

THE REGIME CHANGE CONSENSUS: IRAQ IN AMERICAN POLITICS, 1990-2003

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ABSTRACT

Joseph David Stieb: *The Regime Change Consensus: Iraq in American Politics, 1990-2003*
(Under the direction of Wayne Lee)

This study examines the containment policy that the United States and its allies imposed on Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War and argues for a new understanding of why the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. At the core of this story is a political puzzle: Why did a largely successful policy that mostly stripped Iraq of its unconventional weapons lose support in American politics to the point that the policy itself became less effective? I argue that, within intellectual and policymaking circles, a claim steadily emerged that the only solution to the Iraqi threat was regime change and democratization. While this “regime change consensus” was not part of the original containment policy, a cohort of intellectuals and policymakers assembled political support for the idea that Saddam’s personality and the totalitarian nature of the Baathist regime made Iraq uniquely immune to “management” strategies like containment. The entrenchment of this consensus before 9/11 helps explain why so many politicians, policymakers, and intellectuals rejected containment after 9/11 and embraced regime change and invasion.

This project makes several important historiographical contributions. First, I challenge arguments that the Bush Administration’s concerns about weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were a disingenuous pretext for war. In fact, regime change advocates from the Gulf War forward articulated a unified strategy in which the threat of WMD and terrorism and the need for political transformation in the Middle East were inseparable planks. Second, I demonstrate that while neoconservatives led the political coalition against containment, this coalition also drew

significant support from Democrats, liberals, and humanitarian activists, creating a wider than expected base of support for the 2003 invasion. Finally, while historians have focused on the role of cultural perspectives like Orientalism in shaping U.S. policy in the Middle East, my study stresses the importance of ideas about political regime type in debates about Iraq.

To my family, especially my parents, and my wife.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEI	American Enterprise Institute
BNL	Banca Nazionale del Lavoro
CCC	Commodity Credit Corporation
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPSG	Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ILA	Iraq Liberation Act
INA	Iraqi National Accord
INC	Iraqi National Congress
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KTO	Kuwaiti Theater of Operations
MEPP	Middle East Peace Process
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEA	Near Eastern Affairs Office, State Department
NDZ	No-Drive-Zone
NFZ	No-Fly-Zone
NIC	National Intelligence Council
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NSA	National Security Agency

NSD	National Security Directive
OSP	Office of Special Plans
PCTEG	Policy Counter-Terrorism Evaluation Group
PNAC	Project for a New American Century
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missiles
SCIRI	Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iran
UNMOVIC	United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission
UNSCOM	United Nations Special Commission
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 is now widely seen as one of the worst U.S. foreign policy blunders since the Vietnam War. Between 2003 and the departure of U.S. combat forces in 2011, 4,410 American military personnel died in Iraq and 31,957 were wounded, according to the Department of Defense.¹ Iraq descended into a civil war during the occupation that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians.² Although the “surge” of U.S. troops in Iraq from 2007 to 2008 helped tamp down this violence, the Iraqi state continued to be dominated by corrupt Shia parties that rigged elections, hoarded resources, and abused the Sunni minority.³

The persistence of these political tensions combined with the upheaval of the Arab Spring in Syria to set the stage for the rise of the Islamic State, which seized several major cities in Iraq in 2014 and perpetrated horrible atrocities. The United States and its allies were forced to re-

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, “Operation Iraqi Freedom U.S. Casualty Status,” February 5, 2019, [dod.defense.gov](https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status/), accessed February 5, 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status/>

² Estimates of Iraqi civilian casualties between 2003 and 2011 vary considerably based on different methodologies in different studies. The website Iraq Body Count states that 120,026 Iraqi civilians died in the conflict between from 2003-2011. This is a more conservative estimate because Iraq Body Count measures only deaths with a “verifiable documentary record,” using cross-referenced media sources, hospital, morgue, non-governmental organization, and official government figures. See: “Iraqi Deaths from Violence 2003-2011,” January 2, 2012, iraqbodycount.org, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/2011/>. Household surveys calculate increases in the death rate over time have calculated far higher totals. One survey from a University of Washington public health team in the early 2010s found 405,000 excess deaths from violence and indirect war-related causes like the collapse of infrastructure. See: Amy Hagopian et. al., “Mortality in Iraq Associated with the 2003-2011 War and Occupation,” *PLoS Medicine* 10, no. 10 (2013), available at <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1001533#abstract1>.

³ Useful sources on continued corruption, violence, and ethno-sectarian division in the post-Baathist Iraqi government include: Ranj Alaaldin, “Sectarianism, Governance, and Iraq’s Future,” November 26, 2018, [brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu/research/sectarianism-governance-and-iraqs-future/), accessed January 11, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/sectarianism-governance-and-iraqs-future/>; Emma Sky, *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (New York, Hachette Book Group, 2015); Michael Kirk and Mike Wiser, *Losing Iraq*, July 29, 2014, [pbs.frontline.org](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/losing-iraq/credits/), accessed May 2, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/losing-iraq/credits/>.

engage in fighting in Iraq and Syria and to counter an international resurgence of Islamic State-inspired terrorism.⁴ A U.S. Army War College study released in early 2019 concluded that “an emboldened and expansionist Iran appears to be the only victor,” as one of its main geopolitical rivals was destroyed and a weaker and more friendly regime put in its place. Without the Iraqi counterbalance, Iranian influence has spread in the Middle East, further destabilizing countries like Syria and Yemen.⁵ Meanwhile, in domestic politics, the failure to find significant weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs and the poorly handled occupation undermined public faith in basic governmental competence. The cost, length, brutality of this war, moreover, weakened many Americans’ willingness to bear the burdens of global leadership, empowering more anti-interventionist wings of both major parties.⁶ As of this writing in 2019, the ripple effects of the Iraq War continue to flow and the fate of the Iraqi state remains uncertain.

With this dismal story in mind, it becomes especially important to understand how alternatives to war were discredited. The primary alternative to regime change was containment, a policy that the United States installed on Iraq following the Persian Gulf War in 1991. Under this policy, the United States and an international coalition imposed economic sanctions,

⁴ Islamic State-inspired terrorist attacks outside of the Middle East have included the 2015 San Bernardino attack that killed 14 and the November 13, 2015 attacks in Paris that killed 130. For sources on the rise of the Islamic State and its global reach and appeal, see: Daniel Byman, “ISIS Goes Global,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 2 (March/April 2016), 76-85; Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (New York: Doubleday, 2015); Graeme Wood, *The Way of the Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State* (New York: Random House, 2017); Peter Bergen, *The United States of Jihad: Investigating America’s Homegrown Terrorists* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2016); Martin Smith, *Confronting ISIS*, October 11, 2016, pbs.frontline.org, accessed November 5, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/confronting-isis/>.

⁵ Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchak, eds., *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume 2: Surge and Withdrawal, 2007-2011* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2017), 639-640.

⁶ Political scientists John Mueller coined the term “Iraq Syndrome” to describe the United States’ greater hesitation about foreign intervention in the years after the Iraq War. See: John Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 6 (November, 2005), 44-54; John Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome Redux,” June 18, 2004, foreignaffairs.com, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2014-06-18/iraq-syndrome-redux>. For an interesting RAND and *Foreign Policy Magazine*-sponsored panel discussion of the idea of the Iraq syndrome featuring Douglas Feith, Paul Pillar, Stephen Hadley, see: J. Dana Stuster, “The Iraq Syndrome,” March 19, 2003, foreignpolicy.com, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/19/the-iraq-syndrome/>.

weapons inspections, no-fly-zones, and occasional military strikes on Iraq. Containment sought to keep Iraq militarily weak, prevent it from threatening its neighbors and vulnerable internal minorities, destroy its weapons of mass destruction, and, if possible, create the conditions for Saddam's downfall. Many experts and commentators who predicted some of these dismal outcomes have declared that the United States would have been better off sticking with containment, which they claim managed the Iraqi threat at reasonable cost. Nonetheless, most of these scholars have not asked tough questions about why an ostensibly effective policy became so intensely unpopular in American politics in the 1990s.⁷

In essence, over the course of the 1990s a consensus formed in U.S. political and intellectual circles that the Iraqi threat could not be contained and that the Baathist regime must be removed and democracy established in Iraq. Critics of containment believed that this regime could not be contained because Saddam's personality and the totalitarian nature of his regime made Iraq immune to "management" strategies like containment. Saddam would never cease his pursuit of WMD and regional domination, and as the pillars of containment inevitably weakened, Saddam would break out of this "box," rebuild his WMD, and again threaten regional stability. Before 9/11, relatively few supporters of this consensus called for an invasion, but they did see containment as a failure and regime change as the only realistic solution.

Furthermore, the critics of containment claimed that Saddam's totalitarian control of Iraqi society meant that there were few social or political points of leverage that containment could exploit to bring about his moderation or removal. Even a coup that removed Saddam was seen as

⁷ See: David Cortright and George A. Lopez, "Containing Iraq: Sanctions Worked," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 4, (July 2004), 90-103; James Bamford, *A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 382; Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 269; Richard Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 269; James Rubin, "Arguing Iraq: Ten Years Later, A Symposium," *The New Republic*, March 20, 2013, <https://newrepublic.com/article/112701/iraq-war-10th-anniversary-symposium>.

an inadequate solution. Real regime change meant the uprooting of the entire Baathist system and ideology, not just the replacing of Saddam with a less brutal figure. Only democratization could ensure that Iraq would no longer seek WMD, threaten its neighbors, or mistreat its people. The framing of Iraq as totalitarian, moreover, appealed to a longstanding narrative of the United States as engaged in an ongoing struggle against totalitarianism, whether it came in the form of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, or modern “rogue states” like Iraq.

I call the interpretation of the Iraqi threat outlined in the preceding paragraphs the “regime change consensus.” This study documents the formation of a political and intellectual coalition formed after the Gulf War around this set of ideas. Neoconservatives led this coalition, but it also drew significant support from Republicans and Democrats, liberal intellectuals, and left-wing and religious anti-sanctions activists. At times of intense focus on Iraq, these actors functioned as a united political coalition against containment, while at other times they formed a more general base of intellectual common ground about the Iraqi problem.

This project is primarily concerned with actors who not only make policy inside the government but shape public debates of foreign affairs and influence policymakers and legislators. The critics and defenders of containment with whom I am concerned had access to political power and to the media. They tried to create broad consensus on issues like Iraq by writing books, reports, and articles, testifying before Congress, creating lobbying networks, and other methods. Although I will examine public perceptions through polling data, I am mainly interested in the formation of the regime change consensus among influential policy-makers, politicians, activists, and intellectuals.

This broad coalition made the regime change consensus the dominant viewpoint on Iraq in American politics by the end of the 1990s. Their signal achievement was the 1998 Iraq

Liberation Act, which declared regime change in Iraq as an official U.S. foreign policy goal. President William Clinton pursued a containment policy to the end of his term, but the decisive shift toward the regime change consensus had occurred before he left office in 2000, leaving containment with few defenders in the public sphere.

This analysis of the political delegitimization of containment raises important new questions about the causes of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. In many respects, containment was a successful policy, at least in terms of the limited goals of the George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations. The Iraqi military and economy remained weak throughout the decade. Iraq made few threats to its neighbors in this period, and when it did, it quickly backed down in the face of U.S. threats of retaliation. U.N. weapons inspectors destroyed the vast majority of Iraq's WMD programs, and after 2003 it became clear that Saddam had neither large WMD stockpiles nor active programs before the invasion.⁸ If, however, containment was more successful than most Americans in the 1990s recognized, why did it become so widely discredited in American politics?

One answer is that although containment was successful in part, key planks of the policy weakened over the course of the 1990s. The international coalition's willingness to enforce sanctions and support punitive military strikes on Iraq faded over time, allowing Saddam's regime to access more resources and more brazenly challenge inspections. In addition, Saddam expelled the weapons inspectors in December 1998, undermining the coalition's ability to control his WMD production. Lastly, by the mid-1990s Saddam had survived a series of internal

⁸ The 2004 Duelfer Report concluded that Saddam aspired to renew his WMD and ballistic missile programs, but this report found no "formal written strategy or plan for the revival of WMD after sanctions." Iraq retained a base of scientific knowledge, personnel, and some infrastructure for the revival of these programs. However, this report also concluded that Iraq unilaterally destroyed its undeclared chemical weapons arsenal in 1991, ceased efforts to produce nuclear weapons in 1991, and abandoned work on biological weapons after 1996. See section on "Regime Strategic Intent" in Volume 1 of Department of Central Intelligence, Iraq Survey Group, *Key Findings*, September 30, 2004, cia.gov, accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/

challenges and re-established his control of Iraq, thus presenting the possibility that containment might have to stay in place for decades.

The idea that containment became discredited because it “failed” as a policy, however, is neither a self-evident nor a satisfying explanation of its delegitimization in American politics. This claim of failure played a central role in the regime change consensus, and architects of the Iraq War like Donald Rumsfeld have since asserted that containment was obviously and irredeemably broken when they took office.⁹ In reality, this view was an interpretation of an ambiguous situation. The ideas that critics of containment advanced mattered in terms of how Americans interpreted this ambiguity. The central ideas of the regime change consensus combined with events to undermine the policy’s political credibility and create energy for a shift to regime change.

In particular, it mattered that advocates of regime change argued both that containment was not working and that it inherently could not work against this particular target. They believed that this fanatical, brutal, totalitarian regime, with its recalcitrant and vicious leader, could not be contained, and every day spent trying to do so only allowed Saddam to recover. This idea shaped the conversation about Iraq in ways that scholars have not yet acknowledged. Because of this interpretation, growing numbers of influential Americans believed that the United States should not waste time and resources trying to restore containment, which they thought would fail to arrest Saddam’s ambitions even if its main pillars were fully intact. When, for example, Saddam threw the inspectors out of Iraq in 1998, most regime change advocates argued against their return. They claimed that this would provide a false sense of security and

⁹ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 416-418; Douglas Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 194-200. Some scholars have echoed this claim. See: Hal Brands and Peter Feaver, “The Case for Bush Revisionism? Reevaluating the Legacy of America’s 43rd President,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 1-2 (2018), 1-41.

that inspections simply could not work against a police state determined to hide its WMD programs.

Scholars have also not explored how key flaws in the first Bush and Clinton administration's defense of containment made the policy vulnerable to political attack. Containment's advocates failed to plausibly explain the policy's end point, or how its mechanisms would bring about either a change in Saddam's strategic intentions or the downfall of the regime. George H.W. Bush and Clinton declared that as long as Saddam remained in power, no political rapprochement or lifting of sanctions would be possible, even if Saddam cooperated with weapons inspections. These declarations were made under the assumption that Saddam would fall from power relatively soon, and they sought to assuage domestic critics. However, they only made more credible the critics' claims that Iraq policy was incoherent while damaging the international coalition needed to enforce containment. Moreover, after the Gulf War, the first Bush and Clinton administrations spent far less time defending containment than its political enemies spent attacking it. The result was an under-theorized, under-defended, politically vulnerable policy that became more defined by its shortcomings than its accomplishments.

Understanding how a consensus in American politics formed around the idea that containment not only was not working, but could not work, demands that we look at both the policy itself and the broader intellectual and political conversations about Iraq and U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s. We can then deepen and reframe our historical explanation of the 2003 U.S. invasion.

The standard explanation for the Iraq War from scholars and journalists is that from the Gulf War until 2003, the neoconservative movement fixated on overthrowing the Baathists as

part of an agenda of asserting U.S. global hegemony. Neoconservatives and other Iraq hawks assumed key positions inside the second Bush administration, especially Dick Cheney as Vice President, Donald Rumsfeld as Defense Secretary, and Paul Wolfowitz as Undersecretary of Defense. They used 9/11 to convince Bush that Iraq should be the main target of the U.S. response. They based this argument on the idea that rogue states like Iraq might hand WMD to terrorists to use against the United States. The “nexus” between WMD, rogue states, and terrorists undermined containment and deterrence and necessitated a “pre-emptive” response.¹⁰ Bush then took this argument public, using selective or exaggerated intelligence, fear-mongering, and the post-9/11 psychological need for action to build political momentum for the war.¹¹

This narrative is valid in many ways, and I do not seek to minimize the importance of 9/11 or the neoconservatives in the road to the Iraq War. 9/11 served as a “precipitant” of the Iraq War, or an “immediate, incidental factor” that triggers a massive change in perspective or action.¹² Absent this event, the war almost certainly would not have happened. Without the anger and fear generated by these attacks, it seems unlikely that Iraq hawks could have created the political momentum for an invasion. Furthermore, the presence of neoconservatives with a particular fixation on Iraq was crucial for reorienting the U.S. response to 9/11 toward Iraq. Nonetheless, there are limitations to this explanatory framework. Most importantly, this

¹⁰ In reality, this was a preventive war, a distinction explored in Chapter 5 of this study.

¹¹ Both defenders and critics of the Iraq War have focused on the role of neoconservatives. Prominent examples of neoconservative-focused interpretations include: James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004); Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 288; Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Todd Purdum, *A Time of Our Choosing: America's War in Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2003); David Korn and Michael Isikoff, *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 16-17, Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 15-20, 55, Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 201-210; William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “The Right War for the Right Reasons,” *The Weekly Standard*, February 23, 2004, 20-28.

¹² Lawrence Stone, “Theories of Revolution,” *World Politics* 19, no. 2 (January 1966), 164.

framework does not explain how a wide swathe of Americans, including many legislators, media outlets, intellectuals, and much of the public, came to accept the worst-case portrayal of the threat.

In short, Bush may have put Iraq on the table after 9/11, but why did so many Americans seem primed to buy his argument for war? Why was there not a political brick wall against the push for war on the grounds that the administration had generated little new evidence that Saddam had reinvigorated his WMD programs or played a role in 9/11? Why, moreover, did so few prominent Americans argue that the United States should use the urgency and international sympathy of the post-9/11 moment to reinvigorate containment rather than invading? Answering these questions requires that we trace the evolution of the broader political and intellectual spectrum of debate about Iraq, especially the ascendancy of the regime change consensus before 9/11.

Studying this consensus also provides a better understanding of the opposition to Bush's case for war. As the Iraq hawks pushed for invasion in 2002, a large set of skeptics pushed back, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Congressional leaders like Senators Chuck Hagel and Joseph Biden, and influential former policymakers like James Baker and Sandy Berger. Following what I call the "Powell-Blair approach," they argued that the evidence of Iraq's WMD programs and links to al-Qaeda were weak, that the administration had not prepared adequately for occupying Iraq, and that Bush should build a coalition before going to war. However, these ostensible skeptics actually shared most of the major assumptions about Iraq that the hawks held. Most parties to the debate believed that Iraq would remain a threat until Saddam was removed, that the core cause of Iraq's aggression was the nature of its regime, that even a renewed containment policy could not disarm Saddam or

change his strategic goals, and that only democratization could definitively solve the Iraq problem.

These assumptions, all tenets of the regime change consensus, became entrenched in American politics during the 1990s. Thus, the terms of debate between 9/11 and the March 2003 invasion of Iraq should not be understood as regime change against containment. This question had largely been settled by the late 1990s as the regime change consensus ascended. Rather, this was a conversation about how to pursue regime change, not whether it must be pursued. The dominant explanation of the Iraq War, with its focus on neoconservatives, misses how other actors came to think about Iraq within these boundaries and assumptions. The public figures who argued firmly against invasion and for the renewal of containment became a decided minority.

The dominant understanding of the causes of the Iraq War does not explain how the terms of debate developed in a way that gave the Bush administration a fundamental advantage in building a wide base of support for invasion. I show how the delegitimizing of alternatives and the building of the regime change consensus before 9/11 helped form this base of support while undermining calls for a renewal of containment. 9/11 and the presence of neoconservatives in the Bush administration thus emerge as necessary but insufficient causes of the Iraq War. Along with these factors, the regime change consensus served as an essential precondition for the success of the Bush administration in taking the United States to war.¹³ This preexisting consensus lent plausibility to claims that Iraq was constructing WMD, that Saddam remained fixated on revenge, that he might hand WMD to terrorists, and that containment could not eliminate these threats.

¹³ A precondition in this usage can be understood as long-term, structural factors that create the potential for revolutionary change. They can be ideologies, socio-economic structures, political or geopolitical conditions, etc. See: Perez Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography," *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (March, 1973), 44-45.

Between Triumph and Tragedy: The Bigger Historical Picture

This project places Iraq policy and politics in a broader context, showing how trends and ideas in the historical moment of the 1990s shaped the debate about Iraq. The political legitimacy of containment suffered because this policy stood between two massive triumphs for the United States and one horrible tragedy.

The first triumph was victory in the Cold War as the Soviet Union moved toward reformation and then total collapse. The end of the Cold War undermined the containment of Iraq because it fueled the sense that the world was moving inexorably toward liberal democracy and capitalism, making containment appear intolerably status-quo oriented or even cynical.¹⁴ Universalistic thinking about human rights and democracy saturated U.S. thought about the world. Liberals, neoconservatives, and humanitarian activists all intensified their assaults on the concept of state sovereignty, treating it as a right to be earned rather than inherent in statehood, thus paving the way for armed interventions.¹⁵ Containment's defenders argued that the United States should be careful about destabilizing Iraq because of its fractious ethnic politics and lack of experience with liberal democracy. However, even though the containment of the Soviet Union was seen as a success, the ideological mood of the 1990s ironically put the defenders of the containment of Iraq at a disadvantage. The temper of the times made it easy to portray them as racially and culturally insensitive or stuck in a Cold War mentality.

¹⁴ Two influential texts from the 1990s that posited a global movement toward democracy, liberalism, and free market capitalism were: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Of course, these groups disagreed on what behaviors states had to exhibit or eschew to preserve their right to sovereignty. For a discussion of this issue, see Chapter Four of this dissertation. For discussions of the 1990s an era of crisis for the concept of sovereignty, see: G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 238-240, 245; Robert Jackson, *Sovereignty: The Evolution of an Idea* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 114-135.

