiation between states. What all states *do* have in common, however, is the desire to avoid annihilation. The Cold War is such an enticing case study because of the presence of MAD. If the American leaders could simply have said to the Soviet leaders, "We will not attack you if you do not attack us," there would have been no Cold War and thus no need to produce more nuclear weapons than are required to vaporize the human planet. But there is no such entity as total trust, and the gap between that lack of totality and the totality that fear of annihilation produces in the human spirit created the security dilemma that existed long before the advent of nuclear weaponry. The stakes are simply higher now. How to escape this madness?

The ideal solution for a status quo power would be to escape from the state of nature. But escape is impossible. The security dilemma cannot be abolished, it can only be ameliorated. Bonds of shared values and interests can be developed. If actors care about what happens to others and believe that others care about them, they will develop trust and can cooperate for mutual benefit. When two countries are locked in a spiral of arms and hostility, such bonds obviously are hard to establish. The first step must be the realization, by at least one side but preferably by both, that they are, or at least may be, caught in a dilemma that neither desires.⁴⁸⁴

While the impending doom experienced during the height of the Cold War has come and gone, nuclear weapons and the art of deterrence are now permanent

⁴⁸⁴ Jervis 1976, 82.

fixtures of the international system. There is only one way for the human race to survive, which is of course to learn to cooperate. Jervis references a 1947 article by George Kennan in *Foreign Affairs*: "It is an undeniable privilege of every man to prove himself in the right in the thesis that the world is his enemy; for if he reiterates it frequently enough and makes it the background of his conduct, he is bound eventually to be right." If the United States looks abroad and sees threats first, they will materialize in the flesh. There are two problems with this perspective. First, it dilutes the real threats facing U.S. and global security—namely, at the present time, nuclear proliferation in unpredictable states such as North Korea and Iran, Islamist fundamentalism, and environmental destruction (Kennan was decades ahead of his time on this third issue). Second, it reduces the incentives for other states to engage in cooperation. These issues will be resolved in one fashion or another if the great powers continue to avoid military confrontation as they have since 1945.

The U.S. experience during the Second World War convinced U.S. foreign policymakers that only a preponderance of power would suffice in the interminable quest to achieve lasting security. This may or may not have been true in the immediate postwar years. It is not true now. The only path to security in a nuclear-armed, power-diffused world is to straddle the fence of interdependence and *promote* the idea that it leads to pacific enterprises, rather than accepting that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they

must."⁴⁸⁵ The world can no longer afford to escape normative interpretations of international relations. Security in a world with these two conditions must be *codeterminally created*. As perhaps the preeminent authority on interdependence, Robert Keohane understands that interdependence, like anarchy, "is what states make of it."⁴⁸⁶ As was the conclusion of Jervis, Keohane simply states, "Cooperation is necessary," while recognizing, "It will be cooperation without hegemony."

Interdependence in the world economy generates conflict. People who are hurt by the unexpected changes emanating from abroad, such as increases in the prices that producers charge for oil or that banks charge for the use of money, turn to their governments for aid... If discord is to be limited, and severe conflict avoided, governments' policies must be adjusted to one another. That is, cooperation is necessary. One way of achieving such mutual policy adjustment is through the activities of a hegemonic power, either through ad hoc measures or by establishing and maintaining international regimes that serve its own interests while managing to be sufficiently compatible with the interests of others to be widely accepted... The United States played this role during the first fifteen or twenty years after world War II; hegemonic cooperation was a reality...The United States is still the most important country in the world political economy [and] remains an essential participant in international regimes. Indeed, U.S. involvement is usually necessary if cooperation is to be fostered successfully...The ability and willingness of the United States to devote substantial resources to maintaining international economic regimes have both declined since the mid-1960's... It seems unlikely that the United States will reassume the dominant position that it had during the 1950's, or that any country will come to occupy such a position, in the absence of a wrenching upheaval such as occurred in the past as a result of major wars. Since war in the nuclear age would have

⁴⁸⁵ Thucydides, *The Melian Dialogue*, in *The Landmark Thucydides*, ed. Robert Strassler (New York: Free Press, 1996), 352.

⁴⁸⁶ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), 391-425.

altogether different and more catastrophic effects than the world wars of the past, it is probably safe to assume that hegemony will not be restored during our lifetimes. If we are to have cooperation, therefore, it will be cooperation without hegemony. Nonhegemonic cooperation is difficult, since it must take place among independent states that are motivated more by their own conceptions of self-interest than by a devotion to the common good.⁴⁸⁷

A symposium on Dale Copeland's book *Economic Interdependence and War* at the 2016 International Studies Association Annual Conference produced a fierce debate between John J. Mearsheimer and Copeland, in which the disciple eclipsed the master simply by evolving theory beyond the dinosauric age.⁴⁸⁸ Mearsheimer hysterically repeated that the boundaries of realism cannot be punctured by liberal advancements, to which Copeland responded by doing exactly that. His book examines interdependence and war through historical analysis, with the most relevant current debate of course being that of U.S.-China relations. He argues that one of the underappreciated factors in determining how states calculate the costs and benefits of war versus peace are the expectations of benefit from future trade, a dynamic more important in today's globalized world than at any time in all of history. The merits of his precise argument can be debated by political economists, but its relevance here is in the adaptation of realism by incorporating liberal tenets. Mearsheimer's died-in-the-wool realist parsimony is adeptly propounded by his magnificent scholarship, but Copeland's epistemological evolution surpasses the confines of that parsimonious ontology.

⁴⁸⁷ Robert Keohane: *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 244.