The second triumph was the 1991 Persian Gulf War, in which the United States led a coalition to eject Saddam's forces from Kuwait in an unexpectedly easy fight. This overwhelming military victory fed the belief that the United States was now the world's military hegemon and that it could remove rogue regimes at will. The term "unipolar moment" may have been a neoconservative creation, but this concept influenced most Americans' thinking about the use of U.S. global power in this period. Why tolerate the existence of an odious dictator like Saddam when the United States had the power to remove him and no superpower rival could stand in its way?¹⁶ Why not remove the Baathist regime when a democracy can be expected to grow in its place, just as democracies were rising in Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Latin America? Containment was a poor fit for the national mentality that emerged from these triumphs, one of universalistic political thinking, optimism about U.S. power, and frustration with holdouts to this wave of world-historical progress like Baathist Iraq.

The tragedy came with the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on 9/11, which killed nearly 3,000 Americans in one terrible morning. Before 9/11, politicians and intellectuals, including Clinton, had defined the post-Cold War world as globalized and interdependent. They recognized that these factors meant greater vulnerability to events in other states, but they generally saw greater interdependence as a net positive. The free movement of ideas, goods, and people would universalize values and cultures, foster prosperity and democracy, and discredit retrograde ideologies.¹⁷

¹⁶ John Mearsheimer stresses how a "crusading" mentality always latent in U.S. foreign policy was unleashed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, setting the ground for decisions like the invasion of Iraq. See: John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

¹⁷ Probably the most influential version of this argument in the 1990s came from Clinton's first National Security Advisor, Anthony Lake, in 1993. See: Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," (speech, Washington D.C., September 21, 1993), accessed April 15, 2017, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html>; For discussion of the nature of post-Cold War global politics and economics, including this optimistic vision, see: Derek Chollet, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin*

9/11 instantly reversed this optimistic script by highlighting the negative aspects of interdependence and the ability of small groups to cause asymmetrical destruction. U.S. awareness of international terrorism and weapons proliferation had increased throughout the 1990s, but 9/11 drove home the true potential of these menaces. Terrorists plotting in rural Afghanistan and unstable dictators tinkering with biological weapons in Iraq now appeared as imminent threats in a shrunken world.

Growing numbers of Americans, including high-ranking members of the Bush administration, felt that the United States could no longer tolerate the political dysfunction, religious extremism, and authoritarianism of the Middle East and the terrorism that these pathologies had spawned. The mostly neoconservative vision of the United States using its massive power in a unipolar moment to accelerate the world's movement toward democracy now took on a greater urgency and a wider appeal. Action became imperative as domestic and international constraints on armed intervention abroad fell away. The United States needed to respond to defeat the active terrorist threat and transform the politics of the Middle East.

In a historical moment bookended by two victories and one tragedy, containment, a strategy of management and restraint, satisfied neither the optimistic mood engendered by the victories nor the atmosphere of fear and vulnerability fostered by the tragedy. Before 9/11, containment did not do enough to create the better world that many Americans envisioned, nor did it promise to eliminate a threat to vital U.S. interests in the Gulf. After 9/11, relying on a policy of containment to hamstring Iraq's WMD programs appeared unrealistic and risky, even if the policy could be restored to its earlier strength. To paraphrase philosopher Gary Dorrien, after

Wall and the Start of the War on Terror (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 312-314, Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 266-276;

9/11 the Bush administration and other U.S. leaders wanted to abolish problems like Saddam entirely, not to cope with them.¹⁸

The combination of triumphs and tragedy created a combustible mix of restlessness, idealism, and vulnerability that made containment seem inadequate for either creating a better world or preventing disaster. The triumphs and tragedy noted here were vital structural preconditions for the Iraq War because they created a conducive environment for the ascendancy of the regime change consensus. Nonetheless, in order to explain the Iraq War fully, we have to understand how, in between these major turning points, a set of organized political actors delegitimized containment and made the elimination of Saddam and his regime the only acceptable solution. This coalition, led by but not limited to neoconservatives, constructed an interpretation of these events that posited regime change as the means to achieve the better world and prevent disaster.

The Iraq War as Historiography and History

A historical study of such a recent period presents unique challenges. The type of in-depth analysis of the evolution of policy within an administration, something akin to Frederik Logevall's *Choosing War*, is not feasible because of the lack of declassified sources. This study relies on declassified online collections, available archival sources, interviews, memoirs, and journalists' accounts to reconstruct the policy history of containment. My focus on the broad political and intellectual conversation about Iraq opens up a host of useful sources, including Congressional documents, media sources, think tank archives, scholarly books and journals, and correspondences.

¹⁸ The actual quote is "They believed in abolishing problems entirely, not coping with them." Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 245.

Scholarly and political debates about the causes of the Iraq War have been heavily influenced by the conflict's downward turn into civil war and the failure to find WMD programs. Many politicians and intellectuals have asserted that they would not have supported the war if not for the inflation of intelligence about Iraq's WMD. It is noteworthy that both presidential candidates in 2016 tried to distance themselves from their initial support of the war.¹⁹ Congressional studies have likewise focused heavily on intelligence failures, overlooking the fact that containment, the main alternative to regime change, had been delegitimized well before the WMD debate heated up. Debates about the Iraq War have also featured much recrimination and a tendency to pin all responsibility on neoconservatives. Many accounts of the Iraq War skip over the 1990s entirely or treat the decade as insignificant.²⁰

The focus on the manipulation of evidence about WMD has drawn attention away from an in-depth, historically contextualized look at the political and intellectual building blocks of the war dating back to the early 1990s. Connecting the formation of the regime change consensus in

¹⁹ Hillary Clinton in particular has asserted she was misled by the Bush administration's portrayal of the WMD threat from Iraq. For Clinton, Trump, and a variety of other who say they were misled into supporting the Iraq War, see: Michael Kranish, "Hillary Clinton Regrets Her Iraq Vote," *Washington Post*, September 15, 2016, A12; Michelle Ye Hee Lee, "Timeline of Trump's Comment on Iraq Invasion," February 26, 2016, accessed January 8, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2016/02/25/timeline-of-trumps-comments-on-iraq-invasion-not-loud-not-strong-and-no-headlines/?utm_term=.01572bbf6997; Editorial, "Were We Wrong?" *The New Republic*, June 28, 2004, <https://newrepublic.com/article/67651/were-we-wrong>; Anne Marie Slaughter, "Arguing Iraq: Ten Years Later, A Symposium," *The New Republic*, March 20, 2013, <https://newrepublic.com/article/112701/iraq-war-10th-anniversary-symposium>; "Politicians Regret, Reflect on Iraq War Vote," npr.org, December 16, 2011, accessed January 8, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2011/12/16/143837072/politicians-regret-reflect-on-iraq-war-vote>; Jordain Carney, "Reid: Iraq War Vote 'Biggest Regret,'" thehill.com, June 9, 2016, accessed January 8, 2019, <https://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/senate/282852-reid-iraq-war-vote-greatest-regret>; Jeffrey Goldberg, "How Did I Get Iraq Wrong," theatlantic.com, March 19, 2008, accessed January 8, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2008/03/how-did-i-get-iraq-wrong/8302/>

²⁰ For examples, see: Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 288; Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006); Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); 67-69; Lawrence Freedman, "Iraq, Liberal Wars, and Illiberal Containment," *Survival* 48, no. 4, (Winter 2006), 51-65.

the decade after 1991 to the critical period from September 2001 to March 2003 allows us to rethink key interpretations of the Iraq War and modern U.S. foreign policy.

One of the main interpretations of the Iraq War is what I call the “pretext school.” Many scholars have argued that Bush’s focus on Iraq’s WMD programs and possible links to terrorist groups was a mere pretext for a war based on a broader agenda. The word pretext here implies that the threat of WMD and terror connections was a disingenuous justification for a decision already made, or a misleading “cover story” or “window dressing” for the real but unstated reasons. Journalist James Bamford offers a standard pretext claim in asserting that the WMD argument was “fraudulent...it was simply a pretext for a war long advocated by a small group of hardline neoconservatives with their own agenda.”²¹ This agenda is described as a combination of asserting U.S. hegemony, controlling oil resources, enriching U.S. defense contractors, ensuring Israel’s security, and democratizing the Middle East.²²

The pretext school rightly points out that the Bush administration led with the nexus concept in its case for war and that it shifted its rationale toward democratization once the United States failed to find WMD or connections to al-Qaeda.²³ This point raises reasonable suspicion that WMD and terror connections were covers for other priorities. However, the pretext school

²¹ Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, 423.

²² For examples of the pretext school, see: Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 15-17, 41; Lloyd Gardner, *The Long Road to Baghdad: A History of U.S. Foreign Policy from the 1970s to the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), 4; Andrew Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2016), 223; Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 181-182; Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 290-293; Isikoff and Korn, *Hubris*, 16-17; John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), 229-230; Mearsheimer and Walt *Israel Lobby* 229-230, Steven Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979: Hegemony, Oil and War* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 19.

²³ At a speech in November 2003, Bush started to reframe the Iraq War as a quest to foster democracy in Iraq. See: George W. Bush, “President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East,” November 6, 2003, [whitehouse.archives.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html), accessed January 4, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>; For a discussion of this shift in rationale, see Bacevich, *War for the Greater Middle East*, 240.

fails to appreciate that concerns about WMD and terrorism had been vital to the argument against containment since the early 1990s. Regime change advocates had openly put forth a coherent argument that linked WMD, terrorism, the nature of the Iraqi regime, the importance of assertive U.S. global leadership, and the need for democracy in the Middle East.

Despite its many empirical flaws, this argument had a logical flow, which proceeded as follows. Saddam was an implacable totalitarian bent on acquiring WMD and dominating the Gulf. Containment by its nature could not address this kind of threat. Permanently removing this threat required a firm assertion of U.S. power in toppling Saddam, uprooting the Baathist system, and fostering democracy. These steps would guarantee the free flow of oil from the region, eliminate Iraq's threat to its neighbors, and deflate the appeal of radical ideologies. As I will show, these beliefs and principles worked together in the minds of regime change advocates. No one plank of this mindset can be singled out as the "real reason" for which other reasons were misleading pretexts.

9/11, moreover, was no mere pretext for war.²⁴ It did create a political opening for Iraq hawks to press for invasion, but it also highlighted to even the most fervent regime change advocates the potential danger of rogue states asymmetrically striking the homeland by arming terrorists with WMD. Most regime change advocates had thought of Iraq primarily as a threat to national interests rather than national security, but 9/11 changed this perception and created a new sense of urgency.

A second interpretation of the Iraq War that I challenge in this project is what I call the Orientalism school. Many scholars have portrayed this war as a product in part of American Orientalism, drawing on the work of the literary critic Edward Said. They argue that advocates of

²⁴ Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, 269, 285.

regime change portrayed Saddam and the Iraqi leadership as irrational, inscrutable, inhuman others who were not reasonable like Western leaders. The Iraqi people, moreover, became passive, helpless subjects who needed a Western messiah. Said, for instance, wrote after the invasion: “Without a well-organized sense that the people over there were not like ‘us’ and didn’t appreciate ‘our’ values—the very core of traditional orientalist dogma—there would have been no war.” Said contended that U.S. policy in the Middle East was predicated on longstanding cultural and media representations of Arabs as “irrecusably, and congenitally Other.”²⁵ Scholars in this school connected the Iraq War to a history of Western imperialism in which essentialist portrayals of foreign peoples justified exploitation and the abrogation of sovereignty.²⁶

There is some validity to this Orientalist interpretation, especially the idea that many regime change advocates viewed Iraqis as needing Western tutelage in democracy and capitalism.²⁷ However, the causal relationship between Orientalism and Iraq policy may not be what these critics expect. In debates about Iraq from 1990 to 2003, those who preferred

²⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 160-161. See also: Melani McAllister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, 2nd edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 9-29.

²⁶ Said made this connection explicitly, saying that the U.S. case for war relied on “demeaning stereotypes” and the “same justifications for power and violence...as the scholars enlisted by the Dutch conquerors of Malaysia and Indonesia, the British armies of India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, West Africa, and the French armies of Indochina and North Africa.” See: Edward Said, “A Window on the World,” August 1, 2003, [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com), the Guardian, accessed November 2, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/aug/02/alqaida.highereducation>; For scholarship that has stressed the role of Orientalism in the Iraq War and U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East more generally, see: Osamah Khalil, *America’s Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 5, 264-265; Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 32; Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 270; Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, 3rd edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); 10-11, 35-43, 308; McAllister, *Epic Encounters*, xi, 287-299.

²⁷ The influence of Bernard Lewis in the Bush administration, which included several visits to top Bush officials after 9/11, further speaks to the influence of Orientalism on U.S. policy toward Iraq. Another important example is the influence of the heavily Orientalist book *The Arab Mind*, by deceased Hungarian anthropologist Raphael Patai, in the U.S. military’s cultural training. For further discussion, see: Little, *American Orientalism*, 317-319, 335.

containment frequently argued that Iraqi and Arab political cultures differed in essential ways from the West. They argued that certain conditions in Iraqi society made it a poor candidate for liberal democracy, including the absence of an independent civil society, the lack of experience with constitutionalism and representative government, and the presence of intense ethnic divisions. Some regime change skeptics viewed these problems as part of a fixed, essential Arab or Islamic political character, while others treated them as historically contingent developments, created in large part by the Baathist regime. Whatever their origins, for containment's defenders these deep-seated problems were reasons to eschew regime change and pursue U.S. interests in the region under the assumption that most countries would remain authoritarian for some time.

For most advocates of regime change, especially liberals and neoconservatives, this was an unacceptably relativistic and condescending position. They asserted universalistic notions of human rights and democracy and claimed that pluralistic, representative government could succeed in Iraq. They frequently accused containment's defenders of racism and Orientalism. For regime change advocates, the bursting potential and desire of the Iraqi people to have democratic and humane government was all the more reason to seek Saddam's overthrow.

This is a somewhat unexpected outcome given standard explanations of the relationship between Orientalism and Western interventions in the Middle East. It poses a problem for the portrayal of the Iraq War as an Orientalist enterprise. To invert Said's quote above, it was precisely because so many hawks viewed Iraqis as like "us" and in tune with "our" values that they saw regime change as desirable and feasible. Containment's defenders had to fend off charges of condescending Orientalist thinking, which put them at a political disadvantage even though their argument was more that democracy had to evolve slowly within Iraq rather than be imposed from without. This is not a conclusive statement about Orientalism in U.S. diplomatic

history, but it does suggest that the link between cultural lenses like Orientalism and real policy-making are multidirectional and contextually specific.

Lastly, I challenge an historical interpretation of the Iraq War that treats it as the long unfolding of the logic of the Carter Doctrine. The Carter Doctrine responded both to the collapse of the United States' strongest ally in the region, Iran under the Shah, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Instead of relying on proxies, Carter pledged to resist, with force if necessary, any attempt to gain control of the Persian Gulf and its vital resources. In historian Andrew Bacevich's telling, Carter had fatefully tied the American way of life, based on profligate use of oil, to control of the Persian Gulf.²⁸ In the 1980s, the United States built a military infrastructure in the Gulf that enabled the rapid deployment of forces.²⁹ The Carter Doctrine originally aimed to stop Soviet penetration of the Gulf, but in the 1980s and early 1990s the United States intervened to defeat regional actors, namely Iran and Iraq, in their attempts to control this region.

Some scholars treat the 2003 Iraq War as a consequence of a deep and consistent set of U.S. priorities in the Gulf as established by the Carter Doctrine. They claim that Carter made the area into an "informal American protectorate" that required the United States to impose order in the region.³⁰ According to this interpretation, pursuing these longstanding "hegemonic ambitions" in the Gulf after 9/11 demanded the removal of Saddam and the transformation of the region's politics.³¹ As political scientist Steven Hurst puts it, the Iraq War emerged less from

²⁸ Bacevich, *War for the Greater Middle East*, 246.

²⁹ For an excellent account of the building of this military infrastructure, see: Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

³⁰ Bacevich, *War for the Greater Middle East*, 30.

³¹ Sheila Carapico and Chris Toensing, "The Strategic Logic of the Iraq Blunder," *Middle East Report* 238, (Summer 2006), 7.

9/11 and the neoconservatives than from “a long established American determination to maintain the position of the United States as the dominant power in the Gulf” and the “need to maintain a dominant position in the international oil system.”³² I call this interpretation the Long War School.³³

This interpretation, however, erases key distinctions between how different presidencies pursued the goals of the Carter Doctrine. George H.W. Bush and Clinton may have extended U.S. involvement in the region, but they also exercised restraint. They and their advisors believed in multilateralism and the limits of military power, and they grasped the difficulties of implanting democracy in foreign nations with deep social divides. Their enforcement of the containment of Iraq was predicated on recognizing these problems and limitations. For both of these presidents, regime change was both too risky and unnecessary for achieving U.S. goals in the region.

Moreover, the Long War school overlooks the significance of 9/11 in transforming the perception of Iraq from a threat to the national interest to a threat to national security. The Carter Doctrine and subsequent U.S. interventions like the Gulf War centered on symmetrical military efforts by hostile states to control the resources and political balance of the Gulf. The containment of Iraq, in large part, flowed from that logic as well, requiring the United States to maintain political and economic pressure to prevent Saddam from destabilizing the region. 9/11, however, changed the perception of the international security environment dramatically. By developing the nexus concept, the Bush team framed Iraq and other rogue states as threats to

³² Hurst, *United States and Iraq since 1979*, 1, 20.

³³ For other examples of the Long War Hypothesis, see: Melvyn Leffler, “9/11 in Retrospect,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 5 (September 2011), 43; John Mearsheimer, “Imperial by Design,” *The National Interest*, September 2011, 16-34; Gardner, *Long Road to Baghdad*, 8; Andrew Bacevich, “The United States in Iraq: Terminating an Interminable War,” in *Between War and Peace: How America Ends its Wars*, ed. Matthew Moten, (New York: Free Press, 2011), 315-319.

national security. This necessitated and justified, in their minds, preventive wars to destroy these latent threats and support for democratization to undermine the sources of extremism. In keeping with the Carter Doctrine, Bush also wanted to overthrow Saddam to prevent him from using WMD to try to control the Gulf. Nonetheless, the overwhelming thrust of his case for war was to prevent an Iraqi-sponsored repeat of 9/11, this time with WMD.

In other words, George W. Bush's foray into Iraq was not an incremental intensification of his predecessors' actions but a radical break based on a different logic of intervention. The prominent presence of longstanding regime change advocates and "democratic imperialists" in his administration mattered in making regime change in Iraq, a doctrine of preventive war, and the goal of democratic transformation central to his foreign policy.³⁴ In short, the Carter Doctrine did not predetermine the Iraq War. The specific people in power and the ideas they held made a difference in terms of how these goals were pursued. Moreover, 9/11 mattered in terms of changing U.S. perceptions of its security and its foreign policy goals in the Middle East.

My argument begins by examining how the George H.W. Bush administration developed a containment strategy during the Gulf Crisis. Chapter One shows how Bush envisioned using sanctions and the threat of military action after the Gulf War to compel Saddam to surrender his WMD. However, before the war began in January 1991, Bush and his top advisors decided against trying to topple Saddam, fearing that this would rupture the coalition, destabilize the region, and entrap the United States in an occupation. The Bush administration hoped that the war would lead to Saddam's ouster, but they did not see regime change as a goal of the conflict.

³⁴ The term "democratic imperialists" is taken from Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, who claim that figures like Wolfowitz and Richard Perle believe "the United States should actively deploy its overwhelming military, economic, and political might to remake the world in its image-and that doing so would serve the interests of other countries as well as the United States." See: Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 46-47.

Chapter Two demonstrates that Bush's Iraq policy enjoyed broad political support until the end of the Gulf War in early March 1991. Although the United States soundly defeated Iraqi forces, the end of the war proved messier than Bush had anticipated. Many critics blamed the president for ending hostilities before the Iraqi Republican Guard had been destroyed. They also blamed him for not intervening more decisively to support the Kurdish and Shia rebellions against Saddam.

A widely accepted political narrative emerged after the Gulf War that Bush had missed an opportunity to eliminate a serious threat. Containment became the official U.S. policy in an atmosphere of disappointment and recrimination that created a bias in American politics against flexible or restrained approaches to Iraq. Bush himself added to this bias by asserting that the United States would not lift sanctions on Iraq until Saddam was out of power. This political fallout from victory added converts to the argument that containment was at best a temporary solution because it did not address the fundamental cause of Iraqi misbehavior: the regime.

In this chapter, I also introduce the three main schools of thought about the containment of Iraq that shaped the political and intellectual debate after the Gulf War. The first school, the "conditional" approach, was composed largely of realists and some liberal internationalists who claimed that containment could manage and limit the Iraqi threat if it was enforced rigorously. They often criticized Bush and Clinton's execution of the policy, but they agreed that it was the best of a bad set of options on Iraq. In contrast, members of the "inevitable decline" argued from the outset that containment inherently could not work against totalitarian regimes like Iraq and leaders like Saddam because they would never cease their pursuit of WMD and regional dominance. Composed mainly of neoconservatives but including many liberals and Democrats, they argued that containment would inevitably collapse as Iraq provoked repeated crises and the

international coalition steadily eroded. They concluded that the United States should shift immediately to a regime change strategy before Saddam escaped containment completely. The third approach, the “humanitarian” school, was composed mainly of leftist and religious activists who believed the sanctions were immoral because of their effect on Iraqi public health and wanted them lifted immediately. As containment faced increasing crises over the course of the 1990s, the conditionalist defenders of containment became squeezed between the growing inevitable decline and humanitarian camps, which both wanted to abandon containment.

Chapter Three addresses Clinton’s first term containment policy, which successfully limited the Iraqi threat, compelled more cooperation from Iraq, preserved the coalition, deterred Iraqi challenges to the United Nations, and maintained domestic support. The relative success in enforcing U.N. resolutions and degrading Saddam’s power protected Clinton’s political flank as long as there was a chance for a coup. Nonetheless, Clinton was increasingly torn between domestic critics who wanted tougher action and an international coalition that wanted a faster lifting of sanctions. Clinton also faced pressure from humanitarian critics of sanctions, both at home and abroad, who claimed that sanctions were causing a massive health crisis in Iraq and should be lifted immediately.

By the end of Clinton’s first term, Saddam had crushed the opposition inside Iraq and removed the chance that a coup or rebellion would topple his regime. These events undermined containment, which had long relied on a coup or rebellion to solve the Saddam problem. These events set the stage for a domestic political push for an open regime change strategy in Clinton’s second term. Furthermore, in 1995 Iraqi defection of Hussein Kamel revealed a trove of information about WMD programs that Iraq had hidden from inspectors. This disclosure reinforced the argument that full disarmament was impossible without Iraqi cooperation, which

would never happen because of the nature of the regime. In short, these events added greater legitimacy to the main ideas of the regime change consensus.