⁴⁸⁸ Dale Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

IR as a field has been designed to resolve system-level questions. As such, it tells us little about smaller questions. However, these are the questions that define the larger questions. A state is made up of the smaller units of groups and individuals, just as the structure of the international system is made up of states. Grand strategy and the international balance of power are intricately linked to events and processes of seemingly less significance. Since the Second World War, the United States has controlled the 'world stage,' all the while declining in relative power and losing many smaller battles (Vietnam, fiscal discipline, efficient defense policy, Iraq, Afghanistan, the war against drugs) along the way.⁴⁸⁹

Alternatives to the Bretton Woods model pursued by actors such as Russia, some East Asian countries, China, and others continue to threaten the legitimacy of the Western world order. Chaos in the Middle East, the source of much of the world's energy, continually threatens to derail any semblance of stability in international relations. In short, though the United States is by no means responsible for the maelstrom of instability that characterizes the unpredictable, dangerous nature of international relations, it has fallen short of the mark in terms of producing, clarifying, pursuing, and achieving its grand strategy because of inconsistencies and shortcomings between that grand strategy and the application of particular foreign-policy objectives. The resulting strategic-tactical gap fails to account for, for example, how local indigenous

⁴⁸⁹ The situation in Afghanistan is becoming more precarious. It now seems unlikely that "victory" will be achieved there.

politics relate to great-power interventions. This dissertation has attempted to take a step in the direction of filling that lacuna.

When dealing with the losing powers after the Second World War, in the construction of the Bretton Woods system, a large-scale, hegemonic-like ushering in of an international regime was possible because of glaring cultural similarities between Europeans (despite the despotic regime of the Third Reich) and Americans, and even Japan and its crumbling empire (despite its adherence to Shinto-Buddhist militarism). However, the current foreign-policy climate pits major powers against nonstate actors such as guerillas (hence the need to establish COIN doctrine) and Islamist terrorist groups. While the security demands of the United States and the West have shifted, the United States still maintains a Cold War-like foreign-policy posture that was designed to prevent aggression from the major powers. To solve these new problems, the United States sometimes uses a .44 Magnum to destroy a gnat, and ends up getting caught in the crosshairs of its own crossfire. A new era of foreign policy is needed. The sweeping notions of hegemony and grandiose grand strategy need to be abandoned entirely. Modern security threats require a modern toolbox of utility, not an aggressive one-size-fits-all approach applied by the gargantuan monolith of the U.S. defense establishment's "decisive force."

The status quo or the status quo ante?

On the morning of January 12, 2016, Senator John McCain offered words in support of the confirmation of General James Mattis, perhaps the least

controversial cabinet selection of the new administration, to the post of Secretary of Defense. His characterization of "business as usual" in U.S. foreign policy was particularly telling:

As we meet today, at a time of increasing global threat and disorder, for seven decades, the United States has played a unique role in the world. We've not only put America first but we've done so by maintaining and advancing a world order that has expanded security, prosperity, and freedom. This has required our alliances, our trade, our diplomacy, our values, *but most of all, our military, for when would-be aggressors aspire to threaten world order, it's the global striking power of America's armed forces that must deter or thwart their ambitions. Too many Americans seem to have forgotten this in recent years.* Too many have forgotten that our world order is not self-sustaining. Too many have forgotten that while the threats we face may not have purely military solutions, they all have military dimensions. In short, too many have forgotten that hard power matters. Having it, threatening it, leveraging it for diplomacy, and, at times, using it. Fairly or not, there is a perception around the world that America is weak and distracted, and that has only emboldened our adversaries to challenge the current world order. The threat posed by violent Islamic extremism continues to metastasize across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and but for those who remain vigilant, our homeland. It should now be clear that we will be engaged in a global conflict of varying scope and intensity for the foreseeable future. Believing otherwise is wishful thinking. So, if confirmed, General Mattis, you would lead a military at war. You of all people appreciate what that means and what it demands. *At the same time, our central challenge in the Middle East is not ISIL.* As grave a threat as that is, it is a breakdown of regional order in which nearly every state is a battlefield for conflict, a combatant, or both. ISIL is a symptom of this disorder. At the same time, Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions have been postponed, but not halted, and it continues to modernize its military, expand its maligned influence, and seek to remake the region in its image from Syria to Iraq to Yemen. In Asia, the rise of China is shifting the balance of power in ways that increasingly challenge longstanding U.S. interests. We see a new assertiveness in China to confront U.S. allies and partners, make vast territorial claims with no basis in international law, carve out spheres of influence, and revise the current order. North Korea is testing Nuclear weapons

and ballistic missiles at an alarming rate. Our intelligence community publicly assesses that North Korea will soon develop a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile that is capable of striking the U.S. homeland. This may become a defining crisis for the next president. And then there is Russia. Over the past eight years under Vladimir Putin, Russia has invaded Ukraine, annexed Crimea, threatened NATO allies, [and] intervened militarily in Syria, leaving a trail of death and destruction, and broken promises in its wake. Russia's military has targeted Syrian hospitals and first responders with precision weapons. Russia supplied the weapons that shot down a commercial aircraft over Ukraine. Russia's war in Ukraine has killed thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. And in the most flagrant demonstration of Putin's disdain and disrespect for our nation, Russia deliberately interfered in our recent election with cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns designed to weaken America and discredit Western values. Each of our last three presidents has had great expectations of building a partnership with the Russian government. Each attempt has failed. Not for lack of good faith and effort on the U.S. side, but because of a stubborn fact, that we must finally recognize: Putin wants to be our enemy. *He needs us as his enemy.* He will never be our partner including in fighting ISIL. *He believes that strengthening Russia means weakening America.* We must proceed realistically on this basis. We must build a position of significant strength *vis-à-vis* Russia and any other adversary that seeks to undermine our national interest and challenge the world order; we must reestablish deterrence, and that is primarily the job of the Department of Defense. *But for too long, the Department of Defense has planned and optimized itself for short-term episodic contingencies, whether against great powers or global terrorist movements. We now face a series of long-term, strategic competitions with clear military dimensions that often occur below the threshold of armed conflict* (all emphases added).⁴⁹⁰