Chapter Four examines containment in crisis during Clinton's second term. In 1997 and 1998, Saddam and the United Nations engaged in several showdowns over inspections, and in late 1998 he expelled the inspectors from Iraq. Clinton responded with a series of air and missile strikes in Operation Desert Fox in December 1998. The United States became increasingly isolated on Iraq policy as countries like France, Russia, and China refused to support military action and called for the lifting of sanctions.

Containment's critics exploited these crises to build a political coalition that sought to discredit containment and shift policy toward regime change. They advocated an alternative strategy of regime change called rollback in which the U.S. military would provide air cover, training, and weapons for an insurgency led by the Iraqi opposition. This movement's greatest achievement was the October 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, which declared Saddam's removal and the fostering of democracy in Iraq as U.S. foreign policy goals. This was a non-binding resolution that Clinton offered rhetorical support for but ignored in practice. Nonetheless, the ILA represented the entrenchment of the regime change consensus as the dominant, bipartisan view of Iraq. Containment was now widely seen as a failure that could not be revived. Squeezed between regime change advocates and humanitarian critics of sanctions, containment retained few public defenders.

Chapter Five shows how the preexisting regime change consensus shaped the entire post-9/11 debate about Iraq and made it easier for the George W. Bush administration to take the country to war in 2003. Administration hawks like Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz reoriented the U.S. response to 9/11 from al-Qaeda and Afghanistan to Iraq. Under the Bush Doctrine, the

administration argued that containment and deterrence could not address the nexus of rogue states, WMD, and international terrorism, which meant that the United States needed to invade Iraq.

Bush faced significant public pushback on his rapid march to war from members of the Blair-Powell approach to Iraq, who nonetheless usually did not recommend the renewal of containment. They too believed that a restored containment would eventually relapse into the difficulties of the 1990s while failing to address the root of the problem: Saddam and his regime. Figures like Powell, Blair, and a variety of legislators succeeded in convincing Bush to give inspections and diplomacy more time and effort. However, they ceded to the administration the point that regime change should be pursued if these measures failed. When Bush declared that diplomacy and inspections had failed in early 2003, the vast majority of the political establishment either supported the war or offered few alternatives. Ultimately, the regime change consensus created a narrow prewar debate in which robust alternatives to invasion were already discredited.

CHAPTER 1: A HOPE, NOT A POLICY: CONTAINMENT AND REGIME CHANGE DURING THE GULF CRISIS, AUGUST 1990-FEBRUARY 1991

Introduction

Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 sounded the death knell for the U.S. policy of constructive engagement toward Iraq. This policy had continued U.S. support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War in an attempt to moderate Iraqi behavior. In the long run, the failure of engagement ingrained the "lesson" in U.S. thinking about Iraq that any attempt to incentivize Saddam to change his behavior was pointless. The August 1990 invasion transformed Iraq from a potential partner into a serious threat to U.S. interests.

George H.W. Bush responded to the invasion of Kuwait by mobilizing U.S. forces to deter an invasion of Saudi Arabia in Operation Desert Shield, forming an international coalition to impose sanctions on Iraq, and demanding that Saddam leave Kuwait. The United Nations Security Council resolutions passed in the fall of 1990 defined the coalition's main goals as the ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the restoration of full Kuwaiti sovereignty. Resolution 678 in November 1990 authorized the use of "all necessary means," including the use of force, if Iraq did not withdraw by January 15, 1991.¹

In the United States, President Bush received widespread support for rallying the international community behind this strategy. Americans across the political spectrum agreed

¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 678, (November 29th, 1990), in *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Christopher Cerf and Micah Sifry (New York: Times Books, 1991), 156.

that Saddam threatened the U.S. ability to maintain the free flow of oil from the Middle East.² Many were also shocked by Iraq's brutalization of Kuwaiti citizens and agreed, echoing the cultural memory of Munich, that the United States needed to stop aggressors like Saddam before their power and ambition expanded. The fact that this invasion came in the waning days of the Cold War made this crisis even more important in terms of setting a precedent for how the United States, its allies, and the U.N. would deal with aggression in the post-Cold War world. Secretary of State James Baker aptly summarized the case for intervention: "A very dangerous dictator, armed to the teeth, is threatening a critical region at a defining moment in history."³

This early consensus began to falter after November 8, 1990 when Bush announced that the United States would double its conventional forces in Saudi Arabia in order to create a "viable offensive option" to force Iraq from Kuwait.⁴ At this point, Americans divided along more partisan lines over how to achieve the U.N.'s goals at a tolerable cost. Most Congressional Democrats argued that the use of force against Iraq was unnecessary and risky, preferring to stick with sanctions and isolation. In contrast, the Bush administration, Republicans, and some Democrats contended that sanctions would take too long and that the coalition might fray before the economic damage compelled Iraq's withdrawal. They therefore defended the use of military force after the January 15th deadline as the only guaranteed way to force Saddam out of Kuwait.

² Polls in the fall and winter of 1990-1991 repeatedly showed that Americans approved of Bush's handling of the crisis. His lowest approval rating during the crisis was 57% in early December. The embargo was particularly popular, with 83% approving of this measure in August 1990. Polls also demonstrated that Americans thought protecting global oil supplies was the main reason that U.S. troops were in the Gulf. Bush did receive bipartisan support for sending troops to the Gulf, although Republicans were more likely to back the deployment of troops and the use of offensive military force against Iraq. See Rosita Thomas, *American Public Opinion on the Iraq-Kuwait Crisis Until January 15* (CRS Report No. 91-109) (Washington D.C., Congressional Research Service, 1991), 1-3, 8-11, 17, 33.

³ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., December 5, 1990, 110.

⁴ George H.W. Bush, "The President's News Conference in Orlando, Florida," September 11, 1990, George Bush Presidential Library and Museum Public Papers, accessed November 12, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2381>

Alongside these public and private debates about how to liberate Kuwait was a difficult problem about how to deal with Saddam Hussein as a long-term threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East. Most policymakers and commentators agreed that it was not enough for the United States to allow a return to the status quo ante at the end of this crisis. Even if Saddam Hussein agreed to all the Security Council's demands, he would retain a massive military machine, advanced weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs, and vengeful intentions against his neighbors and the United States.

This problem led the United States to consider a host of goals that went beyond the Security Council mandate. A minority of commentators, mostly outside of the government, argued that the United States should directly seek the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and his regime. The Bush administration unanimously rejected this idea. Nevertheless, the White House believed that the United States needed to severely weaken Saddam during this crisis and impose a containment regime on him afterwards that would, among other things, ensure the destruction of his WMD programs. One question that generally went unanswered in the debate was whether the United States could stabilize the region and prevent Iraq from threatening its neighbors if Saddam Hussein remained in power.

Historians Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh call this question about how to deal with Saddam Hussein in the long run the "Saddam problem." They distinguish it from the Kuwait problem: the short-term question of how to eject Iraq from Kuwait and restore and maintain Kuwaiti sovereignty.⁵ Some solutions to the Kuwait problem, such as compelling Saddam to freely withdraw from Kuwait, would do little to address the Saddam problem. The United States would still need a policy after the Kuwait crisis to prevent future Iraqi aggression.

⁵ Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), xxxii.

The consensus assumption was that if the United States permitted the world's relationship to Iraq to return to pre-August 1990 normalcy, Saddam would ultimately rise again as a nuclear-armed power, rebuild his military, and again try to dominate the Gulf. At that point, he might be unstoppable. The United States would have to contain Saddam Hussein at the minimum and engineer his overthrow at the maximum in order to preclude this nightmare scenario.

Most accounts of the Gulf War that were published shortly after the conflict focus heavily on military planning, the formation of the coalition, the public debate over sanctions and war, and the war itself. They spend comparatively little time on the underlying question of how to deal with Saddam in the long term. This study highlights early thinking and planning for the Saddam problem because after the liberation of Kuwait this became the primary challenge facing U.S. policy makers in regard to Iraq for the remainder of the decade.⁶

During the Gulf Crisis, the debate between the minimalist and the maximalist approaches to the Saddam problem bubbled beneath the more immediate argument over how to liberate Kuwait. For the Kuwait problem the ends were clear; the only debate was over the means. The Saddam problem was about both means and ends. The maximalist approach, a minority view during the Gulf Crisis, believed that U.S. interests in the Gulf would never be safe without the removal of Saddam Hussein and the entire Baathist regime. Its advocates argued that the United States should seek this objective directly by declaring his ouster as a goal of the conflict, although few such commentators developed a strategy for bringing about regime change until after Desert Storm ended.

⁶ For examples of histories and autobiographies written shortly after the Gulf Crisis that focus on the Kuwait problem, see Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*; Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995); George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

This chapter argues that the minimalist approach to the Saddam problem held sway in American politics during the Gulf Crisis, including within the Bush administration. The Bush team welcomed Saddam's ouster, but they contended that the United States could still achieve its goals in the region by containing and enfeebling him. The indirect toppling of Saddam was acceptable to Bush, but only as a byproduct of sanctions and the use of force to liberate Kuwait. If, as the administration expected, the devastation inflicted by sanctions and war prompted disgruntled Iraqi generals to remove Saddam, the United States would welcome this development and try to get his hopefully more compliant successor to accept U.N. demands.

However, the Bush administration decided against directly pursuing regime change because it believed the United States might become bogged down in an occupation, the coalition might fracture, and the region would become even less stable. They also doubted that Saddam's removal would make the handling of postwar Iraq significantly easier. Thus, regime change remained a vague hope throughout this crisis, not a policy. Instead, the policy was to hit Saddam as hard as possible during Desert Storm and then organize a multilateral containment regime that would use economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and the threat of renewed military force to box in Iraq until Saddam or his successor fully conceded to the UN's demands.

Constructive Engagement: 1988 to August 1990

The United States supported Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War to prevent Iran from becoming the dominant power in the Persian Gulf. This policy became known as "the tilt" because it was never an overt alliance. U.S. assistance began in 1982 in response to major Iraqi setbacks in the conflict. Over the next six years the United States provided agricultural and Export-Import Bank credits, licensing for advanced dual-use technology, and military intelligence on Iranian forces.

Through Operation Staunch, starting in 1983, the United States sought to limit international arms sales to Iran even as U.S. allies like France and West Germany sold billions in arms to Iraq. The United States removed Iraq from the terrorist state sponsor list in 1983 and restored full diplomatic relations in 1984. Lastly, from 1987-1988, the United States deployed naval forces to the Gulf to protect Kuwaiti oil tankers from Iranian attacks. This move benefitted Iraq by protecting Kuwaiti shipping, a key source of revenue for Iraq, and providing a de facto American shield for Iraq to attack Iranian shipping.⁷

When the war ended in a bloody stalemate in August 1988, Iraq emerged as the preeminent military force in the Gulf and Iran had been drastically weakened. This situation raised a crucial new question for U.S. policy: Should the tilt to Iraq continue? Many in Congress and the media argued that the strategic rationale for supporting Iraq ceased with the end of the conflict. These critics of engagement pointed out that Iraq had not in fact stopped its support for terrorism after 1983 and that Saddam had become the new threat to stability in the Gulf. Moreover, outrage erupted after Iraqi forces killed thousands of Kurdish civilians with chemical weapons in the city of Halabja in 1988. Both houses of Congress, with significant bipartisan backing, passed legislation in the fall of 1988 to sever U.S. aid to Iraq and impose sanctions.⁸

By contrast, the Bush administration solidified the tilt under a policy it called constructive engagement. In October 1989, Bush signed a new policy directive called National Security Directive 26 (NSD-26). This paper concluded: "Normal relations between the United States and Iraq would serve our longer-term interests and promote stability in both the Gulf and

⁷ The best treatment of U.S. policy towards Iraq is Bruce Jentleson, *With Friends Like These: Reagan, Bush, and Saddam, 1982-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 42-67. See also Zachary Karabell, "Backfire: U.S. Policy Toward Iraq, 1988-August 2, 1990," *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 1 (Winter, 1995): 30-31.

⁸ Helen Dewar and Don Oberdorfer, "Senate Votes Sanctions Against Iraq," *Washington Post*, September 10, 1988; Robert Pear, "House Approves Sanctions Against Iraq," *New York Times*, September 28, 1990.

the Middle East. The United States Government should propose economic and political incentives for Iraq to moderate its behavior.”⁹ This policy aimed to bolster Iraq as a bulwark against Iranian and Soviet power in the region, expand trade ties in order to incentivize moderate behavior, and limit criticism of Iraq to avoid feeding the leadership’s sense of conspiracy. The Bush administration also assumed that Iraq was so exhausted and indebted from the Iran-Iraq War that it would focus on reconstruction, creating an opening for the United States to nudge Saddam towards restraint.¹⁰ NSD-26 did warn Iraq that the United States would respond with sanctions to the use of chemical or biological weapons or the pursuit of nuclear weapons.¹¹ However, in practice the policy would be much more carrot than stick, despite mounting evidence of Iraqi development of WMD and its abuse of U.S. export credit programs.¹²

Constructive engagement shaped U.S. policy toward Iraq from its inception to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. It also sparked a tense public debate on how to deal with Iraq. Critics in Congress and the press blasted the policy as both inhumane and unrealistic. Columnists like Jim Hoagland and William Safire as well as legislators as varied as Claiborne Pell (D-RI) and Jesse Helms (R-NC) accused Iraq of committing genocide against the Kurds and continuing to build WMD.¹³ Congressional opposition to this policy, however, was inconsistent and often

⁹ “National Security Directive 26,” October 2, 1989, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum Public Papers, 2, accessed October 21, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/nsd/nsd26.pdf>.

¹⁰ Jentleson, *With Friends Like These*, 97.

¹¹ “NSD 26,” Bush Public Papers, 2.

¹² Joseph Stieb, “U.S. Financial Aid for Iraq Under the Engagement Policy, 1988-1990,” *International History Review*, published online September 21, 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07075332.2018.1504226>

¹³ Jim Hoagland, “Iraq is the One Place Where Sanctions Might Work,” *Washington Post*, September 15, 1988, A25; Julie Johnson, “U.S. Asserts Iraq Used Poison Gas against the Kurds,” by Julie Johnson, September 9, 1988, A1; Editorial, “Too Tough on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 1988, A20. William Safire: “Free the Kurds,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1989, A27; Editorial, “Hardly a Peep on Poison Gas,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1988, A26.

hypocritical. Efforts to sanction Iraq frequently died because of procedural and partisan squabbles. Furthermore, lawmakers from agrarian states whose constituencies benefitted from agricultural credits for Iraq either opposed or watered-down bills that punished Iraq.¹⁴

Doubts about constructive engagement accelerated in the spring of 1990 in response to a series of troubling Iraqi actions that Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly labeled the “spring of bad behavior.”¹⁵ In March, the Iraqi government executed British journalist Farzad Bazoft on false charges of espionage. Later that month, British and American agents halted the export of specialized equipment for the production of nuclear weapons and a “supergun” that Iraq was attempting to import. On April 2, Saddam threatened to strike Israel with chemical weapons if it launched a pre-emptive attack on Iraqi weapons facilities, saying “we will make fire eat half of Israel if it tries to do anything against Iraq.”¹⁶ Finally, the State Department issued several reports in the spring of 1990 determining that Iraq’s human rights practices had not improved since the end of the Iran-Iraq War.¹⁷ Critics of constructive engagement in Congress and the media responded to this string of provocations by labeling Bush’s policy as appeasement, calling for sanctions, and challenging the policy’s core assumption that United States could push Saddam towards moderation.¹⁸

¹⁴ Pamela Fessler, “Congress’ Record on Saddam: Decade of Talk, Not Action,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly*, (April 27, 1991): 1068-76.

¹⁵ Don Oberdorfer, “Missed Signals in the Middle East,” *Washington Post*, March 17, 1991.

¹⁶ Jeff Gerth, “Atom Bomb Parts Seized in Britain En Route to Iraq,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1990, A1. Alan Cowell, “Iraq Chief, Boasting of Poison Gas, Warns of Disaster if Israelis Strike,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1990, A1; Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, 34.

¹⁷ Jentleson, *With Friends Like These*, 145.

¹⁸ William Safire, “Country of Concern,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1990, A19; Jim Hoagland, “Soft on Saddam,” *Washington Post*, April 10, 1990, A23.

Internally, the Bush administration re-examined constructive engagement and made some minor adjustments in the spring of 1990. On April 10, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and his assistant Richard Haass wrote a memo to Bush arguing that although the policy had not pushed Iraq toward moderation thus far, the United States had little choice but to continue this approach. Cutting off economic links would barely hurt the Iraqi economy, since other states would simply jump in to fill those gaps. In addition, punishing Iraq might backfire by feeding Saddam's sense of an American-led conspiracy against him. Haass and Scowcroft concluded that the United States needed Iraqi cooperation in several areas and that pushing forward with the same policy was the only viable option.¹⁹

At the State Department, James Baker, Policy Planning Director Dennis Ross, and Under Secretary of State Robert Kimmitt concluded in an April 3 meeting that the engagement policy was failing and that the United States needed to shift to punishing Iraqi misbehavior. They instructed April Glaspie, the ambassador to Iraq, to instruct the Iraqi leadership that continuing these actions and threats would put Iraq "on a collision course" with the United States and compel them the withdrawal of U.S. aid. In late May, the United States suspended agricultural credits for Iraq, but the administration explained this move as a response to allegations of Iraqi misuse of the credits instead of reprimand for foreign policy misbehavior.²⁰

Despite these mild alterations to constructive engagement, in public the administration continued to defend the policy in the spring and early summer of 1990. It opposed Congressional efforts to sanction Iraq, which accelerated as Saddam threatened his neighbors. John Kelly

¹⁹ Haass' official position was Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs for the NSC. Memorandum, Brent Scowcroft to George H.W. Bush, April 10, 1990, OA/ID CF00209-011, National Security Council, Peter Rodman Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 2-3.

²⁰ James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 268-269; Telegram, James Baker to U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, April 12, 1990, OA/ID 45486-001, White House Counsel's Office, George Bush Presidential Library.

appeared before several Congressional hearings to defend the administration's policy. While he admitted that Iraq's actions were troubling, he argued that sanctions would have little impact because no allies would join the effort, which meant that sanctions would only hurt U.S. exporters. In line with the thinking of NSD-26, he added, "Sanctions would not improve our ability to exercise a restraining influence on Iraqi actions."²¹ Secretary Baker likewise told a Congressional committee that sanctions were "a bit premature" that U.S. allies in the Middle East continued to support a policy of flexibility toward Iraq.²²

The Bush administration's policy may have been shifting slowly toward a tougher line on Iraq, but it remained tethered to the assumptions of constructive engagement when Iraq escalated its threats against its neighbors in the summer of 1990. On July 15, Iraqi troops started to deploy on the border with Kuwait. The next day Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi foreign minister, accused Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of intentionally overproducing oil in order to cripple the Iraqi economy. He demanded the raising of oil prices, a moratorium on Iraq's massive wartime loans, and the creation of a fund through which the Gulf states would repay Iraq for defending them against Iran. Iraqi threats and troop deployments continued for the next two weeks.²³

Critics of the administration pointed to this escalation as evidence for the failure of engagement. The House and Senate passed bills on July 27 to cut off economic aid to Iraq, but the administration continued to oppose these efforts.²⁴ Republican Senator Alphonse D'Amato

²¹ Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *United States-Iraqi Relations*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., April 26, 1990, 2-4; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *United States Policy Toward Iraq: Human Rights, Weapons Proliferation, and International Law*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., June 15, 1990, 5-9.

²² Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 270.

²³ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, 47-50.

²⁴ Guy Gugliotta, "Trade Sanctions Voted by Senate Against Iraq," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1990, A15.

(R-NY) cried, “We’ve waited for Hussein to take a more humane course and it has not been done. He is a butcher, a torturer, a manipulator.”²⁵ Many former opponents of severing aid to Iraq now voted to punish Saddam, including Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) who said that despite her reservations about hurting food exporters, “there comes a time when I think we have to stand up and be counted.”²⁶ Meanwhile, the Bush administration’s reaction to these threats was concerned but cautious. They generally assumed that Iraq was blustering in order to exact concessions from Kuwait but did not want a conflict because of its exhaustion from the Iran-Iraq War.²⁷ Saudi Arabia and Egypt encouraged this view and asked the United States to let them handle Saddam.

Critics of Bush’s handling of pre-invasion diplomacy later condemned Ambassador Glaspie for her conciliation of Saddam in a meeting on July 25, but she was following a policy that required officials to pepper nebulous warnings with reassurances that the United States still sought Iraqi friendship. For example, a cable from Bush to the Iraqi government on July 28th read: “We believe that differences are best resolved by peaceful means and not by threats involving military force or conflict. My administration continues to desire better relations with Iraq.”²⁸ U.S. messages repeatedly stated that the United States had no defense treaties with Kuwait or positions on Iraq-Kuwait border disputes.²⁹ A mere two days before the invasion, John

²⁵ Steven Holmes, “Congress Backs Curbs Against Iraq,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1990, A5.

²⁶ *Cong. Rec.*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., July 27, 1990, 19806.

²⁷ Memorandum, Richard Haass to Brent Scowcroft, July 25, 1990, OA/ID CF01937, National Security Council, Richard Haass Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library; Telegram, April Glaspie to James Baker, July 18, 1990, OA/ID 10937-003, National Security Council, Richard Haass Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library.

²⁸ David Hoffman and Helen Dewar, "State Department, Panel, Spar Over Envoy," *Washington Post*, July 13, 1991, A1, 14.

²⁹ Janice Gross Stein, “Deterrence and Compellence in the Gulf, 1990-91: A Failed or Impossible Task?” *International Security* 17, no. 2, (October 1992): 150-152

Kelly reiterated the administration's desire for good relations with Iraq while refusing to speculate on what the United States would do if Iraq invaded Kuwait.³⁰ Although the administration was starting to question constructive engagement, their restrained, ambiguous response to Saddam's threats still flowed from that policy and prevented the United States from deterring Iraq more effectively.

Responding to the Invasion of Kuwait, August-November 1990

The Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait in August 1990 shattered every assumption underpinning constructive engagement: that Iraq was too exhausted from the war with Iran to try to dominate the Persian Gulf; that Western and conservative Arab support for his war effort had mellowed Saddam in the 1980s; and that Saddam could be positively incentivized to align with U.S. policies. This paradigm shift initially led to a policy of containing and deterring Iraq but quickly escalated to the use of force to eject it from Kuwait.