This view hardly seems one of a great power that has not fought a war against another even middle power for the seven dominant decades celebrated in the opening line of McCain's comments. McCain went on to criticize the status quo of U.S. military spending and administration, citing "less combat power. In

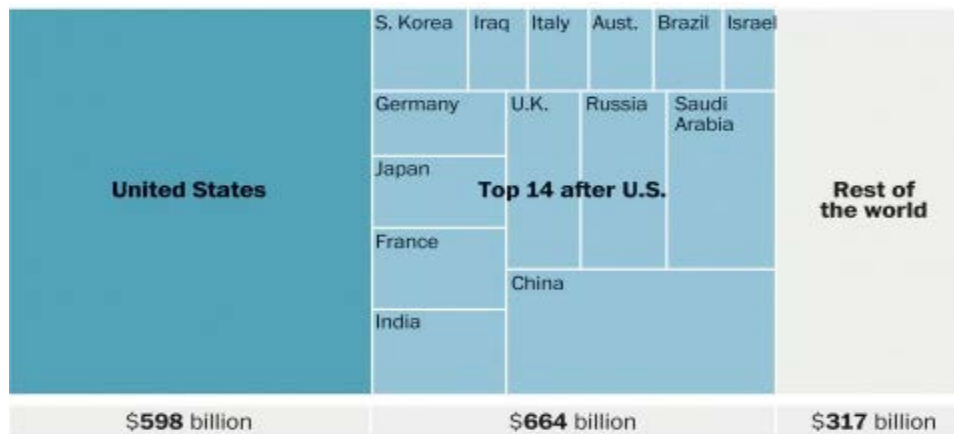
⁴⁹⁰ CNN, live television, January 12, 2016, 10:00-10:05 a.m.

constant dollars we spend almost the same amount on defense as we did thirty years ago, but we are fielding 35% fewer combat brigades, 53% fewer ships, and 63% [fewer] future combat aircraft squadrons, all this while overhead costs that do not add to combat power have steadily increased. In short, we have done great harm to our military." It is unclear whether McCain has read Kennedy's book, which points out that costs of maintaining large militaries inevitably compound—he acknowledges that "overhead costs" rise, but does not account for the lesser return on constant FY dollars. "Business as usual is not just misguided, it is dangerous," he argued, attributing less spending to budgetary constraints: "All of these problems are compounded by the self-inflicted wounds of the Budget Control Act. For five years, national defense spending has been arbitrarily capped," leading to what he characterizes as "deferred modernization" in each branch of the military.

The obvious solution to the Senator, then, would be both ideational and material replenishment: "We need to stop deterring ourselves and return to strategy, aligning our ends, ways, and means to address global threats. We need to resize, and, more importantly, reshape our military." Naturally, this would all correspond with a substantial increase in spending: "This will not be cheap but it pales in comparison to the cost of failing to deter a war or, worse, losing one." But of the major wars fought since 1945, Korea was a stalemate, Vietnam was a resounding defeat, the 1991 Gulf War was a short-term victory but long-term stalemate, which led to the 2003 Iraq War, which was a catastrophe; there is also Afghanistan, which eclipsed Vietnam as America's longest war, and is steadily

slipping back into Taliban hands. In none of these wars was moral or military weakness an impediment to victory. As James Fallows and many others have asked, "Why do the best soldiers in the world keep losing?"⁴⁹¹ Andrew Bacevich, scholar, retired U.S. Army colonel, and critic of U.S. foreign policy states simply, "The global military supremacy that the United States presently enjoys—and is bent on perpetuating—has become central to our national identity."⁴⁹² Figure 11 from the International Institute for Strategic Studies illustrates the scope of American military spending, which is higher than the next ten countries combined:

Figure 11: U.S. accounts for more than a third of global military spending



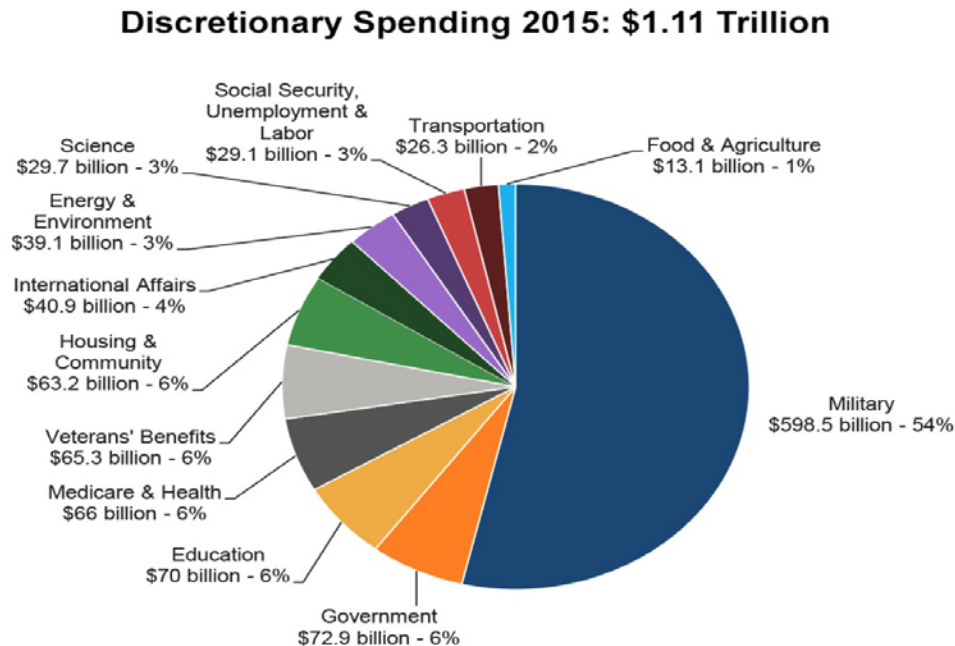
Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies
LARIS KARKLIS/THE WASHINGTON POST