Bush immediately started building an international coalition to condemn the invasion, stop further Iraqi aggression, and create a legal basis for action against Iraq. This effort led to the passing of a number of Security Council resolutions in the early fall that established the U.N.'s demands for Iraq and the tools to enforce them. Resolution 660 on August 2 called for Iraq to "immediately and unconditionally" withdraw its forces from Kuwait and allow the restoration of the Kuwaiti government. Four days later, Resolution 661 froze Iraqi assets and imposed economic sanctions on Iraq, with exceptions for food and medicine.³¹

³⁰ Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Developments in the Middle East: July 1990*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., July 31, 1990, 2, 14.

³¹ Security Council Resolutions found in *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Christopher Cerf and Micah Sifry (New York: Times Books, 1991), 137-143.

The United States also forged a military and political response to the invasion, starting with the deployment on August 8 of naval, air, and ground forces to the Gulf to protect Saudi Arabia from Iraqi forces menacing their border. In a speech announcing the deployment, Bush outlined the principles that would guide U.S. policy in the Gulf. He called for the “immediate, unconditional, and complete withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait” and the restoration of the Kuwait government. He committed the United States, “as has been the case with every President from President Roosevelt to President Reagan,” to the “security and stability of the Gulf.” He framed the deployment of U.S. forces as a measure to defend Saudi Arabia and enforce the sanctions but emphasized that the United States would not settle for less than the full implementation of the U.N. demands.³²

Although Bush received broad support for his post-invasion policy, both parties seized upon the invasion itself to criticize constructive engagement. They claimed that Bush’s “appeasement” merely convinced Saddam he could get away with seizing Kuwait.³³ Pell and Helms claimed that the United States might have stopped Saddam by imposing sanctions on Iraq prior to the invasion.³⁴ The fact that Bush was now doing what these critics had wanted before the invasion limited their criticism, as did their basic agreement with the administration’s new strategy.³⁵ The time for hashing out these battles would come after the war as most Democrats

³² George H.W. Bush, “Address to the Nation Announcing the Deployment of United States Armed Forces to Saudi Arabia,” August 8, 1990, George Bush Presidential Library and Museum Public Papers, accessed November 12, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2147>

³³ See statements by Berman and Lantos, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Sanctions Against Iraq*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., August 1-2, 1990, 20, 42; HCFA August 1-2, 1990, John Goshko and Jeffrey Smith, “State Dept. Assailed on Iraq Policy: Democrats Cite Failure to Avert Invasion,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 1990, A1.

³⁴ See statements by Claiborne Pell and Jesse Helms, *Cong. Rec.*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., August 2, 1990, 21798-21799.

³⁵ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 389-90. Also see Berman statement, *Cong. Rec.* 101st Cong., 2nd sess., August 2, 1990, 21964.

during Desert Shield wanted to avoid criticizing the President too harshly as the country stood on the brink of war. Nonetheless, after the war, anger and recrimination about engagement and the failure to stop Saddam from invading Kuwait would tarnish the implementation of containment and delegitimize any policy that offered positive incentives to Iraq.

By the end of August, Bush had established the basic policy of using sanctions and diplomatic isolation to coerce Saddam into leaving Kuwait. In making the case for action, he identified several core interests and values at stake. The importance of the free flow of oil from the region featured prominently in his justification for opposing Saddam. Maintaining access to the energy resources of the Gulf had been a declared policy goal since the Second World War. By seizing Kuwait, Saddam gained control of about one-fifth of global oil reserves, and he could compel the Gulf States to obey his commands on oil prices.³⁶ Defense Secretary Richard Cheney warned that this situation “gave him a strangle hold on our economy and on that of most of the other nations of the world as well.”³⁷ A surge in oil prices could lead to a global recession that might threaten recent trends towards democracy in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Moreover, Saddam would use these gains to feed his military machine and aggressive ambitions.

Another major part of Bush’s argument for action was the possibility of bolstering collective security, international law, and the United Nations as the primary mechanisms for stopping aggression in the post-Cold War world. Bush labeled this vision the “new world order,” which he defined as the “community of nations” cooperating “to condemn and repel lawless

³⁶ Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America’s Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 46.

³⁷ Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region: U.S. Policy Options and Implications*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., September 11, 1990, 11.

aggression.”³⁸ To the White House, the world in 1990 was in “a critical juncture” between the Cold War and some as yet undetermined order. James Baker called the Gulf Crisis “a political test of how the post-Cold War world will work.”³⁹ In Bush’s words, Saddam had launched “a ruthless assault on the very essence of international order and civilized ideals.”⁴⁰ Allowing Saddam to keep Kuwait would signal that the international community was willing to accept aggression and the eradication of a U.N. member, encouraging more criminality around the world. If, however, the United States and its allies thwarted Saddam, it could be the first step in creating a more peaceful, lawful, and cooperative epoch in international politics.

The USSR’s support for early U.S. actions against Iraq further raised the administration’s hopes of bolstering collective security in the post-Cold War world. The Cold War rivalry often had prevented the Security Council from enforcing international law. But the Cold War had faded by the time Saddam invaded Kuwait, which the Soviets promptly denounced, accusing their former clients of acting like “feudal lords.”⁴¹ If the United States and USSR could demonstrate cooperation in foiling Iraq, Bush believed this would open new options for the cooperative management of international affairs. As he told Gorbachev in early September: “I want to go to the American people tomorrow night to close the book on the Cold War and offer them the vision of this new world order in which we will cooperate.”⁴²

³⁸ George H.W. Bush, “Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 29, 1991, The American Presidency Project, accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=19253>.

³⁹ House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., September 4, 1990, 7.

⁴⁰ George H.W. Bush, “Remarks at the Annual Conference of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Baltimore, Maryland,” August 20, 1990, George Bush Presidential Library and Museum Public Papers, accessed November 14, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2171>.

⁴¹ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, 78-79.

⁴² George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 364; Minutes, Meeting of George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, September 9, 1990, OA/ID CF 01478-021, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 2.

The Bush administration believed the broad goal of setting precedents for a new world order made it vital to maintain multilateral consensus throughout the crisis. In pragmatic terms, the United States needed wide participation in the embargo from Iraq's neighbors and major trading partners to give it any teeth. Allied forces needed bases in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and elsewhere. In addition, the participation of many Arab states in the coalition undermined Saddam's rhetoric that this was a Western crusade against Arabs or Muslims. Bush also aimed to set a precedent for cooperative responses to aggression in which coalitions would build legal justification for action at the United Nations and use force only after pursuing non-violent solutions. Getting Iraq out of Kuwait by any means was not adequate. The United States had to achieve this goal in a way that demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperative security. One crucial element of this effort to create a "model for the use of force" was that Saddam must gain nothing from his crimes: no concessions, no incentives, no deals.⁴³ Only a full denial of any gains for Saddam would firmly establish the principle that aggression does not pay. The administration believed that if it could hold the coalition together in demanding the aggressor's full compliance with the U.N. resolutions, they would set a powerful precedent that would deter future conquerors and offer a model for responding to aggression.

The fall of 1990 brought a whirlwind of diplomatic, political, and military action that inhibited long-term thinking in the Bush administration about how to address Saddam Hussein as a threat to stability in the Middle East beyond the Kuwait crisis. Key officials, including U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Thomas Pickering and CIA Director William Webster, identified an important dilemma in the stated policy: If sanctions and military pressure convinced Saddam to leave Kuwait voluntarily, he would escape with his military machine and WMD programs intact.

⁴³ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 491.

The Kuwait problem would be solved for the moment, but the United States would have done little to solve the Saddam problem. He would retain his ability, and most likely his intention, to bully his neighbors once again. On August 2, Pickering argued that the U.S. needed “to find a broader basis to ensure that Iraq does not return to the status quo ante in a position where its considerable military muscle can be a source of intimidation and threat to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, or other states in the region.”⁴⁴ In October, Webster warned that the region would not be secure unless Saddam was overthrown, “some countervailing force” in the area contained him, or his WMD programs and military strength were decimated.⁴⁵

The Bush administration consequently aimed to weaken Saddam during this crisis and/or impose a set of strictures on him after the crisis to prevent him from keeping or reconstituting his military strength. In effect, from the beginning the United States had committed itself to a new, higher standard of success, one that the Security Council had not endorsed nor had the administration publicly stated as a goal. In addition to Pickering and Webster, both of whom argued from this position as early as August 1990, Richard Haass, also in August, argued that: “it is not clear that an outcome that leaves Saddam in power and Iraq’s industrial and war-making capability intact constitutes a viable much less optimal outcome from our perspective.” Haass noted that if the situation in the Gulf returned to the status quo ante, Saddam would return to aggression in a few years, but this time he would have nuclear and biological weapons. In this

⁴⁴ Telegram, Timothy Pickering to James Baker, August 2, 1990, OA/ID CP 01478-028, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 3.

⁴⁵ Walter Mossberg and Andy Pasztor, “CIA Director Says Gulf Can’t Be Secure as Long as Saddam Hussein Rules,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 1990, A16.

case, coping with Saddam 2.0 would require at the minimum a full containment strategy and a permanent military presence in the region.⁴⁶

Haass' reasoning suggests that some kind of containment strategy was already percolating through the administration's thinking as it dealt with the Gulf Crisis. Bush and his top policy advisors came into the crisis believing that the containment of the Soviet Union had been "extraordinarily successful." A February 1989 National Security Review signed by Bush declared: "Containment is being vindicated as the peoples of the world reject the outmoded dogma of Marxism-Leninism in a search for prosperity and freedom."⁴⁷

Haass and other top officials envisioned a basic containment strategy as requiring a peacekeeping force on the border, a U.S. naval presence, the repositioning of military equipment, regular exercises in the region, the elimination of Iraq's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs, and "covert efforts designed to keep the regime in Baghdad on the defensive."⁴⁸ Bush suggested this kind of post-crisis structure to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on October 18, saying: "we are talking about containing Iraq."⁴⁹ The goal was to put Saddam "in a box," although it remained unspecified whether he would stay in the box indefinitely. The Bush administration believed that the new factors in the post-Cold War world would make multilateral containment feasible. They particularly pointed to the new confluence

⁴⁶ Working Paper, "The Gulf Crisis: Thoughts, Scenarios, Opinions," Richard Haass, August 19, 1990, OA/ID CF00946, National Security Files, Subject Files, Robert Gates Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 1-3.

⁴⁷ Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 277.

⁴⁸ Memorandum, Richard Haass to Brent Scowcroft, August 27, 1990, OA/ID CP 00946, National Security Council, Subject Files, Robert Gates Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 3.

⁴⁹ Talking Points, "Themes for Call to PM Thatcher," October 18, 1990, OA/ID CF 01584-031, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 2. Note: This document was sent to Margaret Thatcher in advance of their October 18 phone conversation.

of interests between the United States and the USSR in the Middle East and the international community's recognition of Iraq as a threat to the global economy.⁵⁰

In an odd twist, although forcible regime change was deemed unnecessary, the need for a future containment strategy led many U.S. officials to see war as preferable to a diplomatic solution. In Haass' words, a punishing war "would greatly ease the post-war challenge of containing Iraq and maintaining security in the Gulf" by allowing the United States to degrade Saddam's military and WMD programs.⁵¹ Scowcroft concurred, saying that if the United States had to use force to eject Saddam from Kuwait it should "reduce the Iraqi military as much as possible" in order to "reduce the threat Saddam posed to his neighbors."⁵² The administration anticipated that many European and Arab allies might see this policy as "moving the goalpost" on Iraq, but they nevertheless believed they had to pursue this goal while preserving the sanctioning coalition after the crisis, knowing that any unilateral containment regime would fail.

This exploration of the Saddam problem led the Bush administration to consider a new question: Would the Middle East ever be stable as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power? The administration was usually pessimistic on this question, but they did not definitively decide if Saddam had to be removed for the United States to achieve its objectives beyond the current crisis.⁵³ There were hints that top U.S. officials thought that United States might not be able to achieve its goals while Saddam was still around. In an August 4 NSC meeting, Baker said "Our

⁵⁰ Andrew Rosenthal, "Neutralizing Iraq's Threat: For Bush, Toppling Hussein Isn't Required," *New York Times*, August 29, 1990, A1.

⁵¹ Memorandum, Richard Haass to Brent Scowcroft, August 27, 1990, 4.

⁵² Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 383.

⁵³ Gideon Rose makes a similar case in his book *How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle: A History of American Intervention from World War I to Afghanistan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 202.

strategy is three-fold: to keep Saddam out, to make him a pariah, and to topple him through sanctions and covert actions.” In an August 6 NSC meeting, Bush said “all will not be tranquil until Saddam Hussein is history.”⁵⁴ The NSC agreed with this long-term goal but stated that getting Saddam out of Kuwait was the first priority.⁵⁵

The Bush administration believed the removal of Saddam Hussein would probably make Iraq easier to control after the crisis but never identified regime change as a policy goal. They framed it as a hope rather than an objective even though they expected that at some point Saddam would have to be removed for the region to return to stability. For example, when Senator Al Gore asked Cheney if the removal of Saddam was a U.S. goal, Cheney said no but added “I think it would be fair to say, Senator, we probably would not have any objection were that to occur.”⁵⁶ As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell said after the war: “We hoped that Saddam would not survive the coming fury. But his elimination was not a stated objective. What we hoped for, frankly, in a postwar Gulf region was an Iraq still standing, with Saddam overthrown.”⁵⁷ Instead of regime change, the administration focused on enforcing the Security Council resolutions and weakening Iraqi military capabilities in the process. Following this logic, Ambassador Pickering reasoned in the fall of 1990: “the continuation of Saddam as

⁵⁴ Minutes of NSC Meeting on Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait, August 6, 1990, OA/ID 01478-030, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library.

⁵⁵ Minutes of NSC Meeting on Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, August 4, 1990, OA/ID 01478-029, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library.

⁵⁶ See Cheney and Baker testimonies in Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region*, September 11, 1990, 13; House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf*, September 4, 1990, 13.

⁵⁷ Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 363.

president should not be a major issue for us...it is his military strength, power, and his economic potential that are concerning to us, not his personality (others might be worse).”⁵⁸

The administration decided early in the crisis that the United States would not directly pursue regime change as a policy goal. These and other statements, however, do show that the United States would have welcomed the toppling of Saddam as byproduct of the campaign to oust him from Kuwait. The NSC Deputies Committee, which reviewed the regime change option in the fall of 1990, also suggested that the United States might be able to create the conditions in which regime change could happen.⁵⁹ A military coup would be the main mechanism for regime change. They reasoned that if the coalition pounded Iraqi forces, destroyed key pillars of the regime like the Republican Guard, and crippled the Iraqi communications system that these actions, combined with sanctions, might prompt top generals to remove Saddam. Robert Gates described this approach as such: “We wanted to create circumstances that would encourage the Iraqi military to take Saddam out.”⁶⁰ A more pragmatic successor might concede to U.N. demands in order to avoid further destruction and to shore up his domestic position. The administration also developed a covert component to the coup option. Immediately after the invasion of Kuwait, Bush ordered the CIA to look for sources of discontent with Saddam that could be cultivated. The administration was pessimistic about locating a viable internal resistance in a totalitarian state like Iraq, but they still wanted to make preliminary contacts.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 106.

⁵⁹ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 383-384.

⁶⁰ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 192.

⁶¹ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 237, 282. It should be noted that Woodward does not cite a source for these claims about covert action.

The plans for the U.S. ground and air campaigns against Iraq offered some insight into the Bush administration's early desire to use this crisis to weaken Saddam Hussein in the long run. On August 8, 1990, CENTCOM Commander Norman Schwarzkopf ordered the air staff at CENTCOM to start developing a strategic air plan that would go beyond tactical air support and strike directly at the Iraqi state.⁶² The responsibility for this planning fell to Colonel John Warden and his team, known as Checkmate. Warden was an air power theorist who believed the primary purpose of air power should not be tactical support for ground operations but the destruction of a state's ability to absorb information, issue orders, and resupply its forces, an end point they called "strategic paralysis."⁶³ The Checkmate plan for the air assault on Iraq, titled Instant Thunder, sought to cut off Iraqi forces in Kuwaiti theater of operations (KTO), which included Kuwait and Southern Iraq, from the command and control system in Baghdad in order to facilitate their destruction or force their surrender. Rather than just bombing Iraqi units in the KTO, the Checkmate team aimed to strike a host of targets in Iraq that would blind the state and prevent it from resupplying its forces: command and communications facilities, supply lines to Iraqi forces, WMD and missile production sites, the electricity grid, the civilian telephone and water systems, oil production sites, and more symbolic targets like Saddam's palaces.⁶⁴

⁶² John Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2007), 146-147.

⁶³ Warden was one of several air power theorists who developed this doctrine in the 1980's and 1990's. A particularly important concept in Warden's thinking was the Five Rings Model, which viewed a modern state as five concentric rings with power and direction emanating from the inside outwards. The innermost ring was the leadership, then essential industries, infrastructure and transportation, the population, and lastly military forces in the field. Warden sought to attack the innermost rings first, paralyzing and blinding the state while cutting off military forces from information, direction, and supplies. For an examination of the development of this doctrine and its application in the Gulf Crisis, see Olsen, *Renaissance of American Air Power*, 108-112; Edward Mann, *Thunder and Lightning: Desert Storm and the Airpower Debates* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1995), 35-42; Richard Reynolds, *Heart of the Storm: The Genesis of the Air Campaign Against Iraq* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1995), 16-19.

⁶⁴ Norman Friedman, *Desert Victory: The War for Kuwait* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1992), 180-183.

Warden and his team understood, with little explicit direction from military or civilian authorities, that Bush's main goal was to force Iraqi troops out of Kuwait but that in the longer term it also wanted to weaken Iraq as a threat to regional stability.⁶⁵ They therefore oriented the bombing campaign around these objectives. Their primary goal in extending the bombing beyond the KTO was to facilitate the liberation of Kuwait, but the campaign would also reduce Iraqi forces, industrial capacity, and WMD production in order to diminish the threat Saddam would pose to his neighbors after the crisis.⁶⁶

Moreover, CENTCOM treated Saddam himself as a legitimate target for air strikes because he was the core of the Iraqi command and control system.⁶⁷ Many in the Air Force, including Chief of CENTCOM Air Operations Buster Glosson, believed that the planned air campaign against Iraq could decapitate the regime or provoke a coup.⁶⁸ Indeed, the Gulf War Air Power Survey later stated: "Despite somewhat ambiguous policy guidance, the chief architects of the air campaign targeted Saddam Hussein and planned air operations meant to create conditions conducive to his overthrow."⁶⁹ Although the civilians in the Bush administration played a

⁶⁵ Olsen, *Renaissance of American Air Power*, 148.

⁶⁶ Olsen, *Renaissance of American Air Power*, 149-151. It is important to note that the air campaign against Iraq in Desert Storm was a product both of political guidance and the strategic culture of strategic air power theorists. These theorists had developed their doctrine in response to what they viewed as the piecemeal, ineffective use of air power during the Vietnam War, particularly the failure to attack the North Vietnamese state. It should also be noted that the actual air campaign against Iraq featured much more attention to tactical air support than Warden's original concept. For background on debates about air power following Vietnam, see Olsen, *Renaissance of American Air Power*, 64-74, 101-105.

⁶⁷ Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 57.

⁶⁸ Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995), 78-80, 99; Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 180-183.

⁶⁹ Eliot Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, vol. 1, *Planning and Command and Control* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993) 97-98.

minimal role in the air plan's formation, the expansive direction it took reflected their desire to strike a major strategic blow against Saddam that might engender his overthrow.

The final version of the ground campaign plan emerged in December 1990 under the guidance of CENTCOM Commander Norman Schwarzkopf. The ground plan treated the Republican Guard as the Iraqi strategic center of gravity. Destroying as much of the Guard as possible would ensure the Kuwait's liberation and cripple one of the Baathist regime's key tools for maintaining internal security and projecting power in the region.⁷⁰ The ground assault would start with the First and Second Marine Divisions, along with some British units, attacking directly into Kuwait from Saudi Arabia as other Marine elements launched a feint towards an amphibious landing along the Kuwaiti coastline. These initial moves would hopefully draw Republican Guard units in Southern Iraq into Kuwait to meet these advances, fixing them in place for a flanking attack. The coup de grace would come with a massive left hook of the U.S. VIIth and XVIIIth Corps, which would enter the Iraqi desert to the west of Kuwait, move east while sweeping Iraqi units towards the KTO, and ultimately trap and annihilate the Republican Guard divisions already engaged with Marine forces in Kuwait.⁷¹

Although the Bush administration was thinking about how to weaken or indirectly topple Saddam in the long run, they tried to minimize open discussion of these secondary goals. They wanted to avoid scaring the public, the Democrats, and the international coalition into thinking the administration planned to expand U.S. objectives beyond those of the Security Council resolutions. In the fall of 1990, Bush had not convinced the American people, Congress, or the coalition that a war to liberate Kuwait was necessary, much less a war to cripple Saddam

⁷⁰ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 298-299.

⁷¹ Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 190-191.

Hussein. The sanctions-based strategy was popular among Democrats and Republicans, although Democratic leaders like Sam Nunn (D-GA) and George Mitchell (D-ME) warned Bush that they opposed offensive military action for the time being.⁷²

General Michael Dugan, the Air Force Chief of Staff, found out the hard way that Bush would not tolerate open advocacy of expanding the coalition's objectives. In early September, Dugan publicly advocated directly targeting Saddam and his personal entourage in order to decapitate the regime and force an Iraqi surrender. Although these comments did not stray far from Instant Thunder's objectives, the Bush administration was outraged that Dugan made these comments without permission. They dreaded that he would signal that the United States was pursuing a more expansive set of goals. On September 18th, Cheney fired Dugan, and Scowcroft told reporters that Dugan "does not speak for the administration."⁷³

Despite these efforts at controlling the message, as the fall of 1990 dragged on, the Bush administration could not avoid addressing the longer-term problem of Iraq as a threat to regional security. When pressed by Congressman Stephen Solarz (D-MA) in a September hearing, Baker stated that any settlement of the crisis had to address Iraq's "capacity for future aggression."⁷⁴ Cheney also told Congress that the removal of Iraq's nascent nuclear capability was a longstanding U.S. policy goal.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the Bush administration concluded that talk of the broader goals inherent in the Saddam problem jeopardized the greater priority of maintaining an effective international coalition that could resolve the Kuwait problem.⁷⁶

⁷² Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 389.

⁷³ Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 100-101.

⁷⁴ Cheney, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Crisis in the Persian Gulf, September 4, 1990, 8.

⁷⁵ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, 219-220.

⁷⁶ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 298-99.

By the late fall of 1990, the basic structure of U.S. policy on the Saddam problem had been established. If Saddam relented without violence, the United States would install a containment regime to ensure that he could not rebuild his conventional and unconventional arsenals. If war became necessary to oust him from Kuwait, the United States would strike hard at Iraqi forces and WMD programs in order to force him out of Kuwait and weaken him in the long run. If sanctions and/or war led to his overthrow, the Bush administration would welcome this outcome, but they did not see it as necessary for achieving their short or long-term goals.

The Debate Heats Up: November 1990-January 1991

By late October 1990, the Bush administration had started to doubt that sanctions alone would compel Saddam to leave Kuwait. President Bush held a Cabinet meeting on October 30th to decide whether to stay with the sanctions-based policy or start building an offensive military option. The Cabinet noted that sanctions had been in place for almost three months and appeared to be having little effect on Saddam's decision-making despite inflicting significant economic damage. The CIA had reported in late September that sanctions would not force Iraq from Kuwait nor cause the shutdown of vital industries "in the short or medium term."⁷⁷ Most of the Cabinet agreed that sanctions might force Saddam's hand eventually, but not within an acceptable time frame. The United States could not sustain hundreds of thousands of troops in the desert indefinitely, and the best time period for offensive ground operations would end around March of 1991 when the heat started to increase.⁷⁸ The political climate in the Middle East posed an equally difficult problem. Recent fighting between Israelis and Palestinians

⁷⁷ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, 196.

⁷⁸ Brent Scowcroft's Notes, Meeting on the Gulf, October 30, 1990, OA/ID CF 01584-031, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 1-2; Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 394.

opened the possibility that Saddam might use this crisis to divide the coalition. The haj was set to begin in the spring, and the mere presence of U.S. troops posed political dangers for Saudi Arabia.⁷⁹ All of these factors militated against a strategy of sanctions and attrition.

One noteworthy skeptic of the push away from sanctions was Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Powell was a combat veteran of the Vietnam War and a believer in using force only as a last resort and only in defense of precisely defined national interests. He was not opposed to the use of force against Iraq, but he feared that Bush might not be hearing the full case for sticking with sanctions from advisors like Cheney and Scowcroft, who had expressed their skepticism of this route early in the crisis. Powell later explained: “My thinking was that it would be great if sanctions would do the job because then we would avoid a war with unknown consequences and therefore we should give sanctions as much of a ride as was politically possible.”⁸⁰ State Department personnel remembered Powell as “a very reluctant warrior” who advocated the sanctions strategy to Bush and other top civilian officials.⁸¹ Powell told Bush in late September, “There is a case here for the containment or strangulation policy...It may take a year, it may take two years, but it will work some day.”⁸² In October, Powell told Britain’s air chief marshal that he would be willing to wait twelve to fifteen months for sanctions

⁷⁹ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 234.

⁸⁰ Colin Powell, interview by Frontline, PBS, 1995, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/powell/1.html>; Woodward, *The Commanders*, 38.

⁸¹ Dennis Ross, interview by Andrew Carpendale, February 9, 1994, Box 173, Folder 8, MC 197, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, 12; Robert Zoellick, interview by Andrew Carpendale, July 27, 1993, Box 173, Folder 8, MC 197, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, 12.

⁸² Woodward, *The Commanders*, 41-42, 300-303. In his memoir, Powell contested Woodward’s portrayal of his position on sanctions, saying that he did not advocate either route but “simply believed that both options had to be considered fully and fairly.” This self-portrayal reflects a pattern in Powell’s career as a policy advisor in which he tries to make sure all options receive fair consideration without putting himself clearly behind one position or another. See Powell, *My American Journey*, 467.

to work.⁸³ Bush, Cheney, and Scowcroft all disagreed, saying that there were too many risks in waiting that long. Once Bush decided to augment troop numbers in Saudi Arabia in late October, Powell fell in line behind this approach.

The Cabinet in late October agreed to pursue a new Security Council resolution that would authorize the use of all necessary means to force Saddam out of Kuwait by a certain date. They also decided to double the number of soldiers in the region to enable an offensive to liberate Kuwait. They hoped that the creation of a viable offensive force would convince Saddam of the coalition's resolve and get him to back down.⁸⁴ If he did not yield, the United States would have the military strength in place to force him out. On November 8, Bush gave a speech announcing the addition of another 200,000 troops to the Desert Shield force "to ensure that the coalition has an adequate offensive military option."⁸⁵

The administration then went to the United Nations to acquire a new resolution that would authorize the use of force against Iraq. The result was Resolution 678, passed on November 29, 1990. This resolution noted that Iraq had refused to comply with the Security Council's previous demands and offered Iraq "one final opportunity" to do so. If by January 15 1991, Iraq did not begin the full implementation of these demands, the coalition would be authorized to use "all necessary means" to force Iraq from Kuwait. This resolution also called for the restoration of "international peace and security" in the region, a general enough goal to justify the broader goal of weakening of Iraq through military action.⁸⁶

⁸³ Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 130-131.

⁸⁴ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 302.

⁸⁵ Cerf and Sifry, *The Gulf War Reader*, 228-229.

⁸⁶ Cerf and Sifry, *The Gulf War Reader*, 155-156.

In late 1990 and early 1991, administration officials accelerated a campaign to convince Congress and the public that the United States could not wait indefinitely for sanctions to work and had to use force if Saddam did not relent. They sought Congressional authorization for the use of force before the January 15 deadline. James Baker told a Congressional hearing that sanctions were not having the desired political effect: “so far, all available evidence suggest they have had little, if any, effect on his inclination to withdraw from Kuwait.”⁸⁷ Cheney and Webster noted that Saddam could endure the sanctions for years by directing resources to key power bases like the Sunni population and the military while starving the rest of the population.⁸⁸ Adding to this urgency was the sense that, as the world waited for sanctions, Iraq was dismantling the nation of Kuwait to the point where there might be no country left to save.

The Bush administration also argued that waiting for sanctions to work posed great risks to the coalition’s unity. They emphasized that sanctions hurt countries like Jordan, Turkey, and Eastern European nations that relied on trade with Iraq. The longer the sanctions regime lasted, the more likely cheating became. Moreover, many Arab members of the coalition felt growing pressure from large segments of their population that sympathized with Saddam’s challenge to the West and the wealthy Gulf States.⁸⁹ The contingency of Israel being dragged into the conflict, possibly by Saddam’s own actions, would make it politically impossible for these states to stay in the coalition. The United States also feared that the longer the standoff lasted the more

⁸⁷ House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Update on the Situation in the Persian Gulf*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., December 6, 1990, 5.

⁸⁸ House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Situation in the Persian Gulf*, 5; Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region*, December 3, 1990, 647-8.

⁸⁹ House Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf: Sanctions, Diplomacy, and War*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., December 14, 1990, 525-526.

likely that the Soviets, Arabs, or Europeans would offer Saddam some kind of incentive or partial reward for complying with the United Nations.⁹⁰

In late 1990, the Bush administration increasingly stressed the long-term threat of Saddam as a nuclear power to defend the shift to an offensive strategy. Speaking to coalition forces in Saudi Arabia on Thanksgiving, Bush claimed, “Those who would measure the timetable for Saddam’s atomic program in years may be seriously underestimating the reality of that situation and the gravity of the threat. Every day that passes brings Saddam one step closer to realizing his goal of a nuclear weapons arsenal.” Bush then said that no one knew exactly when Saddam would acquire nuclear weapons but warned, “He has never possessed a weapon that he didn’t use.”⁹¹ U.S. officials emphasized that the United States could either defeat Saddam now without nuclear weapons or fight him later when he had a nuclear arsenal.

These claims advanced a much more alarmist view of the Iraqi nuclear program than the intelligence community’s assessments. An interagency review estimated in the fall of 1990 that Iraq was 5-10 years from a large nuclear weapons program and that it could build a small nuclear weapon at some point between few months and a few years.⁹² Nevertheless, the growing emphasis on nuclear weapons bolstered the case for war in Congress and among the public. A CBS News Poll on November 19th found that 54% of Americans thought that preventing Saddam from building nuclear weapons was a good reason to go to war. In contrast, 56% found restoring

⁹⁰ Telegram, Chas Freeman to James Baker, October 29, 1990, OA/ID CF 01584-032, Working Files, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 5.

⁹¹ George H.W. Bush, “Remarks to United States Army Troops Near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia,” November 22, 1990, The American Presidency Project, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=19088>

⁹² W.R. Doerner and J.O. Jackson, “When Will Saddam Get the Bomb?” *Time*, December 10, 1990, 38.

the Kuwaiti government and defending Saudi Arabia an inadequate reason, and 62% thought protecting the source of much of the world's oil also did not justify the use of force.⁹³

The cultural memory of the 1938 Munich Conference and Adolf Hitler played a major role in the administration's case for setting a deadline for the use of force rather than relying on sanctions. Bush was a World War II veteran and, like many of his generation, he believed that war could have been averted if the allies had confronted Hitler earlier than 1939. Bush contended soon after the invasion: "A half century ago, our nation and the world paid dearly for appeasing an aggressor who should, and could, have been stopped. We are not going to make that mistake again."⁹⁴ American leaders applied this lesson to Saddam Hussein, arguing that if the United States did not reverse his aggression he would commit worse transgressions and build nuclear weapons. Bush, for instance, wrote to his children on January 15th: "How many lives might have been saved if appeasement had given way to force earlier on in the late '30s or earliest '40s? I look at today's crisis as 'good' vs. 'evil'-yes, it is that clear."⁹⁵

The Munich metaphor added moral urgency to the administration's case for war and helped build public support. One *New York Times* poll in August 1990 reported that 61% of Americans agreed that Saddam was like Hitler and the United States needed to stop him.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, some top officials felt that it raised expectations beyond the defined set of objectives. After all, the United States fought the war against Hitler with total means and for total ends, in marked contrast to the planned war against Iraq. Richard Haass, for one, believed that

⁹³ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, 227.

⁹⁴ R.W. Apple, "Bush Invokes U.S. Values: Confrontation in the Gulf," *New York Times*, August 16, 1990, A1.

⁹⁵ H.W. Brands, "Neither Munich nor Vietnam: The Gulf War of 1991," in *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft*, edited by Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 81.

⁹⁶ Brands, "Neither Munich nor Vietnam," 86.

“making the comparison would add pressure on us to go beyond our mission and remove the regime.”⁹⁷ Moreover, Colin Powell later recalled his unease with comparing Saddam to Hitler because “in so demonizing him...you raised expectations that you would do something about him at the end of the day.”⁹⁸ Powell and others feared that the mismatch between rhetoric and policy might tarnish whatever the United States achieved in the conflict.

The massive troop surge in November 1990 intensified domestic opposition to Bush’s Iraq policy. Democrats in Congress had backed the sanctions-based strategy, but they believed this shift, combined with the January 15 deadline, altered U.S. strategy in perilous ways. Led by Sam Nunn and Claiborne Pell, Democrats invited prominent foreign policy figures to speak in a series of Congressional hearings on behalf of the sanctions strategy and against a shift to the use of force.⁹⁹ Democrats and their allies contended that war against Iraq was premature and that the United States should give sanctions more time to influence Iraq. This public debate centered on means rather than ends. Democrats agreed with Bush that Saddam should receive no rewards or incentives for withdrawing from Kuwait in order to reaffirm the principle that aggression does not pay. They also acknowledged the importance of establishing precedents of effective collective security, countering his bid to dominate oil resources, defending human rights and state sovereignty, weakening Saddam, and stripping him of his WMD programs.

⁹⁷ Richard Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2009), 77.

⁹⁸ Powell, interview by Frontline, 1995.

⁹⁹ Prominent figures arguing in favor of the sanctions strategy included numerous Secretaries of Defense, Secretaries of State, National Security Advisors, former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other high-ranking policymakers and experts. James Schlesinger, Frank Carlucci, William Crowe, David Jones, Robert S. McNamara, Zbigniew Brzezinski, McGeorge Bundy, Paul Nitze, Richard Murphy, Arthur Schlesinger, Edward Luttwak, and Kenneth Waltz.

Democrats argued, however, that sanctions were still the best means of achieving those ends. They believed the massive economic damage the sanctions wrought on the Iraqi economy would eventually affect Saddam's military machine.¹⁰⁰ The sanctions would deny spare parts to the military, shut down key industries, drain Iraq's cash reserves, and force the rationing of food. Saddam could only shuffle resources around so much before he became unable to pay off the key constituent groups that sustained his regime. At that point, projected by sanctions advocates to be between six months and a year, Saddam would have to choose between withdrawing from Kuwait and facing overthrow from within.¹⁰¹ If the embargo failed and the United States had to use force, Iraq would be even weaker due to this extended economic isolation.¹⁰² Democrats believed the coalition had time on its side and a chance to defeat Saddam without a risky conflict. Some Democrats pointed to the containment of the USSR as a model for how to deal with Iraq, claiming that if the United States outlasted this superpower they could also wear down Iraq.¹⁰³

Democrats and their allies also condemned what they saw as Bush's rush to war. They contended that a war would cause thousands of American casualties, break up the international coalition, and turn Arab public opinion against the United States. In addition, Vietnam loomed large over the Democrats' hesitance to use force against Iraq. Many Democrats had personal

¹⁰⁰ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., December 4, 1990, 1-2.

¹⁰¹ See testimony of Senator Sam Nunn and Claiborne Pell, Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region*, November 27, 1990, 108-109; *Cong. Rec.* 102nd Cong., 1st sess., January 4, 1991, 330; David Rogers, "Pro-Defense Nunn Counsels U.S. Not to Let Slip too Quickly those Hard-to-Stop Dogs of War," *Wall Street Journal*, December 4, 1990, A20; Editorial, "How to Choke Iraq," *New York Times*, December 7, 1990, A34.

¹⁰² See argument of Senator George Mitchell, *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., 409.

¹⁰³ See testimony of William Quandt and Senator Paul Sarbanes, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf, Part 2*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., December 12, 1990, 128-130.

connections to Vietnam, either as veterans or as politicians who opposed the war. As Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) put it, “We are products of the Vietnam experience... We are really touched by the possibility that we may be repeating that experience.”¹⁰⁴ Vietnam veterans like John Kerry and Robert Kerrey cited their experiences as a warning against rushing into wars, particularly when the United States seemed to be fighting for countries that would not protect themselves.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, many Democrats feared that the United States would become bogged down in a bloody war with Iraq, poisoning domestic politics as Vietnam did.¹⁰⁶

In legal terms, Democrats claimed that Bush had exceeded his constitutional authority by doubling the number of troops and signing Security Council Resolution 678 because these steps effectively put the country on a course for war before Congress had authorized the use of force. They demanded that Bush seek Congressional approval before launching a war to liberate Kuwait.¹⁰⁷ Democrats also argued that in spite of the broad international support for Bush’s policies, the United States would end up bearing a disproportionate share of the fighting and the casualties given the small military contributions of most coalition partners. Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE), for instance, argued that this burden-sharing problem undermined Bush’s push for collective security, saying: “A New World Order in the United Nations and collective security adds up to ‘We will hold your coat, United States. You go get them; we give you the authority to

¹⁰⁴ E.J. Dionne, “Gulf Crisis Rekindles Democrats’ Old Debate but with New Focus,” *Washington Post*, January 3, 1991, A16.

¹⁰⁵ See testimony of Senators Robert Kerrey and John Kerry, *Cong., Rec.* 101st Cong., 2nd sess., October 24, 1990, 33377; *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., January 11, 1991 846-849.

¹⁰⁶ Brands, “Neither Munich nor Vietnam,” 83-86.

¹⁰⁷ Ruth Marcus, “Congress and the President Clash Over Who Decides on Going to War,” *Washington Post*, December 14, 1990, A46.

do it.”¹⁰⁸ Other Democrats said that the American soldiers were serving as “mercenaries” or “cannon fodder” for Gulf regimes that would not fight for themselves.¹⁰⁹

As for the New World Order, most Democrats contended that ousting Saddam from Kuwait through sanctions would establish a more replicable approach to stopping aggression than the use of force. The United States could not deploy legions of troops for months at a time, much less fight a war, to counter every international act of aggression. As Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) asked: “Isn’t it arguable that we have a special interest actually in trying to make the economic sanctions work in order to establish a precedent of collective action by the U.N. which could fairly readily be invoked...where we sought to deter aggression in the future?”¹¹⁰

On the issue of WMD, Democrats emphasized that the United States could keep sanctions on Iraq after the withdrawal from Kuwait to compel Saddam to undo these programs. They and other critics of Bush’s policy also objected to his portrayal of Saddam’s nuclear program as an imminent threat to the United States. The United States had to be concerned with Iraq’s WMD, but this was not an immediate *casus belli*. For instance, former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski contended that even if Iraq built a small nuclear weapons program in spite of sanctions, the United States could deter them just as they had deterred far more powerful nuclear states. Furthermore, nuclear experts noted that Saddam would still be five to ten years away from a large nuclear arsenal even if the sanctions were not in place.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., December 4, 1990, 27.

¹⁰⁹ See Testimonies of Robert Kerrey and Zbigniew Brzezinski: Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region*, December 3, 1990, 751; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, December 5, 1990, 168.

¹¹⁰ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., January 8, 1991, 32.

¹¹¹ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf, Part 1*, December 5, 1990, 156.

In the meantime, Saddam could create a crude, Hiroshima-sized device, but experts emphasized that he could neither test this device nor deliver it with ballistic missiles. These specialists also doubted that Saddam Hussein was irrational enough to use a nuclear weapon and bring destruction down upon his head.¹¹² They and experts on Iraq such as Phebe Marr and Efraim Karsh portrayed Saddam as a power-hungry, ruthless, but mostly rational survivor who lacked a “Masada complex.”¹¹³ Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait was a gamble, they argued, but it was not irrational because the conciliatory U.S. engagement policy gave Saddam good reason to think he could get away with the invasion. Saddam’s life was “a ceaseless struggle for survival” in which he always prioritized domestic power. Even if he could acquire nuclear weapons, the odds were exceedingly small that he would throw his lifelong struggle away by using them.¹¹⁴

A large minority of Democrats, however, broke with their party and supported Bush’s case for war. Most of these legislators were more hawkish, conservative, and pro-Israel than average in their party, including Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Albert Gore (D-TN), and Les Aspin (D-WI). Aspin shifted many Democrats towards the administration’s side through his position as the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, which published several reports declaring the low likelihood that sanctions would force Saddam out of Kuwait. Aspin thought that the United States would have to contain Iraq for years to come and that this task would be easier if the Kuwait crisis was resolved through force rather than diplomacy.¹¹⁵ Since Democrats

¹¹² See testimonies of Gary Milhollin and Leonard Spector as well as letter from Union of Concerned Scientists: Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region*, December 3, 1990, 33-35.

¹¹³ See testimony of Phebe Marr: House Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf*, December 4, 1990, 24, 39; Efraim Karsh, “Myths about Hussein and Iraq,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1990, A15.

¹¹⁴ Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, “Why Saddam Hussein Invaded Kuwait,” *Survival* 33, no. 1 (January, 1991): 19, 29.

¹¹⁵ See the reports of the House Armed Services Committee under Les Aspin’s name: House Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf*, January 8, 1991, 852-917.

controlled both houses of Congress, these defections were crucial to the passage of the authorization to use force in January 1991. In the Senate, the vote was 52-47 in favor of authorization, with ten Democrats crossing the aisle. Eighty-six Democrats voted for the authorization in the House, enabling that resolution to pass by a more comfortable 250-183.¹¹⁶

Possibly the most significant Democrat who supported the war was Representative Stephen Solarz of New York. Solarz was a staunch supporter of Israel who saw Saddam as an irrational tyrant on the brink of attaining nuclear weapons. He viewed the conflict in stark moral terms, drawing on Munich metaphor to conclude that “the great lesson of our time” is that “evil exists and when evil is on the march, it must be confronted.”¹¹⁷ He had advocated a policy of containing Iraq since the chemical weapons attacks on the Kurds in 1988. He also warned Democrats against looking like the weak party, writing: “The Democrats must ponder the political consequences of a reflexive refusal even to consider the use of force.”¹¹⁸

Solarz and the neoconservative Richard Perle led the formation of the Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf in the fall of 1990 to secure endorsements from people who might help convince the public and Democrats to support Bush’s policy. This organization received the support of a diverse mix of politicians and intellectuals, all united in support of the pending war against Iraq and the destruction of Iraq’s WMD programs. They particularly emphasized the need to destroy Saddam’s ability to threaten Israel.¹¹⁹ Janet Mullins, James Baker’s assistant for

¹¹⁶ “H.J. Res.77 (102nd): Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution,” GovTrack.us, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/102-1991/h9>.

¹¹⁷ Stephen Solarz, *Journeys to War and Peace: A Congressional Memoir* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 200.

¹¹⁸ Stephen Solarz, “The Case for Intervention,” in Cerf and Sifry, *The Gulf War Reader*, 282.

¹¹⁹ “Why We Are in the Gulf,” Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf, December 10, 1990, OA/ID 03417-002, Kristen Gear Files, White House Office of Public Affairs, George Bush Presidential Library, 1-4.

legislative affairs, later declared that Solarz and this committee were “The single greatest force to gather up the conservative Democrats who ended up voting with us in the House.”¹²⁰

The political debate throughout the Gulf Crisis centered on whether the United States should give sanctions more time to drive Saddam from Kuwait or shift to the use of force. The Democrats and other critics put forth a policy of sanctions and isolation to address both the short-term Kuwait problem and the long-term Iraqi threat. The Bush administration and the Republicans countered that the United States could not indefinitely wait for sanctions to work and had to shift to the use of force. As the debate about the Kuwait problem raged, the parties shared similar views on the Saddam problem in that they agreed that Saddam needed to be weakened over the course of this conflict and then vigilantly contained in the aftermath.