⁴⁹¹ James Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military," *The Atlantic*, January/February 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-tragedy-of-the-american-military/383516/>

⁴⁹² Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

Figure 12 depicts military spending as a share of total discretionary spending:⁴⁹³

Figure 12: U.S. Military spending as a share of total discretionary budget



Though McCain is often cited as a "hawk" by the media, this depiction of the expectations of the U.S. position in the world and the capabilities of U.S. military power hardly strays from the common interpretation among his fellow foreign-policy practitioners. In fact, he has been at the forefront of many of the nation's foreign policies for the three decades he has served in the Senate since 1987, and his rostrum as the Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee affords him an unrivaled pulpit with which to promulgate viewpoints unfiltered by the foreign-policy establishment. The irony, however, is that "maverick" McCain personifies the establishment he prides himself on bucking as well as just about anyone.

⁴⁹³ National Priorities Project, nationalpriorities.org/budget-basics/federal-budget-101

Contained within his overall perspective, which is much in line with the prevailing grand strategy over the seven decades his comments open with, are several implicit and explicit assumptions and contentions that reveal much about the 1945-onward endurance of preponderance in U.S. foreign affairs. "Unique," though accurate, hardly begins to describe the U.S. role in the world. The reason McCain's assumptions and contentions neither require further explanation nor invite debate in the confirmation hearing is because they are not controversial in U.S. foreign-policy discourse. First among these assumptions is the idea that American military power is directly and primarily credited with maintaining the postwar global order. Although there is no doubt that American military power turned the tide of the Second World War and indeed ushered in an era of global stability, democracy, and free market capitalism, assuming that the U.S. military is still "most of all" to credit for the "world order" all but disregards the liberal institutionalism that order is built on (though McCain does provide lip service to "our alliances, our trade, our diplomacy, our values" in passing). To place U.S. military power as the overwhelming caretaker of the international order is, in spite of its regular occurrence in official U.S. foreign-policy discourse, a monumental, and perhaps impossible, task to charge it with, just as President Bush's assertion that the United States is responsible for ridding the world of evil bears a cross contrary to pragmatism.

Second, when McCain problematizes the modern American zeitgeist by asserting that "too many Americans seem to have forgotten this in recent years," he is issuing a rallying call to American militarism that harkens directly back to

the early neoconservative publications of the 1990's, with striking similarity to William Kristol and Robert Kagan's 1996 essay in *Foreign Affairs* referenced in Chapter 6: "American hegemony is the only reliable defense against a breakdown of peace and international order. The appropriate goal of American foreign policy, therefore, is to preserve that hegemony as far into the future as possible." When McCain argues that "we need to stop deterring ourselves," he echoes the call to arms of Kristol and Kagan two decades earlier when they looked within to find the strength to destroy the monsters without: "The main threat the United States faces now and in the future is its own weakness." They too had warned against "flagging will and confusion about our role in the world," calling for a "benevolent hegemony" that wields "the capacity to contain or destroy many of the world's monsters."⁴⁹⁴

The refrain remains unchanged: the world is filled with monsters, and only the United States can destroy them; it cannot do so unless it maintains hegemony; and it cannot maintain hegemony unless it finds the strength to do so among the populace. Most strikingly, there is no mention of any historical change since 1945 with the exception of threats posed that seemingly are meant to represent a new manifestation of old threats, given that none of them are contextualized in a modern-historical juxtaposition. Schlesinger may have been correct in asserting that unilateralism is the most enduring feature of American foreign relations. But if we look specifically at the seven decades since 1945, the

⁴⁹⁴ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1996).

language still invoked by our foreign-policy leaders reveals that the most enduring feature of American foreign relations goes one step further, to preponderance.

Inherent in this grand strategy is the ideational exceptionalism of the United States to the extent that no other power can exist alongside it, and states labeled as threatening such as Iran are not afforded the same rights as the United States and its allies. If Iran is going to "seek to remake the region in its image from Syria to Iraq to Yemen," it must be countered *en force* at every step of the way; meanwhile, the American way of life ought to be promoted *en force* wherever plausible in order to remake the world in its image. In colloquial terms, McCain's perspective argues that might makes right, although it at least caveats that approach by defending the "values" that have supposedly made the right mighty. Here is where realpolitik and values intertwine, although McCain focuses overwhelmingly on the "hard power" of realpolitik.

Morgenthau's contention that "political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe" was invoked by he and others during the escalation phase of the Vietnam War, the conflict that would call into question whether Americans could indeed claim the mantle of the moral high ground, as well as material invincibility.⁴⁹⁵ Morgenthau and other war-skeptic realists were vilified by the Johnson Administration for their disapproval of the Vietnam War. Although U.S. leaders still cling to this moral superiority and material invincibility, neither is more readily

⁴⁹⁵ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1948).

apparent now than it was in 1968 when the Tet Offensive would signify the beginning of the end in Vietnam, five full years before the acknowledgement of failure in the cease-fire.