Rejecting Regime Change, Planning for Containment: December to February 1991

The Bush administration made one last-ditch effort to avert war by sending James Baker to meet with Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz on January 8, 1991. Baker delivered a letter to Saddam through Aziz that communicated the coalition’s resolve to accept nothing less than full Iraqi compliance with the Security Council’s demands and its insistence that there would be no negotiation on any terms. The letter clarified that the coalition would use force to expel Iraq from Kuwait if the withdrawal did not start before January 15. Aziz called the letter an insult to a sovereign nation and refused to even take it back to Saddam.¹²¹ On January 12, both houses of Congress voted to authorize the use of force for the fulfillment of the Security Council

Same Box, Folder: Supportive Groups/Persian Gulf OAID 03417-002, Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf, Why We Are in the Gulf, December 10, 1990. 1-4.

¹²⁰ Janet Mullins, interview by Andrew Carpendale, September 28, 1993, MC 197, Box 173, Folder 6, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, 6.

¹²¹ Special to *The New York Times*, “Confrontation in the Gulf: Text of Letter from Bush to Hussein,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1991. A1.

resolutions. On January 15th, the deadline set by Resolution 678 expired. The next day, Operation Desert Storm commenced with a massive bombing campaign against Iraq.

As the use of force became a reality in the winter of 1991, the Bush administration expanded its thinking and planning for long-term policy on Iraq. In January 1991, the administration issued National Security Directive 54 (NSD-54), which set out objectives for the war and its aftermath. It identified the goals of the conflict as pushing Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, restoring Kuwait's government, and promoting "the security and the stability of the Persian Gulf."¹²² The administration derived legal sanction for this last objective from Security Council Resolution 678's call for the restoring of "international peace and security in the area."¹²³

NSD-54 then stated that "to achieve the above purposes" the United States would seek the destruction of Iraq's WMD programs, its "command, control, and communications capabilities," and the Republican Guard as "an effective fighting force."¹²⁴ The assault on these pillars of the Iraqi state aimed to liberate Kuwait and seek the postwar goal of weakening and containing Iraq. In addition, NSD-54 defined the conditions under which the United States would pursue regime change. It would "become an explicit objective of the United States to replace the current leadership of Iraq" if Iraq used WMD, supported terrorist attacks on United States or coalition partners "anywhere in the world," or destroyed Kuwait's oil fields.¹²⁵

¹²² "National Security Directive 54," George Bush Presidential Library and Museum Public Papers, accessed November 27, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/nsd/nsd54.pdf>, 1.

¹²³ Cerf and Sifry, *The Gulf War Reader*, 156; Bob Kimmitt, interview by Andrew Carpendale, October 14, 1993, MC 197, Box 173, Folder 4, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, 13.

¹²⁴ "National Security Directive 54," Bush Library Public Papers, 2.

¹²⁵ "National Security Directive 54," Bush Library Public Papers, 3.

As the United States planned for the aftermath of the war, top administration officials discussed how to build a containment regime under the legally sanctioned goal of restoring international peace and stability in the region. This goal would require eliminating Iraq's WMD programs and restraining its military strength. Richard Haass and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Clarke wrote that if the war did not destroy Iraq's WMD facilities, the United States had to demand access to those facilities to render them inoperable.¹²⁶ Because this goal was not explicitly covered by the U.N. resolutions that authorized Desert Storm, the administration planned to seek a new resolution that would maintain sanctions until Iraq was disarmed. Moreover, U.S. officials saw recreating the balance of power and preventing the emergence of a regional hegemon as a key way of containing Iraq and ensuring stability. In fact, they viewed the collapse of the regional balance of power at the end of the Iran-Iraq War as a condition that made Saddam's bid for regional supremacy feasible.¹²⁷

To achieve this regional balance, the United States would have to foster cooperation among the Gulf States and strengthen their militaries so that the United States would not have to play such a direct security role.¹²⁸ In addition, the United States needed to maintain the military capability to intervene rapidly in case of renewed aggression by Iran or Iraq. The Bush administration preferred to minimize the U.S. presence in the postwar security system because of

¹²⁶ Memorandum, Richard Haass to NSC Deputies, January 19, 1991, OA/ID CF 00946, Subject Files, Robert Gates Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 3; Memorandum, Richard Clarke to NSC Deputies, January 21, 1991, OA/ID CF 00946, Subject Files, Robert Gates Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 1; Memorandum, Richard Clarke to Reginald Bartholomew, September 20, 1990, Digital National Security Archive, Iraqgate, 1980-1994 Collection, 2-4.

¹²⁷ Working Paper, "Post-War Security Structures in the Gulf," Richard Haass, February 8, 1991, OA/ID CF 01584, Working Files, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library.

¹²⁸ Memorandum, Richard Haass to NSC Deputies, January 25, 1991, OA/ID CF 00946, Subject Files, Robert Gates Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 1, 3.

expense and the political pitfalls, both at home and in the region, of maintaining ground forces in the Gulf.¹²⁹ The pre-positioning of equipment, stationing of naval and air forces, and occasional joint exercises with the Gulf states would maintain the ability to respond to emergencies while limiting an obvious foreign presence. Nevertheless, they acknowledged the need for an increased level of U.S. involvement, or as Haass put it, “As the current crisis makes painfully clear, the era of keeping the Gulf at arm’s length or managing its security on the cheap is over.”¹³⁰

As early as December, the United States had announced that it would keep sanctions in place to enforce Iraqi disarmament after the resolution of the Kuwait crisis, whether it ended through war or voluntary withdrawal.¹³¹ Policy staff in the State Department and NSC envisioned that the United States would seek a new Security Council resolution that would link the lifting of sanctions to progress in the disarmament of Iraq. Scowcroft and Richard recommended this approach throughout the winter of 1990-1991.¹³² Haass spelled out the conditions for lifting sanctions in detail:

We could also make clear what would be required from Iraq-Iraqi payment of reparations and signing of an Iraqi-Kuwait peace treaty, reductions in its conventional arms, pull-back of remaining arms away from the Kuwait border, elimination of chemical and biological arms, inspections of all nuclear facilities, and so on-in order for sanctions to be phased out.¹³³

Richard Clarke echoed this thinking in counseling that the United States “develop a plan for a phased lifting of sanctions in response to Iraqi steps toward dismantlement of these

¹²⁹ Haass, “Post-War Security Structures in the Gulf,” February 8, 1991, 1, 7; Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 148-150.

¹³⁰ Working Paper, “Post-Crisis Security Arrangements in the Gulf,” Richard Haass, December 28, 1990, OA/ID CF 00946, Subject Files, Robert Gates Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library.

¹³¹ “U.S. Said to Want Sanctions Kept After a Pullout,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1990, A29.

¹³² Memorandum, Brent Scowcroft to George Bush, February 25, 1991, OA/ID CF 01584-005, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 1.

¹³³ Haass, “Post-Crisis Security Arrangements in the Gulf,” December 28, 1990, 3.

programs.”¹³⁴ Policy planners thus envisioned a flexible postwar policy in which Iraq, whether or not Saddam remained in charge, could earn the “gradual phase-out of sanctions” by demonstrating commitment to disarming and cooperating with the United Nations.¹³⁵ The United States would also have to convince the coalition that the destruction of Iraq’s WMD and the limitation of its conventional strength were necessary for achieving postwar stability. Planners predicted that many members of the coalition would see this shift as “moving the goalposts” on victory in Iraq, which might cause difficulties in sustaining the coalition.¹³⁶ They argued that Bush administration should therefore avoid imposing a “Versailles” style peace on Iraq because the more they demanded the harder it would be to preserve the coalition.¹³⁷

As the Bush administration planned for the aftermath of the war, they reaffirmed the decision to not seek regime change directly. Top U.S. officials recall no significant dissension on this point.¹³⁸ Their basic position on regime change was that Saddam’s demise might be desirable if it made dealing with postwar Iraq easier but that it was too risky to pursue this goal directly. Officials repeatedly said the United States “would not weep” if Saddam fell from power but that this was not an objective.¹³⁹ The only way to guarantee this outcome seemed to be an

¹³⁴ Memorandum, Richard Clarke to NSC Deputies, January 21, 1991, 5, 8.

¹³⁵ Working Paper, “Arms Control after the War,” Richard Haass, February 8, 1991, OA/ID CF 01584-006, Working Files, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 3. Haass reiterates the administration’s intention during Desert Shield and Desert Storm to keep using sanctions after the war primarily to compel Saddam to meet the Security Council’s terms rather than to force him from power. See Haass, *War of Necessity*, 142.

¹³⁶ Haass, “Post-Crisis Security Arrangements in the Gulf,” December 28, 1990, 3; Memorandum, Richard Haass to NSC Deputies, January 19, 1991, 2.

¹³⁷ Haass, “Arms Control after the War,” February 8, 1991, 3.

¹³⁸ Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice*, 131.

¹³⁹ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 408.

occupation of some or all of Iraq, and Bush officials overwhelmingly rejected this option, which they viewed as fraught with dangers. The United States would likely face guerrilla resistance from Baathist elements, what Robert Gates called “the Vietnam scenario.”¹⁴⁰ Scowcroft summoned the ghost of another intractable war, Korea, to highlight the dangers of expanding objectives once the original set of goals had been achieved.¹⁴¹ The military leadership echoed this concern, preferring the pursuit of limited, well-defined war aims over the nightmare of occupying Iraq.¹⁴² Furthermore, there was no guarantee that the United States could actually capture Saddam Hussein, who could hide out in his labyrinthine security system. Scowcroft and Powell, for instance, recalled how difficult it was to capture Manuel Noriega in Panama during the previous winter, a leader of a far smaller country with a much weaker security apparatus.¹⁴³

In addition, if the United States occupied Iraq they would face the complex task of nation building in a devastated society that that Americans knew little about. In the meantime, the administration predicted that Arab public opinion would turn against the United States as imperial occupiers, fueling instability and extremism in the region.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the administration had not prepared Congress, the public, or the coalition for such a vast expansion of war aims. The administration believed an invasion of Iraq would shatter the coalition and the

¹⁴⁰ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 145.

¹⁴¹ Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 415.

¹⁴² Atkinson, *Crusade*, 299.

¹⁴³ Powell, interview by Frontline, 1995.

¹⁴⁴ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 433, 464.

domestic consensus around the conflict, undermining the goals of bolstering multilateralism and the United Nations as problem-solving mechanisms of the post-Cold War world.¹⁴⁵

Chas Freeman, the U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, recalled that the administration so prioritized consensus at home and within the international alliance that it often avoided defining postwar goals clearly, even to itself. According to Freeman, top officials feared that this information would leak and jeopardize the domestic and international coalitions they had painstakingly constructed since August 1990. He later said that the administration has “a well-founded fear of clarity” because of “the concern about leaks and the danger that any clear definition of war objectives would have been picked apart by members of Congress, made public, and then dismantled the coalition.”¹⁴⁶ Key administration figures valued these alliances, especially the international coalition, for reasons that transcended liberating Kuwait, including containing Iraq after the current crisis, cementing a positive relationship with the Soviet Union, and building a stronger international system based on collective security and international law. Freeman suggests that that these goals drove the administration’s thinking towards the “lowest common denominator” of the goals set by the Security Council resolutions while inhibiting more serious thinking about the Saddam problem, especially questions like how much Iraq needed to be weakened to make sure Saddam or his successor would be manageable in the aftermath...¹⁴⁷

Another reason for the Bush administration’s rejection of regime change was concern about the territorial integrity of Iraq and its place in the regional balance of power. The

¹⁴⁵ Powell, interview by Frontline, 1995; Peter Cary, Brian Duffy, and Joseph Galloway, *Triumph Without Victory: The History of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 142-143.

¹⁴⁶ Chas Freeman, interview by Charles Stewart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 1995, accessed April 1, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000394/>, 412.

¹⁴⁷ Freeman, interview by Kennedy, 1995, 429.

administration believed that a debilitated Saddam who remained in power had two uses for the United States. First, he could preserve the political unity and territorial integrity of Iraq, albeit by terrifying means. Many in the administration feared that if Saddam fell from power his successors might not be able to keep the country intact, especially if restive Kurds and Shia launched rebellions. Scowcroft and Haass voiced this concern from the start of the crisis, saying that Iraq could collapse without Saddam at the helm because no one else had his cult of personality.¹⁴⁸ An NSC planning document from January 1991 stated that the Baath Party was the only force in Iraq capable of sustaining civil order.¹⁴⁹ The administration knew it would be hard to extract U.S. forces from an Iraq mired in chaos, which made them doubt whether the demise of Saddam would really serve U.S. interests.

The second way that a weakened Saddam would be useful was his ability to preserve enough Iraqi strength to balance Iranian power. If Iraq collapsed into civil war, it would be unable to check Iranian expansion. In addition, Iran would be poised to interfere in the conflict by backing Shia forces. As an NSC memo warned in January of 1991: “Political and military collapse could make Iraq vulnerable to the predatory ambitions of its immediate neighbors.”¹⁵⁰ This contingency could bring about the ascension of a pro-Iranian Shia government in Iraq that would upend the balance of power, forcing the United States to protect its regional allies from a powerful and hostile Shia bloc. The CIA repeatedly warned that the Shia had threatened the

¹⁴⁸ Minutes, National Security Council Meetings, August 3, 1990, OA/ID 01478, Working Files, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Working Paper, “Immediate Post-War Requirements,” Richard Haass, January 21, 1991, OA/ID CF 01584-020, Working Files, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Haass, “Post-War Requirements,” 8; Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 416.

stability of Iraq since the tribal revolts in the 1920s and that a Shia Iraqi government would probably align with Iranian policies.¹⁵¹

Moreover, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other regional allies preferred a defanged Sunni regime, even one under Saddam, to the rise of a Shia-dominated Iraq. They wanted the Sunni to remain in charge of Iraq in order to stifle Shia political forces that might empower Iran and destabilize the Gulf States domestically. They encouraged Bush's tendency towards restraint on the regime change question.¹⁵² The administration wanted Iraq to emerge from the crisis with enough strength to defend itself but not enough to threaten its neighbors, a balancing act they referred to as "Goldilocks outcome."¹⁵³ A cable from Chas Freeman to Baker captured this approach, saying the United States should: "preserve its [Iraq's] capacity to defend itself in the post-crisis environment and thereby avoid the destabilizing vacuum of power in Iraq."¹⁵⁴

Pessimism about political and social change in the Middle East also contributed to the dread of becoming bogged down in Iraqi politics. Like most Americans, the Bush administration viewed Iraq and the entire Middle East as awash with religious and secular radicalism, ancient ethnic and religious conflicts, anti-Americanism, and political violence. All sides of the debate before Desert Storm shared the sense that the Middle East was a hostile, unstable place that the United States did not understand. James Schlesinger, an opponent of the war, told Congress that Saddam's overthrow would not address the deeper problem of the region: "The Middle East is

¹⁵¹ CIA Report: Political and Personality Handbook of Iraq, January 1991, CIA.gov, accessed February 6, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000227795.pdf, 2.

¹⁵² U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf War*, (New York: Times Books, 1992), 395; Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 58.

¹⁵³ Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice*, 126.

¹⁵⁴ Telegram, Chas Freeman to James Baker, December 15, 1990, OA/ID CF 08514-025, Working Files, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library, 10.

quite unstable inherently. If Saddam Hussein were to be removed lock, stock, and barrel, the Middle East will not be stable.”¹⁵⁵ Another opponent of the war, Arthur Schlesinger, portrayed the region as: “characterized from time immemorial by artificial borders, tribal antagonisms, religious fanaticisms, and desperate inequalities.”¹⁵⁶ Martin Indyk, a supporter of Desert Storm who later served in the Clinton administration, reasoned that United States should shape its policy with minimal regard for Arab public opinion because: “They all hate us anyhow. I mean, they always did, they always will.”¹⁵⁷ Most players in the Iraq debate concurred that the United States should keep its distance from this strange, violent region, deterring even the strongest regime change advocates from calling for an occupation of Iraq.

This skepticism toward the Arab world’s potential for democratization enhanced the Bush administration’s desire to avoid the nation-building project that regime change might require. A CIA handbook published just after Desert Storm described Iraqis as having a reputation among Arabs for being “self-confident and proud,” “stubborn,” “loath to change their opinion,” “suspicious,” “conspiratorial,” “brutal,” and “persistent.”¹⁵⁸ Back in February 1991, Haass wrote that while the United States should push for the gradual opening Arab politics, “The prospects for democratization in the Arab world must be assessed as bleak.”¹⁵⁹ To support this assessment, he later cited: “the lack of civil society, the lack of experience with democracy, the

¹⁵⁵ Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region*, November 27, 1990, 135.

¹⁵⁶ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, December 4, 1990, 9.

¹⁵⁷ House Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf*, December 6, 1990, 242.

¹⁵⁸ Political and Personality Handbook of Iraq, January 1991. CIA.gov, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Paper, “The Middle East in the Post-War Period: Political Stability and Openness,” Richard Haass, February 8, 1991, OA/ID 01584-003, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 2.

sectarian divisions, none of that suggested to me that Iraq was poised to become democratic if the lid was taken off.”¹⁶⁰ U.S. diplomat Edward Djerejian also described the chances of democracy in Iraq as “very improbable,” pointing to obstacles like “the brutal repression of the regime” and “the lack of civil society.”¹⁶¹ Iraq historian Phebe Marr supported the administration’s hesitance to consider expansive goals in Iraq, telling Congress, “Our knowledge to undertake social or political engineering-such as ‘replacing Saddam’-is really extremely difficult...The fact that we would have a finger in a pie such as this is disturbing to me.”¹⁶²

These perceptions of Arab political culture dampened the Bush administration’s enthusiasm for the demise of Saddam in one additional sense. U.S. officials reasoned that any heir, most likely a general, who seized power would have emerged from the same debased political culture as Saddam. Thus, he would most likely share Saddam’s hatred of the West, his Baathist ideology, and his expansionist goals for Iraq. For instance, a DIA report suggested that any successor “would resume pursuit of weapons of mass destruction to support its ambitions” and be hostile to the United States, Israel, and the Gulf States.¹⁶³ As a high official in the Baathist system, he would also have a long record of human rights abuses.

Working with this kind of leader would create problems in domestic politics and lend an unsavory taste to the war’s end. Powell and Scowcroft both doubted that any of Saddam’s likely successors would be a more reasonable character, although they expected him to be weaker, which posed problems for Iraq’s territorial integrity and the regional balance of power.¹⁶⁴ Powell

¹⁶⁰ Richard Haass, interview by Joseph Stieb, October 4, 2017.

¹⁶¹ Edward Djerejian, interview by Joseph Stieb, October 20, 2017.

¹⁶² Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy Options and Implications*, November 29, 1990, 346.

¹⁶³ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 156.

¹⁶⁴ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 68.

mocked the idea that if Saddam fell “he would have necessarily been replaced by a Jeffersonian in some sort of desert democracy where people read *The Federalist Papers* along with the Koran.”¹⁶⁵ The United States would demand that any successor to Saddam adhere to the Security Council resolutions, but they had reason to doubt that Saddam’s overthrow would ease the postwar management of Iraq enough to justify the risks of directly seeking regime change.

The expectation that Saddam Hussein would fall from power soon after the war further dissuaded the Bush administration from seeking regime change directly. They struggled to imagine how Saddam could an overwhelming military catastrophe on top of sanctions and the recent costs of war with Iran. For instance, Bush wrote in his diary on January 31:

Seeing their troops and equipment getting destroyed-they’ve got to do something about it...It seems to me that the more suffering the people of Iraq go through, the more likely it is that somebody will stand up and do that which should have been done a long time ago-take the guy out of there.¹⁶⁶

A DIA report from January 1991 likewise anticipated that military defeat of Iraqi forces would probably “lead to the fall of Saddam Hussein.”¹⁶⁷ The expectation of Saddam’s imminent demise also bolstered the administration’s view that containment would suffice to fulfill U.S. goals after the conflict. If Saddam was likely to be toppled, the United States could deal with a weaker successor who would need to end Iraq’s isolation in order to survive at home, making him more likely to comply with the U.N. demands.

Nevertheless, most of the predictions that Saddam Hussein would be overthrown after the war were based not on hard evidence but on incredulity at the idea that Saddam could put his

¹⁶⁵ Powell, *My American Journey*, 513.

¹⁶⁶ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 464; Haass, interview by Frontline, 1995.

¹⁶⁷ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 156.

country through these catastrophes and not be overthrown. There was, in fact, little evidence from August 1990 to February 1991 that Saddam's grip on power was in jeopardy. Intelligence agencies and the State Department repeatedly noted that the opposition was weak and fragmented by ethnicity and ideology. Opposition groups also lacked a real presence in Iraq because of Saddam's effective security apparatus.¹⁶⁸ Over the previous two decades, Saddam had weeded out potential rivals with incredible severity, surrounding himself with lackeys who relied on him for patronage and survival.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, the CIA reported in January that despite the damage inflicted by bombing and sanctions, "the regime appears fully in control. There have been no credible reports of unrest since the war began." This report noted that Saddam had put only his most loyal forces in Baghdad, mostly from the Republican Guard, to reduce the chances of a coup or rebellion.¹⁷⁰

The Bush administration steeled themselves for a messy, less than satisfying ending to Desert Storm. As Haass told Bush in January: "I don't think we're going to get our battleship Missouri here." On February 20, Bush expressed the central dilemma of the aftermath of the conflict: "Our goal is not the elimination of Saddam Hussein, yet in many ways it's the only answer in order to get a new start for Iraq in the family of nations."¹⁷¹ The possibility that Saddam Hussein would comply with U.N. demands appeared so unlikely to the administration that he would probably have to be removed for regional stability to be restored. Nevertheless,

¹⁶⁸ Glenn Frankel, "Suppressed at Home and Dismissed Abroad: Prophetic Iraqi Opposition Considered Too Far-Flung, Fractious to Engineer Saddam's Overthrow," *Washington Post*, August 27, 1990, A13.

¹⁶⁹ For an excellent study of Saddam's methods of ruling Iraq, see Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁰ CIA Report, Iraq: Domestic Impact of War, January 25, 1991, CIA.gov, accessed February 6, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/iraq-domestic-impact-war>, 1-2.

¹⁷¹ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 167.

Bush dreaded the consequences of this removal occurring too precipitously and lacked acceptable means of pursuing this goal. The ousting of Saddam thus remained a vague hope rather than a policy objective. The policy was to prepare a multilateral containment regime that would keep Iraq from threatening its neighbors and compel Saddam or his successor to comply with the United Nations, especially on the destruction of his unconventional weapons programs.