Third, when McCain quite accurately asserts that "our central challenge in the Middle East is not ISIL," he exposes the rupture any great power faces between the "cold" and "hot" threats discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Where should statesmen focus attention—on the active combatants seeking to destroy American institutions, allies, and interests, or on the great-power rivalry proxy battlefields that populate the great-power-conflict hinterlands? Should the focus be on the existential threats of terrorist groups, environmental issues, and the like? Or on the balance of power and the rising, revisionist powers that seek to reorient status-quo international norms, institutions, and leadership? Perhaps it is unsurprising that so much attention is given to places like Syria, where both existential and power-rivalry threats can be engaged simultaneously.

The irony there, however, is that without the cooperation of the Russian menace, waging a war against Bashar al-Assad and Islamist terrorist groups within Syria becomes impossible, given that the Kurds and weaker Syrian Democratic Forces are the only other groups capable of challenging the tyrannical Syrian state, and they are opposed by the Russo-Turkic alliance. The incredibly convoluted and tenuous interest webs in Syria are so intertwined so as to render the whole situation relatively hopeless—every enemy is a friend to some friend and, conversely, every friend is a friend to some enemy. As an illustration of this complexity, when Vice President Joe Biden lamented the

support of Salafi jihadists in Syria by Turkey, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia in a speech at Harvard University on October 2, 2014, he was forced to publicly apologize for making remarks that everyone with two eyes knew to be true, in order to avoid alienating those allies.⁴⁹⁶ As McCain accurately depicts, the ISIS problem is but a "symptom" of a larger regional malaise beholden to sectarian, regional, and power-dynamical intricacies.

Fourth, very much in conjunction with the third assumption/contention, McCain correctly calls into question the ultimate direction of the Department of Defense. While he recognizes that the U.S. military is not designed to fight the wars of the 21st century (a contention implicit in the OPM), portraying it as having "optimized itself for short-term episodic contingencies, whether against great powers or global terrorist movements," he misses the meta-argumental elephant in the room: how military power should be organized and applied is indeed an important question, but *whether* military power can solve the problems of the 21st century is quite another. This dissertation has attempted to demonstrate that sometimes it can, and sometimes it cannot; in the case studies as in many other cases, U.S. foreign policymakers have greatly overestimated the extent to which military power can slay the seemingly infinite production of the world's increasingly amorphous monsters.

It is impossible to hear McCain beseech his audience for more means to achieve his ever-expanding ends without conjuring up Gaddis and "the gap

⁴⁹⁶ Carol Giacomo, "Joe Biden Apologizes for Telling the Truth," *The New York Times*, October 6, 2014.

Americans had allowed to develop between aspirations and accomplishments. We had preached self-determination but objected when others sought to practice it; we had proclaimed the virtues of economic freedom even as we sought to impose economic control."⁴⁹⁷ If grand strategy is essentially a means-end chain, in Gaddis' words, then preponderance, by definition, expands the ends beyond whatever the means become, no matter how much the means expand. A toddler rationing apple juice could comprehend the paradoxical predicament inherent in such a philosophy.

Barry Posen offers a depiction of U.S. grand strategy, in addition to a prescription for its ills, in *Restraint*:

This undisciplined, expensive, and bloody strategy has done untold harm to U.S. national security. It makes enemies almost as fast as it slays them, discourages allies from paying for their own defense, and convinces powerful states to band together and oppose Washington's plans, further raising the costs of carrying out its foreign policy. During the 1990s, these consequences were manageable because the United States enjoyed such a favorable power position and chose its wars carefully. Over the last decade, however, the country's relative power has deteriorated, and policymakers have made dreadful choices concerning which wars to fight and how to fight them. What's more, the Pentagon has come to depend on continuous infusions of cash simply to retain its current force structure—levels of spending that the Great Recession and the United States' ballooning debt have rendered unsustainable.

It is time to abandon the United States' hegemonic strategy and replace it with one of restraint. This approach would mean giving up on global reform and sticking to protecting narrow national security interests. It would mean transforming the military into a smaller force that goes to war only when it truly must. It would mean

⁴⁹⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, "The Tragedy of Cold War History," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 73, No. 1 (January/February 1994), 142.

removing large numbers of U.S. troops from forward bases, creating incentives for allies to provide for their own security. And because such a shift would allow the United States to spend its resources on only the most pressing international threats, it would help preserve the country's prosperity and security over the long run.⁴⁹⁸

This diagnosis, as well as its prescription, find concert with the findings of FPE and OPM contained in the previous chapters. There is always a 'justification' for intervening and pursuing preponderance. As long as there is a world there will be monsters, and as long as there are monsters, you can always try to justify intervening to slay them. The United States vacillated back and forth between isolationism and hegemony throughout its history because American identity itself is somewhat confused between hunger for power and moral messianism. Somewhere in the penumbra of this ineluctable paradox is an irreducible axiom: if means are not correlated with ends, and ends are not clearly defined, foreign policy is likely to end in blunder.

If John Quincy Adams did not wish for the United States to parade around the globe on quests to expurgate monsters, some of his contemporaries did. Thomas Jefferson promoted the idea of an "Empire of Liberty," just as his successors would pursue hegemony in Latin America, Western Europe, and Asia many years later.⁴⁹⁹ But while it was always present in American foreign relations, the real push for preponderance came in the years after 1945.

⁴⁹⁸ Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁴⁹⁹ Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (Oxford University Press, 1990).

Mearsheimer reminds us that "for every neck, there are two hands to choke it." The United States, no matter how powerful, cannot afford to employ both hands. It will end up choking itself. This is not to suggest the morality should be entirely distinguished from statecraft, and that is not what Morgenthau suggested either. It is merely to acknowledge that morality is but one of many factors in the international interchange between states and other social groups.

Monster in the closet, monsters at the gates

The monster of restraint in the closet lives only in the American imagination. But there are real monsters in the world that require our attention, and the United States and its allies now face a terrifying monster in the form of Islamist militarism. While this threat does not yet wield the capacity that a great power would, it does not play by the rules a normal state would either. In making the contention that applying only a grand-strategic lens to any given policy problem invites disaster, the OPM does not mean to suggest that a state should not have any grand strategy, but rather that grand strategy and foreign policy should take into consideration the constraints of pragmatism and the particularities of localities in any calculation of means and ends, in addition to understanding the limits of power and the inherent issues of transforming the politics of other states. This dissertation has posed research questions relating to intervention and responded to them with case studies that illustrate the manifold problems inherent in the exercise of that policy. Its conclusions point to a

response to Islamist terrorism that would be most effective by employing a *narrowly defined* set of national-security interests.

As a response to the 9/11 attacks and the enduring thorn of Islamist fundamentalism, the war against terrorism seems to have become a never-ending feature of American foreign policy. For the most part, other than the two obvious exceptions (Afghanistan and Iraq), targeted killings, usually from the air, have become the method of choice for attacking terrorists or would-be terrorists. In July of 2016, President Obama's White House revealed that between 2,372 to 2,581 combatants and between 64 and 116 civilians had been killed by U.S. attacks (mostly drones, presumably) in 473 non-specified "strikes" against "terrorist targets" between January 20, 2009 and December 31, 2015 "outside areas of active hostilities," which does not include Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria.⁵⁰⁰ The number offered for civilian casualties is highly questionable, since there is often no way to verify with certainty who has been killed afterward. Whether these targeted attacks do more harm than good by motivating more terrorists than they kill is an open question, but it is certainly less costly than the alternative of large-scale military intervention, which itself has been shown to produce a fierce backlash.

⁵⁰⁰ "Summary of Information Regarding U.S. Counterterrorism Strikes Outside Areas of Active Hostilities," Director of National Intelligence, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Press%20Releases/DNI+Release+on+CT+Strikes+Outside+Areas+of+Active+Hostilities.PDF>

The war against terrorism has thus far been delineated into three phases.⁵⁰¹ In the first, personified by Donald Rumsfeld, the buzz words were “liberation,” “democracy,” “blitzkrieg,” and “shock and awe.” This era saw the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the foundations for future counterinsurgencies. The pacification era, personified by General David Petraeus and later General Stanley McChrystal, advocated engagement with local populations in the form of COIN and the establishment of an American civil/military hybrid force to secure the populace and address the needs of the people, thus aiming at the root causes of hostility to the foreign power. The first phase led into the second phase as invasion turned into occupation. The paradox of COIN is the paradox of American identity: it relies both on the “noble cause,” in Reaganite terminology, of winning “hearts and minds,” and on “decisive force,” in Bush terminology, which clears the way for civilian ‘pacification’ in the first place by attacking hostile actors.

In Vietnam, pacification ultimately failed along with the war, but Robert Komer and John Paul Vann learned lessons that can be applied today to the war against terrorism. Recently, there have been voices within U.S. foreign policymaking circles that have argued for a more human approach to intervention. One example of this brand of thinking was the Human Terrain System (HTS). Defined by Kipp as “the social, ethnographic, cultural, economic, and political elements of the people among whom a force is operating,” HTS was

⁵⁰¹ Andrew Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East* (New York: Random House, 2016).

a program designed to culturally map the people of a given area, with the hope of better integrating military forces with the local population and thus providing better security, incurring fewer military casualties and inflicting fewer casualties, and gathering better intelligence.⁵⁰² Operating with a budget of \$190 million, HTS was for a time "among the largest social-science projects in history."⁵⁰³ But while the attitude behind such a program is indeed a "noble cause," incorporating anthropologists into war also incorporated war into anthropologists, which eventually led to formal disapproval by the American Anthropological Association's Executive Board, citing the potential for militarizing scientists in addition to obvious questions of scientific biases. Furthermore, these efforts have been difficult to implement, and run into many of the same problems as would a traditional military approach to coercively transforming the politics of other states.

The second phase of the war against terrorism, although achieving some victories, such as an environment safe enough for democratic elections and the beginnings of democratic government in Afghanistan and Iraq, nevertheless failed to achieve lasting security or elimination of the fundamentalist enemy in either case. The current preference of the policy community informs U.S. foreign policy to prosecute the war on terrorism perhaps how it should have begun: partnership with any available local actors and targeted strikes from the air and Special Forces. This is how the "drone wars" have been fought in Pakistan,

⁵⁰² Jacob Kipp, "Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21st century," *Military Review* (September/October 2006), <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/kipp.pdf>

⁵⁰³ Roberto Gonzalez, "Indirect Rule and Embedded Anthropology: Practical, Theoretical, and Ethical Concerns," in *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, eds. John Kelly, Beatrice Jauregui, Sean Mitchell, and Jeremy Walton (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 232

Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere. As Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Michael Vickers put it, “I just want to kill those guys.”⁵⁰⁴ While targeted killings will never adequately address the root causes of Islamist terrorism, and in fact may exacerbate them, they do act as a stopgap against existential terrorist formations.