Regime Change Advocates during the Gulf Crisis

Most politicians, journalists, and foreign policy intellectuals agreed with Bush that the best way to deal with Iraq beyond the crisis over Kuwait was to focus on enforcing the Security Council resolutions and weakening Saddam in the process. There were, however, some prominent figures, mostly conservatives and neoconservatives, who argued from the start of the crisis for the pursuit of regime change as a direct objective. Most major newspapers had at least one prominent writer who called for regime change, including A.M. Rosenthal and William Safire of the *New York Times*, Jim Hoagland and Charles Krauthammer of the *Washington Post*, and the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*.¹⁷² The editors of the *National Review* called for regime change as an explicit policy goal, as did several prominent neoconservative intellectuals such as Richard Perle, Joshua Muravchik, Frank Gaffney, Laurie Mylroie, and Norman Podhoretz.¹⁷³ A fair number of Congressmen and Senators called for regime change as well, including Alphonse D'Amato, Richard Lugar, William Dickinson, and Mark Sanford.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² A.M. Rosenthal, "Making a Killer," *New York Times*, August 5, 1990, E19; Jim Hoagland, "Stopping Saddam's Drive for Dominance," *Washington Post*, August 5, 1990, D1; Charles Krauthammer, "It's Not Just Oil: If Saddam Hadn't Shot His Way Into Kuwait, We Wouldn't be in Saudi Arabia," *Washington Post*, August 17, 1990, A27.

¹⁷³ Editorial, "Quick on the Draw," *National Review*, September 3, 1990, 11. Frank Gaffney, "Get it Over With," *New Republic*, December 10, 1990, 19-20.

¹⁷⁴ Alfonse D'Amato, "Yes, Hussein Must be Ousted," *New York Times*, August 24, 1990, A29; David Hoffman and Gwen Ifill, "Bush Wins Support on the Hill: Mideast Mission Has Lawmakers Anxious," *Washington Post*, August 29, 1990, A1.

Regime change advocates identified the same basic Saddam problem as the Bush administration, but they believed that in order for the United States to achieve its goals in the region Saddam absolutely had to be toppled. This position contrasted sharply with the administration's position of preferring but not requiring regime change. As Congressman William Dickinson (R-AL) put it, "Achieving long-term stability in the region ultimately means removing Saddam Hussein and his power base, because Saddam Hussein is not a man capable of making fundamental changes in himself or his national policy goals."¹⁷⁵ This definition of victory meant that regime change should be a specific objective in the Gulf Crisis, not merely a byproduct of the effort to liberate Kuwait.

The main reasons why Saddam could not be left in power after this crisis were his WMD and ballistic missile programs as well as his proven record of aggression. Regime change advocates believed that even if this crisis ended with the liberation of Kuwait and the degrading of the Iraqi military, Saddam would eventually return to regional prominence with nuclear weapons, making his next act of aggression far harder to stop. Imagine, they argued, if Israel had not destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981: the United States would be facing a nuclear-armed Iraq in the current crisis, maybe making the liberation of Kuwait impossible.¹⁷⁶ The world got lucky that Saddam foolishly invaded his neighbor before he finished his nuclear arsenal, but they could not count on luck in the future. The only way to prevent a nuclear-armed Saddam from dominating the Gulf in a few years was to make sure that he did not survive the

¹⁷⁵ House Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf*, December 4, 1990, 6.

¹⁷⁶ D'Amato, "Saddam Must be Ousted," *New York Times*, August 24, 1990.

current crisis.¹⁷⁷ As William Safire concluded: “We must rid ourselves of Saddam Hussein before he achieves the means to rid himself of us.”¹⁷⁸

Another important difference between regime change advocates and the Bush administration centered on what kind of regime change each side would accept. Bush preferred a coup that would put a more pliable authoritarian in charge. They feared that pursuing anything beyond that would entrap the United States in Iraq, break up the coalition, and threaten Iraq’s territorial integrity. In contrast, most regime change advocates wanted not just to topple Saddam but also to root out the entire Baathist system and replace it with a democracy. The concept of “the regime” played a crucial role in this maximalist desire, especially among neoconservatives. Neoconservatives had long argued that the root source of a state’s external behavior was the nature of its political system and ideology, or its regime. Democratic regimes that possessed mechanisms of accountability for their leaders and embraced liberal values were highly unlikely to act aggressively. In contrast, totalitarian regimes almost inevitably acted belligerently because their leaders embraced messianic, Manichean worldviews and were not accountable to the people or other branches of government. In addition, neoconservatives argued that undemocratic regimes often started wars to justify or distract from oppression at home.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ For representative regime change arguments, see: Editorial, “The Stakes in the Gulf,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 1990, A8; Charles Krauthammer, “The Case for Destroying Saddam,” *Washington Post*, November 25, 1990, C7.

¹⁷⁸ William Safire, “The Phony War,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1990, A21.

¹⁷⁹ For overviews of neoconservative thought on the concept of the regime, see: Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 120-121; Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006), 25-29. The inverse side of this argument was the democratic peace theory, which gained tremendous popularity among neoconservatives in the 1990s who argued that the decline of the Soviet Union gave the United States the opportunity to spread democracy, and therefore peace, on a global scale. For an example see Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America’s Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1991).

One key intellectual foundation for this line of thinking came from Cold War neoconservative discourses about authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. The political thinker Jeane Kirkpatrick wrote an influential essay on this topic for *Commentary* magazine in 1979. She believed that President Carter had foolishly pressured friendly governments like Iran and Nicaragua into premature reforms and then refused to back them up as revolutions started to gain momentum. These errors led to their overthrow by radical, anti-American revolutionaries who even more brutal than their predecessors. She claimed that the myopia of Carter and other liberals emerged in part from their failure to recognize the distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.¹⁸⁰

Authoritarian regimes, like Iran under the Shah, featured unelected leaders who possessed centralized power, the toleration of limited opposition, the imprisonment, exile, and torture of political opponents, and the secret police. However, they also generally respected “habitual” ways of life, family relations, and religion, and they used violence mainly to stay in power rather than to revolutionize society. Pointing to countries like Spain and Portugal, Kirkpatrick claimed that “right-wing autocracies do sometimes evolve into democracies-given time, propitious economic, social, and political circumstances, talented leaders, and a strong indigenous demand for representative government.”¹⁸¹

Totalitarian states, which she labelled “revolutionary autocracies,” could be Marxist states like the Soviet Union or religious reactionaries like Ayatollah Khomeini. These regimes sought to bring about utopian transformations of politics, society, and ordinary life, and they

¹⁸⁰ Jeane Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards,” *Commentary Magazine*, November 1979, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/dictatorships-double-standards/>

¹⁸¹ Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards.”

were willing to use mass terror to pursue these ends. Rather than allowing individuals to live their lives if they stayed out of politics, like most authoritarian states did, totalitarian states sought to “cure the false consciousness” of their citizens and convert them into atomized, loyal ideologues. According to Kirkpatrick, they were also incapable of transforming themselves into more liberal, democratic states; they had to either collapse from within or be defeated from without.¹⁸² Kirkpatrick’s practical message was that the United States should tolerate “traditional authoritarian governments” because they “are less repressive than revolutionary autocracies...more susceptible of liberalization...and more compatible with U.S. interests.” In turn, the United States should be absolutely ruthless in opposing Marxist and other revolutionary groups who were certain to build totalitarian regimes if they overthrew U.S. allies.¹⁸³

This essay epitomized a deeper discourse among neoconservatives and many liberals in the 1970s and 1980s about regime type as a determinant of foreign policy behavior. Writers like Nathan Glazer, Walter Laqueur, and Norman Podhoretz all explored and promulgated the authoritarian/totalitarian distinction. They believed that authoritarian and totalitarian regimes generally acted aggressively abroad, but they saw totalitarian states as uniquely, pathologically aggressive. In particular, they employed these concepts in their criticism of détente, arguing that no *modus vivendi* was possible with the totalitarian Soviet Union.¹⁸⁴ This discourse carried over into the Iraq debate. For Iraq to be labelled as totalitarian meant that it was ideologically fanatical and incapable of internally generated change. For many regime change advocates, this

¹⁸² Kirkpatrick developed some of these distinctions in an earlier work: Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Leader and Vanguard in Mass Society: A Study of Peronist Argentina* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 40-42.

¹⁸³ Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards.” It should be noted that unlike most neoconservatives after the end of the Cold War, Kirkpatrick did not believe that the United State should engage in crusades to spread democracy overseas.

¹⁸⁴ John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs: 1945-1994* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 115-116; Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 11.

meant that more hands-off strategies like containment that sought to create the conditions for internal change could not solve the problem.

Furthermore, regime change advocates drew heavily on the work of Arab intellectuals like Kanan Makiya and Fouad Ajami about Arab political culture to support their case. Makiya and Ajami argued that the core cause of Iraq's aggression was "the enormous, uncontrolled capacity for violence of the modern police state of Iraq," which they called "the warfare state." Iraqi politics, in Ajami's words, were defined by a swollen, totalitarian state at home, a cult of personality, self-delusion, utopian dreams, and extreme violence. Saddam was both a product and a producer of this milieu. The sickness of Iraqi politics reflected the "rotten" nature of a Middle Eastern politics still under the sway of the false, dying hopes of Arab nationalism. In this political culture, force had become the ultima ratio of politics and the totalitarian ideologies had swallowed the rights of the minority and the individual. Ajami and Makiya pointed to the popularity of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait among many Arabs as evidence both of the sickness of Arab politics, the enduring appeal of the strongman figure, and the desperation of the impoverished, humiliated Arab masses. Although they later changed this argument, they claimed during the Gulf Crisis that no "foreign savior" could pull the Arabs or the Iraqis from this morass. Nevertheless, they hoped that Saddam's fall might yield an improvement in Iraqi politics that would act, in Makiya's phrasing, as a "the fragile, razor-thin wedge of freedom" that could upend the authoritarian Arab order and empower democratic forces in the region.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Samir al-Khalil, "In the Mideast, Does Democracy Have a Chance?" *New York Times*, October 14, 1990, SM30; Fouad Ajami, "Into the Dangerous Twilight," *U.S. News and World Report*, March 11, 1991, 24. For an extended examination of Ajami's thinking on problems in Arab politics and culture, see Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), especially 169-171, and "The Summer of Arab Discontent," *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 5 (Winter, 1990): 1-20.

Within the frame of mind set by these ideas about regime type and political culture, the best and possibly sole way of eliminating the Iraqi threat was to transform their regime, which could not happen with Saddam or any other Baathist still in power. Regime change advocates in the United States echoed Ajami and Makiya's arguments to make the case that until Iraq's regime was transformed, it would remain a source of trouble. Laurie Mylroie argued that Iraq needed push around its neighbors in order to justify domestic oppression and steal the wealth required to sustain his authority at home.¹⁸⁶ The *New Republic* editors, major boosters of the war and regime change, saw Iraqi aggression as part of a deeper rot in Middle Eastern politics: "The distinctive aggression against Kuwait is an expression of deep resentments in an Arab body politic that has never found a way to channel resentments into realistic hopes and reasonable programs."¹⁸⁷ Regime change advocates reasoned that a coup was a poor solution because the most likely successor would be, in Richard Perle's words, one of the "little Saddams" that Iraqi politics tended to produce.¹⁸⁸

Regime change boosters identified democracy as the solution to this problem, which meant that the United States should seek to remove Saddam and the Baathist system. For example, columnist Flora Lewis argued that "a prerequisite for achieving the longer-range goal of a security balance in the region" entailed "ousting the regime and opening a chance for victims of one of the world's nastiest dictatorships to develop democratically."¹⁸⁹ A.M.

¹⁸⁶ Judith Miller and Laurie Mylroie, *Saddam Hussein and the Crisis in the Gulf* (New York: Times Books, 1990), 53-4.

¹⁸⁷ Editorial, "Tough Duty," *New Republic*, December 10, 1990, 9.

¹⁸⁸ Richard Perle, "In the Gulf, the Danger of a Diplomatic Solution," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1990, E21.

¹⁸⁹ Flora Lewis, "Eliminate Saddam Hussein: The Best Way to Long-Term Peace," *New York Times*, January 22, 1991, A23; Jim Hoagland, "Back Democracy in Iraq," *Washington Post*, February 26, 1991, A21.

Rosenthal reasoned that the United States should break the cycle of Arab violence and tyranny by implanting democracy in Iraq.¹⁹⁰ Many politicians and commentators recommended that Bush expand contacts with the Iraqi opposition. Democratic Senator Mark Sanford, for instance called for the United States to help install the Iraqi National Congress, a newly formed opposition group, as a new government that would oversee elections.¹⁹¹

Furthermore, many regime change advocates believed the United States had to pursue regime change now because any attempt to contain Saddam after the crisis would be doomed from the start. Charles Krauthammer contended that the states surrounding Iraq were too weak and quarrelsome to rely on as part of a containment policy. The United States would have to take the lead in watching Saddam, which would require leaving a large force in the region.¹⁹² Senator D'Amato and others argued that the United States could never get Saddam, an inveterate deal-breaker, to commit to an arrangement that would destroy his WMD and limit his military.¹⁹³ Furthermore, regime change advocates noted that containment would rely on deterring Saddam from aggression, but they doubted that Saddam was rational enough to be deterred. For instance, William Safire argued: "A threat from us of massive retaliation is meaningless; a deterrent to a rational leader is an incentive to a martyr."¹⁹⁴ In keeping with the regime concept, advocates of this approach concluded that the United States could not devise a policy of constraints, threats, or

¹⁹⁰ A.M. Rosenthal, "Neither God nor Infidel," *New York Times*, February 15, 1991, A35.

¹⁹¹ See these sources for calls for expanded contacts with the Iraqi opposition, including Mark Sanford's argument: Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, December 5, 1990, 162; Flora Lewis, "Embolden Hussein's Opponents," *New York Times*, November 24, 1990, A21; Laurie Mylroie, "Post-War Issues: The Future of Iraq," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch Paper 71, February 27, 1991, accessed January 21, 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/post-war-issues-the-future-of-iraq>.

¹⁹² Charles Krauthammer, "Why Containing Saddam is Not Enough," *Washington Post*, September 7, 1990, A15.

¹⁹³ D'Amato, "Hussein Must be Ousted," *New York Times*, August 24 1990.

¹⁹⁴ Safire, "The Phony War," *New York Times*, October 1, 1990.

incentives that would change Iraqi behavior. Iraq's actions stemmed inexorably from the nature of the Baathist regime, and only uprooting that regime could address that core problem.

Regime change advocates set out highly ambitious goals, but during the Gulf Crisis they rarely spelled out how the United States would achieve these ends. Among major media outlets, only the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board recommended that the United States “take Baghdad and install a MacArthur regency.”¹⁹⁵ Frank Gaffney also went far beyond the norm in calling for the United States to start arming Shiites, Kurds, and disaffected military personnel in order to start an internal rebellion against the Baathists.¹⁹⁶ Although regime change advocates pushed for much broader goals than the administration, few offered a strategy to achieve this objective beyond what the United States was already doing.¹⁹⁷

Nonetheless, most regime change advocates shared the Bush's reservations about involvement in internal Iraqi affairs. Few of the writers who called for regime change as a policy goal recommended anything close to occupying of Iraq. Richard Perle did not even like the idea of a ground war at all, preferring the less risky use of air power to degrade and destabilize the regime.¹⁹⁸ Like these regime change advocates, the U.S. public wanted to pursue grand aims in Iraq but did not identify clear ways of achieving these goals. A Gallup poll in August 1990 found that 73% of respondents thought that removing Saddam's government from power should be a coalition goal.¹⁹⁹ This outlook held steady throughout the crisis, as two polls in February 1991

¹⁹⁵ Editorial, “Goals in the Gulf,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 1990, A10.

¹⁹⁶ Gaffney, “Get it Over With,” *New Republic*, December 10, 1990, 19-20.

¹⁹⁷ Mylroie, “The Future of Iraq,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 27, 1991; Krauthammer, “It's Not Just Oil,” *Washington Post*, August 27, 1990.

¹⁹⁸ Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region*, November 29, 1990, 374.

¹⁹⁹ Rosita Thomas, *American Public Opinion on the Iraq-Kuwait Crisis*, 5.

found that 90% thought Saddam should be brought to trial at the conflict's end and 70% favored assassinating Saddam. Nevertheless, polling data also suggests that Americans did not want to occupy Iraq after the conflict.²⁰⁰ Not until after Desert Storm, when Saddam appeared to be teetering on the brink of overthrow, did regime change advocates start to level a more effective argument against the Bush's policy in terms of how regime change could be achieved.

Conclusion

Regime change advocates during the Gulf Crisis wanted to reframe Iraq policy as a struggle to address the Saddam problem first and the Kuwait problem second. They contended that the real imperative in this crisis was preventing a nuclear Iraq from dominating this vital region. Saddam's gamble of invading Kuwait gave the United States the opportunity to eliminate this threat once and for all; that was the priority, not the liberation of Kuwait. As Krauthammer phrased it: "Liberating Kuwait is the means. Defeating Saddam is the end."²⁰¹

The *casus belli* of regime change advocates inverted the thinking of the Bush administration. Bush fought the war primarily to liberate Kuwait, prevent Saddam from controlling energy resources, and shape the post-Cold War international system in a positive manner. Bush also sought to degrade Saddam's strength in order to make him or his successor easier to contain in the aftermath of the war. However, the Bush administration was wary of pursuing this ancillary goal too openly or directly lest it jeopardize more important priorities, such as bolstering a multilateral approach to countering aggression or staying out of Middle Eastern politics. Unlike with regime change advocates, weakening Saddam was not the priority but one of many goals that had to be balanced. Rather than seeking Saddam's overthrow, Bush

²⁰⁰ Polling data from Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Crisis*, 412.

²⁰¹ Charles Krauthammer, "Rush to Diplomacy: How to Disguise Defeat," *Washington Post*, January 4, 1991, A17.

prepared to contain Iraq and enforce the writ of the United Nations regardless of who held the reins of power in Baghdad. The focus was, in Haass' words, on "external behavior" of the Iraqi state rather than the "domestic trajectory" of Iraqi politics.²⁰²

The argument for regime change during the Gulf Crisis is nevertheless important to the broader story of Iraq policy in the later 1990s. Regime change advocates put forth the problem of the regime as a powerful argument against the administration's pursuit of limited ends during the conflict as well as their budding containment strategy. The Bush administration had not yet answered to itself or the nation whether Saddam, much less the Baathist system, had to be removed to satisfy U.S. goals in the region. It had a strategy for managing the problem, but it had not spelled out an endgame for U.S. policy towards Iraq.

In a sense, this uncertainty inhered in the administration's realist approach to global politics. They aimed not to transform the politics of a region or a state but to restore balance and stability in the region, pursue internationalist goals, and minimize the expenditure of lives and resources. While they acknowledged the brutal nature of Iraq's regime, the enormous task of reconstituting a nation's political system, especially by force, was anathema in this worldview.²⁰³ Nevertheless, to Bush's chagrin, the war itself and its aftermath would only bolster the suspicion that the root of Iraq's misbehavior was the regime itself, a problem that neither the toppling of any given leader nor a containment policy could resolve. The regime problem would form the heart of the argument against containment in the coming years.

²⁰² Richard Haass, interview with Joseph Stieb, October 4, 2017.

²⁰³ For discussions of how a type of multilateralist realism informed the top actors in the Bush administration, see Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 555-556; Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 68, 158-163.

CHAPTER 2: THE FALLOUT FROM VICTORY: CONTAINMENT AND ITS CRITICS, 1991-1991

Introduction

In early March 1991, an elderly woman named Daisy Lucas from Martinsburg, West Virginia wrote to her senators, Robert Byrd (D) and Jay Rockefeller (D), with a message for President Bush about the recently concluded war in the Persian Gulf. The senators promptly passed the letter to the President. Lucas praised Bush's handling of the crisis but lamented that Bush had not toppled Saddam, saying: "In fact, he should not be in power at all, kick his butt out. Let him suffer like the Kuwaitis have suffered."¹ Representative Stephen Solarz (D-MA), a staunch supporter of Desert Storm, had a similar experience, which he also relayed to the President. Solarz had taught his four-year-old granddaughter Leah the name of Saddam Hussein, and during a visit he asked her "And what did Grandpa do to Saddam Hussein?" She replied, "You gave him a spanking, but you should have thrown him in the trash can."² Bush himself shared this feeling of an anti-climax, telling a press conference on March 1: "I haven't yet felt this wonderfully euphoric feeling that many of the American people feel... I feel much better about it today than I did yesterday. But I think it's that I want to see an end."³

¹ Letter, Daisy Lucas to Robert Byrd and Jay Rockefeller, March 4, 1991, George Bush Presidential Museum and Public Papers, accessed November 27, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/persian-gulf/41-CO072-211871-225130/41-co072-222050.pdf>.

² Stephen Solarz, *Journeys to War and Peace: A Congressional Memoir* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 202.

³ George H.W. Bush, "The President's News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict," March 1, 1991, George Bush Presidential Library and Museum Public Papers, accessed November 14, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2755>, 7.

Americans across the political spectrum shared the mixed emotions of Mrs. Lucas, Leah, and the President about a stunning military victory followed by a messy political outcome. Saddam Hussein's survival and the crushing of Kurdish and Shia revolts in the spring of 1991 further contributed to a sense that Desert Storm was a missed opportunity to definitively solve the Saddam problem, or the threat he posed to U.S. interests in the region beyond the war for Kuwait. By April, polls showed that 55% of Americans thought that the United States should not have ended with war with Saddam still in power, a number that surged to 69% by June and 82% by January 1992.⁴ Strong majorities in the spring of 1991 recommended greater intervention on behalf of the rebels than Bush was willing to undertake, including 78% favoring attacking Iraqi helicopters that were fighting the rebels.⁵

The events of the spring of 1991 seemingly tarnished the success of the Gulf War and added new converts to those who believed the United States should directly pursue regime change, undo the Baathist regime, and foster democracy in Iraq. During the Gulf Crisis, these critics held that Iraq would threaten regional stability as long as Saddam and the Baathists remained in power. However, they had failed to articulate an acceptable strategy for achieving this end beyond Bush's existing policy of devastating the Iraqi economy and military.