At the same time, not all are satisfied with this approach. Senators such as John McCain and Lindsey Graham, critical of the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, now advocate sending brigade-level troops back into Iraq to coordinate the war against Islamic State, which the American public has little appetite for. We now appear to be entering—perhaps re-entering is a more appropriate term—the pursuit of multilateralism in foreign policy and the avoidance of becoming militarily extended by fighting large-scale wars against states or de-facto states like the Taliban (ISIS can hardly be considered even a de-facto state, despite its inclination to describe itself as such). Just as the United States waxed and waned through fits of unilateral expansion and starts of self-absorbed isolationism, the current trend may be no more than that—a trend. The precarious situation in the Middle East now seems a far cry from the aspirations the region and its onlookers held at the outset of the Arab Spring, an apparently ephemeral movement many media outlets now characterize as an “Arab Fall” or the even more melancholy “Arab Winter.”

⁵⁰⁴ Bumiller, Elisabeth, “Soldier, Thinker, Hunter, Spy: Drawing a Bead on Al Qaeda,” *The New York Times*, September 3, 2011.

Global terrorism is a new problem, and along with nuclear proliferation and environmental destruction, the most important national-security threat of our times. It must be viewed as a modern threat and modern tools must be employed against it. The war machines of the Third Reich and Imperial Japan required decades of underlying bureaucratic, political, ideational, material and nationalistic underpinnings. When they were smashed by the “arsenal of democracy,” the Red Army, and allied forces, an infinite amount of time and effort would never have put those humpty-dumpties back together. In contrast, terror networks can be created and morphed on a whim within hours. The circumstances of the Second World War were unique to those nations and conditions. To fight wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan with the mindset that defeated those bureaucratic machines is to fail at the task. Terror networks likewise cannot be understood in the same terms; the analysis and tools required to fight them are distinct from anything else. The same is true of drug trafficking organizations, environmental problems, and any of the multitude of 21st-century national-security concerns. This is not to say that emerging great-power threats or balance-of-power considerations should be absent the policymaker's mind, but resources must be directed at "hot" threats, even if preparation for "cold" threats never disappears from the foreign-policy landscape.

Possibilities for future research

Analysis of the case studies has helped to answer some questions while feeding further curiosity in others. Some of these questions follow: These historical case studies address two events that have come and gone. What further predictions about the future of IR can be made from their study? How would the OPM relate to a non-blunder case study or a foreign policy that ended in success? How do the pursuit of preponderance and the estimation of power to transform the politics of other states relate to non-military interventions, or large-scale efforts at political coercion, such as the war against drugs in the Americas?

The United States is in many ways an exceptional nation, not just in how it defines itself but also from an objective point of view. To what extent is U.S. foreign policy simply based on its power endowment, and in what ways does it behave differently than other states irrespective of power endowment?

Do other states look to the United States as an example, or do they just fall in line (or not) with international liberal regimes and institutions because they believe it is in their own best interests to do so? Can attacking hostile states and nonstate actors serve as a lesson, a form of deterrent terrorism perhaps, to thwart other hostile actors?

How are changing norms going to affect the future of international relations? To what extent will the world become globalized, cultures infused, languages forgotten, and how will this affect the future of international relations?

To what extent are the OPM Indicators active in today's conflicts? For example, how does Indicator I relate to the overestimation of Syrian rebels to

challenge Bashar al-Assad, an effort that has been a complete failure by the United States?

What is the role of the American public in the pursuit of preponderance? How can we estimate the distinction between support and complacency, for any policy or ideology?

How hard will the United States attempt to cling to preponderance as power becomes more globally diffused, and will the world retain the relative great-power peace it has achieved since 1945 without a global hegemon?

Chapters 1-6 describe a world in which the most powerful state in the international system fails at its most ambitious foreign-policy projects. What happens if/when a slightly less powerful United States either becomes more successful at intervention or abandons intervention altogether?

How will the international community resolve the issues of nuclear proliferation and environmental destruction, and will these new threats force states to achieve an unprecedented level of cooperation?

How can this research be utilized to understand other foreign-policy blunders?

Has there been any major U.S. military intervention in the last seven decades that can be considered a clear success? How is the stalemate in Afghanistan to be assessed?

Concluding reflections and qualifications

This research has implications beyond U.S. foreign policy. While the domestic social conditions and foreign-policy traditions of the United States display a multitude of unique behavioral patterns, many of which are unpacked in the OPM, it also entails lessons for would-be superpowers and foreign policymaking in general. The OPM asks a fundamental question about the extent to which one state can affect the politics of another through intervention. Although it focuses on the most powerful state in the international system intervening in relatively weak states, it is likely that the conclusion that affecting the politics of other states in this outlier relationship holds even truer in any other type of relationship, all of which descend down the power ladder. The ability of an equal state to control another would likely be even more difficult, and a weaker state to control a stronger state more difficult still.

From a god's-eye view of the conflict (or a realist view, for that matter), it is perhaps fortunate that the Vietnam War and Iraq War did not succeed. It would have set a precedent that one state with a handful of token allies can and should invade other states that are deemed undesirable by some faction of the international community. Although this dissertation approached the research question with the assumption that the American self-image and U.S. foreign policy are in many ways unique, the finding that power cannot and does not always translate into the ability to control the politics of other states is relevant to any state seeking to affect the politics of other states. At the same time, advocating a narrower definition of the national-security elements of the national

interest does not preclude substantial diplomacy, cooperation, and progressive relations between states.

The case studies reveal many findings, some overlapping others, and some contradicting others. Despite the fact that the grand strategy of preponderance takes strides to make Americanism ubiquitous, it itself is not ubiquitous within U.S. grand strategy. Chapter 3, while contending that the presence of preponderance since 1945 has been unmistakable, also acknowledged the more pragmatic and isolationist tendencies in the history of U.S. foreign relations. Neither preponderance nor isolationism has ever been completely absent from the American way of foreign relations or the FDPM of elected leaders. And it must be noted that after the interventions of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, there was in fact an attitude unsympathetic toward intervention. "Vietnam Syndrome" prevented any such intervention again on that scale, at least for a time, and even informed the FPDM of the 1991 Gulf War as well as the Iraq War.

In 2003, U.S. leaders tried to convince themselves and the public that the fierce indigenous resistance (buoyed by foreign support) of Vietnam would not be re-experienced in Iraq a generation later. But for many of the same reasons, many of the same problems were encountered. It is too early to tell whether an "Iraq Syndrome" will emerge and what form it will take. The nature of the terrorist threat, which is very real even though it was invented with the case of Saddam Hussein, makes solutions to it highly complex and entirely unsavory. But Barack Obama did ascend to the presidency in part based on his opposition to that

intervention. Even after smaller episodes, such as Mogadishu, there has been an isolationist, or at least non-interventionist, response. Characterizing U.S. grand strategy as one of preponderance must therefore be qualified by the post-intervention instances in which the pendulum auto-corrected back to a more pragmatic stance.

A second important point is that in both Vietnam and Iraq, U.S. foreign policymakers generally viewed themselves and their actions as a cause for good. This is not technically a qualification to the OPM, because the OPM does not contend the opposite. It is, however, a viewpoint common among scholars and public intellectuals with which there is some overlap with the OPM. This dissertation has intentionally avoided discussion of oil, imperialism, empire, neo-colonialism, and Marxist and critical perspectives because the arguments made using these parameters and approaches are not compelling. The evidence does not point in these directions. While the dissertation has contended that the occurrence of U.S. foreign policymakers (as well as leaders of other states) pursuing policies contrary to the national interest, even when there is substantial evidence to make that known to them, is far more prevalent than many observers would claim, or than the tenets of rational-choice theory would have us believe, it does *not* contend that there is some inherently pernicious conspiracy to harm the national interest or even to profit from cronyism or the military-industrial complex, at least not in the case of the United States.

While the factors of class, the military-industrial complex, and economic considerations are of course not entirely absent, these are not core components

of the grand strategy of preponderance and they were not core components of the interventions in question. Preponderance is about ideas, security, fear, and capitalizing on the victories of the Second World War more than it is markets, empire, and avarice. It is ideational first and material second; indeed, the previous chapters have referred to it both as a grand strategy and as an ideology, perhaps the former as the conscious pursuit of the subconscious latter. The FPDM of the leaders examined herein was *imprudent*, not nefarious. Certain aspects of their reign were nefarious, just as certain actions of CEOs, craftsmen, artists, professors, or any other ordinary citizens are. Selfishness, laziness, and simple general fallibility are inherent aspects of human nature. To expect our leaders to never exhibit any of these characteristics is to make a Lego train out of a 500-ton locomotive—these are no rational-choice models, they are human beings.

But just as a craftsman would be held accountable if the house he built were to fall over, so too should the leaders propagating faulty logic and sending citizen-soldiers into harm's way to endanger the citizens of other states be held accountable when their FPDM fallacy leads the nation into blunder. And yet, in spite of this imprudence, these have been truly *national* blunders, with the full knowledge, compliance, and support of the American public. A majority of the American people supported the Vietnam War and the Iraq War years into the conflicts. Therefore, we cannot attribute these tragedies to imprudent FPDM alone. This is what George Kennan meant when he said, "People are not always more reasonable than governments."

The leader-populace consensus is a sword with two edges: people must be held accountable for who they elect, just as leaders must be held accountable to the same standards of success as would anyone of any ordinary trade. Nevertheless, these were in some ways tragedies *with* villains, contrary to what Schlesinger would have us believe. U.S. foreign policymakers time and time again looked disconfirming evidence in the face and continued down the plank because they refused to accept the severe truth their preconceived cognitive and policy-preference biases would not incorporate. They subsequently lied to the American people about every aspect of the conflicts, even if that public was being told what it wanted to hear. Absent in all of this madness was leadership of thought and direction of purpose. Preponderance is an underlying social condition as much as it is a grand strategy or ideology; it is not a paradigm or doctrine or prescription or policy per se and it is not *necessary*. The nation could wake up tomorrow and absolve itself of it because it is not only unnecessary for the survival of the state, but also harming the evolutionary fitness of the state. Some scholars of the critical persuasion would have us believe that the whole pursuit of preponderance is an “elite” exercise to sequester resources from foreigners and from poor Americans. But it is *not* in the national interest, not even when viewed from an extremely objective (self-interested) perspective. That some corporate interest-groups profit from it is not evidence that those groups control the American way of foreign policy.

The United States is not going anywhere as a great power in this century. But other great powers are forming, they will expect and demand their fair share

of world power, and they do not all mean us harm. In fact, as the world becomes increasingly globalized, interests are becoming increasingly co-determined across states. Realism informs the basic premise of the contention of this dissertation that takes aim at the assumption that power can transform the politics of other states. But realism is a paradigm of the past. It cannot adequately explain the intricacies of interdependence because it is based on the empirical evidence of history, and there is no empirical evidence for what has yet to happen. If the dictations of positivists demand that scholarship remain confined within the objective world, they can claim no objection to the contents of this dissertation, but for its penultimate line: this chapter here closes with an entreaty for scholars, policymakers, and average citizens alike to look to the better angels of our realist, liberalist, and Constructivist assertions in theory and praxis in order to promote a pragmatic vision of global good that begins with the exemplar of a benevolent United States strong enough to defend its values but smart enough to apply them wisely. If we are to avoid a life that is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short, we must imagine that life in ontology, understand it in epistemology, and create it through the regenerative phronesis of method.

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