In contrast, the last stages of Desert Storm and the rebellions that followed offered these critics numerous opportunities to press the administration to take bolder action toward regime change or disparage it for missing such opportunities. These opportunities included the

⁴ Richard Morin, "Majority in Poll Says U.S. Ended Attack on Iraq Prematurely," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1991, A14; Andrew Rosenthal, "Support for President Amid Some Questions: Poll Finds Strong War Support, but Some Erosion," *New York Times*, June 11, 1991, A1; "A Year After Desert Storm: What the War Didn't Resolve," *Washington Post*, January 12, 1992, C1.

⁵ Morin, "Majority in Poll," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1991. In this poll, 89% favored giving food and clothing to the rebels, 63% favored giving them weapons, 71% favored sending U.S. military advisors to help them, 69% favored threatening to resume the war unless Saddam stepped down, 57% favored resuming bombing Iraqi military forces, and 42% favored resuming the ground war and sending in U.S. troops to help the rebels.

administration's ending of hostilities before coalition troops had fully surrounded Republican Guard units in Kuwait, the charitable ceasefire terms offered to the Iraqi military at the March 3 Safwan meeting, and the general lack of support for the postwar rebellions. Bush's failure to seize these opportunities led to the breaking of the political coalition that had united around the war to liberate Kuwait. By the early summer of 1991, Democrats and neoconservatives, along with by some Republicans, led the criticism of Bush's handling of the end of the war and his new policy of containment, which was installed under a pall of disappointment and anger in domestic politics.⁶ In a broader sense, the war's tragic ending offended the belief in U.S. politics that the world was shifting towards democracy and human rights as the Cold War waned. In combination with partisan recrimination about Iraq policy before the war, this firestorm of criticism influenced both parties and the president to seek tougher policies on Iraq and narrowed the acceptable options, biasing U.S. politics against restrained and flexible approaches.

As this political maelstrom raged, the Bush administration and the international coalition established a postwar policy on Iraq through a series of Security Council resolutions in March 1991. These resolutions established the central mechanism of containment for the next decade. In resolution 687, the Security Council stated that the sanctions on Iraq established in August 1990 would remain in place until Iraq completely destroyed all chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, equipment, and materials as well as all ballistic missiles with ranges over 150 km. Once Iraq had fulfilled these and several other obligations, the sanctions would be lifted.⁷ The

⁶ Histories of U.S. policy and thinking toward Iraq have generally focused on neoconservative and Republican advocacy of regime change, but in the aftermath of Desert Storm the Democrats were the most vocal detractors of Bush's restrained approach. See: Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 329; Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 147-150.

⁷ United Nations Security Council Resolution 687, April 8, 1991, un.org, accessed May 10, 2017, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/687.pdf>, 5, 8.

intention at the United Nations was that sanctions would enforce Iraq's compliance with a series of demands that would defang Iraq, commit it to normal relations with its neighbors, and permit a progressive normalization of relations.

The Bush administration, however, took a decidedly different route than the text of the Security Council resolutions by declaring, starting in March 1991, that sanctions would remain in place until Saddam was out of power and Iraq had complied with the United Nations' demands. After August 1990, Bush established several goals that the Security Council resolutions did not explicitly endorse, including the weakening of Iraqi military power and the containing of Iraq in after the war. It had not, however, clearly decided whether Saddam Hussein absolutely had to be removed for the United States to achieve its goals in the region. Shortly after Desert Storm, key Bush officials came to believe that the possibility of Saddam fully complying with the United and becoming a non-threatening state was so unlikely that eventually his removal would be necessary for establishing regional stability. The atmosphere of criticism and anger at home about the end of the war also contributed to this policy shift.

For the remainder of Bush's presidency, containment was suspended between conflicting goals. The United States sought to maintain pressure on the Iraqi government in order to contain it and compel its compliance with the United Nations. Bush also hoped that combining pressure on the Iraqi state and the declaration that this punishment would remain until Saddam was removed would motivate Iraqi military officers to remove Saddam. However, the several factors restrained the aggressive pursuit of regime change: the desire to avoid direct involvement in Iraqi politics, the anxiety that too much pressure on the Iraqi state or support for splinter groups would cause the ethnic fragmentation of Iraq, and the goal of maintaining the international coalition's unity in order to enforce the Security Council resolutions. Bush's policy was stuck between

domestic political demands to intensify action against Saddam and the consistent calls of key allies for restraint and focus on compliance rather than regime change. The long-term effect of this tension was to open fissures within the international coalition.

As his domestic critics lamented, Bush never prioritized regime change within this web of conflicting goals. His administration focused primarily on containing Saddam and enforcing the Security Council resolutions, in large part because they considered him to be defanged for the time being. They only sought regime change insofar as they maintained the conditions and pressures that might foment a coup. As Saddam issued repeated challenges to the weapons inspections and other Security Council demands in 1991 and 1992, Bush focused on preserving coalition unity and forcing Saddam into compliance rather than, as critics demanded, using those confrontations to destabilize the Baathist regime. Bush continued to try to manage the Saddam problem, but numerous camps in American politics were shifting towards the consensus that this problem could not be managed indefinitely and that the United States needed to find a solution that started with the removal of Saddam.

Ending Desert Storm

The wave of regret and second-guessing that followed Desert Storm gave rise to an enduring school of criticism of Bush's handling of the end of the conflict. These critics contend that Bush had established regime change as an unstated goal of the Gulf War but never developed a plan for how to, in scholar Thomas Mahnken's words, "translate a lopsided battlefield victory into a durable postwar settlement" with Saddam out of power.⁸ Bernard Trainor and Michael Gordon similarly argue that there was an "absence of a clear political

⁸ Thomas Mahnken, "A Squandered Opportunity," in *The Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered*, ed. Andrew Bacevich and Efraim Inbar, (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003), 122.

strategy for postwar Iraq.”⁹ These scholars argue that excessive caution and a lack of planning led the administration to miss opportunities to weaken, humiliate, or topple Saddam. They add that once it became clear that Saddam would survive the end of the war, Bush cobbled together a flawed containment policy.¹⁰ This school of thought can be described as the “Triumph without Victory” thesis, after a book that *U.S. News and World Report* published on conflict in 1992.

There are two major problems with this argument. First, its proponents mistakenly attribute a policy objective to the Bush administration that it did not endorse during the crisis. Since August 1990, key officials had said that they would welcome the overthrow of Saddam because it would make the postwar handling of Iraq easier. However, U.S. policy had always been focused on enforcing the Security Council resolutions, keeping the coalition intact, and weakening the Iraqi military. Far from being an unstated aim, regime change, as Chapter 1 demonstrated, was a hope but not a policy during the crisis in large part because the direct pursuit of regime change would jeopardize these other goals

The second problem with the Triumph without Victory thesis is that the Bush administration in fact had a plan for how to move from the ending of hostilities to an acceptable

⁹ Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995), 476.

¹⁰ This is a common argument in the scholarly literature since the Gulf War. It was also a popular criticism of the Bush administration following the Gulf War itself, one made by politicians from both parties, top members of the military, and numerous public commentators. For scholarly variations of this argument, see Robert Divine, “The Persian Gulf War Revisited: Tactical Victory, Strategic Failure,” *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 1 (Winter, 2000): 129-138; Mahnken, “A Squandered Opportunity?,” 121-148; Gideon Rose, *How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle: A History of American Intervention from World War I to Afghanistan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 226, 230, 234; Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 173, 188, 191; Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002), 52-3; Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1995), 461, 473; Steven Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979: Hegemony, Oil, and War* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2009), 105; Peter Cary, Brian Duffy, and Joseph Galloway, *Triumph Without Victory: The History of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 400; Paul Wolfowitz, “Victory Came Too Easily: Review of Rick Atkinson,” *The National Interest*, April 1, 1994, 87-92.

postwar settlement. The plan was to install a containment system on an enfeebled Iraq that would remove its WMD capabilities and maintain its military and economic weakness. The assumptions embedded in that policy show that the lapses highlighted by critics actually flowed from a coherent strategy. The administration simply was not in the mindset to maximize every feasible way of exerting pressure on the Iraqi state, such as destroying as many military units as possible or supporting the rebellions. The United States planned to impose containment on Iraq after the war regardless of who was in power, so they perceived no need take these risky, maximalist actions. Triumph without Victory proponents could argue that the Bush administration had the wrong plan in their neglect of regime change opportunities, but they are off base in claiming there was no plan to transition from hostilities to a postwar policy.

The United States launched the Desert Storm ground campaign on February 24, 1991. The Marine thrust into Kuwait from the south succeeded almost instantly against Iraqi forces, demoralized after weeks of aerial bombardment. Iraqi troops fled Kuwait City on February 26, and Saddam ordered a retreat from Kuwait the next day. Nevertheless, the rapid success of the initial assault into Kuwait created a problem for the coalition's plan to encircle and destroy the Republican Guard units in the Kuwaiti theater of operations (KTO). Although they suffered heavy damage, the allied assault had pushed these units into Iraq rather than fixing them in place for the flanking strike of the U.S. VIIth and XVIIIth Corps.¹¹ At 2100 hours in Riyadh, Schwarzkopf announced at a press conference that the United States had achieved its mission of liberating Kuwait. Nevertheless, it was still uncertain whether the United States had demolished

¹¹ For early military histories of the Persian Gulf War, see Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*; Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); Cary, Duffy, Galloway, *Triumph Without Victory*.

these Republican Guard forces, which were crucial pillars of the Baathist regime's ability to maintain power at home.¹²

After Schwarzkopf's announcement, President Bush held a Cabinet meeting to determine whether to end hostilities in Iraq. Powell told the Cabinet that at this point the United States had achieved its objectives by liberating Kuwait and striking a harsh blow to Iraqi military power. He emphasized that there were virtually no coherent Iraqi units left in the KTO. Bush, Cheney, and Scowcroft agreed, but Bush asked Powell to call Schwarzkopf and confirm that hostilities could be ended. In a phone call on February 27, Schwarzkopf confirmed that the Republican Guard was surrounded and asked for another day to finish off these units. Powell relayed this request back to Bush, but the Bush Cabinet decided to end the war at the 100-hour mark on February 28, almost a full day short of Schwarzkopf's request.¹³

Bush did this because of concerns that coalition forces were slaughtering too many Iraqis and because the coalition had achieved its main objectives. Powell called Schwarzkopf back to relay this decision and see if he had any reservations. Despite some of his later comments, Schwarzkopf agreed that they had achieved their objectives, including the degrading of Iraqi military capabilities.¹⁴ However, soon after the unilateral ceasefire declaration on February 28, it became clear that the U.S. military had overestimated the level of damage to the Republican

¹² Atkinson, *Crusade*, 471.

¹³ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 471-476; Richard Cheney, Interview by Frontline, PBS, 1995, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/cheney/1.html>; Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 505-6; William Allison, *The Gulf War, 1990-1991* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 139-142.

¹⁴ Powell, *My American Journey*, 509. Norman Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero: The Autobiography of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 470-1.

Guard. About half of the Republican Guard troops and armor in the KTO had escaped to Iraq, including roughly 800 tanks and 1,400 armored personnel carriers.¹⁵

Since Desert Storm, there has been much debate about the communications between Powell, Schwarzkopf, and the field commanders from February 27-28. Numerous critics of the “early end” to the war have argued that Schwarzkopf lacked the situational awareness to recognize that the gates were not closed around Iraqi forces.¹⁶ For example, General John Yeosock, the commander of the Third U.S. Army, had already asked Schwarzkopf for 24 additional hours to complete the destruction of the Republican Guard, which, Yeosock emphasized, was not totally surrounded.¹⁷ Schwarzkopf later said that when Powell called him on February 27, it seemed that Powell was trying to get his consent for a decision to stop the war that had already been made, or a “fait accompli” in Schwarzkopf’s words.¹⁸ This perception possibly explains why Schwarzkopf did not relay the concerns of his ground commanders to Powell and thereby the President. After the war, Powell claimed that if Schwarzkopf had told him that not enough damage had been inflicted on the Republican Guard that Powell would have recommended to Bush that U.S. forces be allowed more time.¹⁹

Despite these disputes about the failure to completely enclose the Republican Guard, it is unclear whether this encirclement mattered much to Bush’s strategy for ending the war and

¹⁵ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 476; Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals’ War*, x; Joseph Galloway and Brian Duffy, “A Desert Storm Accounting,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 16, 1992, 35.

¹⁶ Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals’ War*, 429-431; Lt. Gen. John Cushman, “Desert Storm’s End Game,” *Proceedings Magazine* 110, no. 9, (October, 1993), 76.

¹⁷ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 471. Calvin Waller also stressed to Schwarzkopf that the gates were not closed around the Republican Guard. See Mahnken, “Squandered Opportunity?” 22.

¹⁸ Norman Schwarzkopf, interview by Frontline, PBS, 1995, accessed January 25, 1992, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/schwarzkopf/1.html>.

¹⁹ Colin Powell, interview by Frontline, PBS, 1995, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/powell/1.html>.

containing Iraq. The Bush administration did aim to destroy the Republican Guard units in the KTO along with as much of the Iraqi military as possible. However, they were increasingly aware that American forces were inflicting massive losses on the retreating Iraqis, especially on the so-called Highway of Death between Kuwait City and Basra. Top Bush officials felt that continuing this carnage was unethical and ignoble. Moreover, it would tarnish the public's view of the victory and upset the coalition, especially the Arab allies. Bush was facing direct pressure from states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt to end the fighting as soon as possible because of the war's unpopularity with these states' populations.²⁰ As Scowcroft later said, "I think it was stopped when it was stopped because we believed that we had achieved our objectives and that to continue the war would have been an unnecessary slaughter."²¹ Moreover, as Powell pointed out at the time, Saddam still held twenty divisions, including several Republican Guard divisions, safely within Iraqi territory. Consequently, the Bush administration believed that destroying a few more units in the KTO would not significantly influence whether or not Saddam survived this defeat.²² The broadly shared belief that Saddam would fall from power after the war bolstered this perception.²³

Once the fighting ended on February 28, the United States needed a ceasefire agreement with the Iraqi government to manage the transition to a postwar settlement. On March 1, Schwarzkopf met with two Iraqi generals at Safwan, a town in southeastern Iraq near the Kuwaiti

²⁰ James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 436; Atkinson, *Crusade*, 453; Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 416; Cary, Duffy, Galloway, *Triumph Without Victory*, 395.

²¹ Brent Scowcroft, interview by Frontline, PBS, 1995, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/scowcroft/1.html>; Powell, *My American Journey*, 505.

²² George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 488; Atkinson, *Crusade*, 453.

²³ Andrew Rosenthal, "U.S. Expecting Hussein to Be Out by Year's End," *New York Times*, March 18, 1991, A8.

border. He had received little instruction from the Bush administration about what to achieve in this meeting beyond strictly military issues such as the separation of Iraqi and coalition forces and the exchange of prisoners. Throughout Desert Storm, Bush had tried to avoid micro-managing the generals' conduct of the war, and he viewed the ceasefire negotiations as the military's domain. Schwarzkopf therefore offered terms so lenient they surprised the Iraqi generals. After agreeing on a buffer zone between their forces, Schwarzkopf demanded that Iraq ground all planes in order to avoid further conflict or confusion in the air. The Iraqi generals then requested the United States allow them to fly helicopters to ferry officials from place to place given the extensive damage to Iraq's roads and bridges. Schwarzkopf, in a spirit of chivalrous magnanimity, agreed to this request, even allowing Iraqi officials to fly armed helicopters for this purpose. Lastly, Schwarzkopf reassured the Iraqi generals that the United States had no intention of occupying southern Iraq and would withdraw its soldiers as quickly as possible.²⁴

Since Desert Storm, many critics of Bush's handling of the war's ending point to Safwan as another missed opportunity to humiliate the Iraqi government and destabilize its control over the country.²⁵ U.S. forces at the time occupied large parts of southern Iraq, including key oil fields. Some critics have suggested that Bush should have demanded that Saddam himself appear at Safwan to accept the surrender terms in order to debase the dictator and inspire a coup.²⁶ Others have suggested that even if Saddam did not fall to a coup, demanding abject surrender at Safwan would have driven home to Saddam that he was defeated and possibly made him more

²⁴ Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 444-447.

²⁵ Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 444; Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 186-7; Mahnken, "Squandered Opportunity?" 138, 142; Wolfowitz, "Victory Came Too Easily," 91-92.

²⁶ Richard Haass, interview by Frontline, PBS, 1995, accessed January 28, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/haass/1.html>.

compliant with the United Nations' demands.²⁷ Still more critics have argued that the United States should have preserved strategic uncertainty about its willingness to march to Baghdad or occupy Iraqi territory in the hope that this ambiguity might prompt Iraqi generals to move against Saddam. Indeed, many within the Bush administration and the military reacted uneasily to Schwarzkopf's leniency. Scowcroft, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz, and CENTCOM Air Operations Chief Buster Glosson thought that the concession on helicopters was too indulgent and would allow the Baathist regime to remain in power.²⁸

Detractors of the Safwan agreement saw the lack of instructions from the civilians to Schwarzkopf and his subsequent leniency as evidence that Bush lacked a plan to translate military victory into political success, including the "unstated aim" of toppling Saddam. However, this criticism misreads the administration's priorities and its approach to the end of the war. The Bush Cabinet did discuss whether to demand that Saddam appear at Safwan to surrender, but they determined that if Saddam refused the United States would face the unpleasant choice of backing down and empowering Saddam or resuming fighting. Such a resumption of hostilities, however, would expand the coalition's war aims from liberating Kuwait to forcing Saddam into a symbolic surrender at the cost of more loss of life on both sides. The administration further reasoned that the renewal of hostilities would sink U.S. forces deeper into Iraq while alienating the coalition, which viewed the conflict as successfully concluded.²⁹

On a deeper level, the Bush administration's failure to push for harsher terms at Safwan cohered with its plan to install a containment regime on Iraq that would prioritize disarmament,

²⁷ Charles Freedman, interview by Charles Stewart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, April 14, 1995, 459; Mahnken, "Squandered Opportunity," 142.

²⁸ Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 448; Scowcroft, interview by Frontline, 1995.

²⁹ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 489-490; Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 409-410.

coalition unity, and the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Bush had only ever sought regime change as a byproduct of the actions taken to liberate Kuwait and weaken the Iraqi military. Any direct moves toward regime change would be far too hazardous, possibly leading to a U.S. occupation, the splintering of the country, and the collapse of the coalition.³⁰ Moreover, because they did not believe Saddam's immediate ouster was necessary for the United States to achieve its goals in the region, the administration did not seize every opportunity to maximize the likelihood that Saddam would fall, such as grounding Iraqi helicopters. Far from lacking a plan to terminate the war, the administration planned to quickly extract U.S. forces from Iraq, preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq, and maintain the coalition. Thus, the inexact, hands-off approach to the ceasefire declaration and Safwan flowed from a distinct strategy and set of assumptions.

Installing Containment: March-June 1991

The spring and early summer of 1991 changed the political and strategic dimensions of U.S. policy toward Iraq in pivotal ways. The Bush administration installed a containment regime through a series of Security Council resolutions that imposed demands on Iraq while using sanctions to ensure compliance. At the same time, they tried to establish a policy of indirect regime change through economic pressure and signals to the Iraqi military that Saddam's removal would lead to the easing of sanctions. This restrained policy, however, was challenged by the unexpected Kurdish and Shia rebellions of March 1991. The Bush administration decided to not support these rebellions, but growing domestic criticism and the near-genocidal Iraqi assault on Kurdish civilians that followed the crushing of the revolt led the United States and its allies to establish an NFZ and a humanitarian effort in Northern Iraq. As the administration

³⁰ Haass, "Post-Crisis Security Arrangements in the Gulf," December 28, 1990, 3; Memorandum, Richard Haass to NSC Deputies, January 19, 1991, 2.

struggled to contain Iraq, avoid more entanglements, and placate domestic critics, they gravitated to the position that Saddam would have to be removed to achieve stability in the region.

After the Safwan accords, top Bush administration officials examined how to move from the ceasefire terms to a postwar settlement that would contain Iraq and remove its WMD programs. Richard Haass, the NSC's director of Near East and South Asian Affairs, wrote that the United States should demand the destruction of Iraqi WMD and ballistic missile programs, Iraqi recognition of the border with Kuwait, a system for compensating Kuwaitis and returning stolen property, and Iraqi acceptance of peacekeepers on the border. In Haass' formulation, sanctions would remain in place until Saddam or another Iraqi leader fulfilled these terms. However, he noted that this approach would "remove much of our leverage to see that Saddam is removed." He therefore proposed a strategy in which the United States would state that certain sanctions, such as the ban on oil exports, would be lifted only when Saddam was out of power. He also suggested communicating to Iraqi generals that "we would be willing to waive some compensation claims or be more relaxed toward prosecuting war crimes if there were a leadership change."³¹ Undersecretary of State Robert Kimmitt echoed this approach, writing on February 24 that if Saddam survived the war, "we would be much slower in lifting the oil export limitations in the trade embargo, because we want to deny Saddam the means to rearm."³²

This strategy targeted the Baathist and military elites with a mix of pressures and incentives to encourage a coup against Saddam, although Haass and Kimmitt warned against direct measures to take Saddam down. Bush communicated this concept in a press conference in

³¹ Memorandum, from Richard Haass to Brent Scowcroft, March 7, 1991, OA/ID CF01585-018, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 2.

³² Notes used in conjunction w/2/24/91 appearance on "This Week w/David Brinkley," James Baker, February 24, 1991, MC 197, Box 109, Folder 10, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library.

July 1991: “If the military talked him into stepping aside and getting out of there, I’d give them a real break as far as U.S. policy goes.”³³ This approach of “turning the screw,” as Haass later described it, formed a baseline approach of indirect regime change on which the administration would theoretically add new pressures and incentives throughout the next two years.³⁴

The United States and its allies established a postwar settlement on April 3, 1991 with the passage of Security Council Resolution 687. This resolution issued demands that Iraq had to satisfy to have the sanctions removed. They included the revelation and destruction of all WMD and ballistic missile programs, reparations payments for Kuwait, the recognition of the Kuwaiti border, peacekeepers along the border, and the return of Kuwaiti nationals. To supervise the destruction of WMD, Resolution 687 established the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), an international team of weapons experts given unconditional authority for the “immediate on-site inspection” of Iraqi weapons programs.³⁵ The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in turn, would supervise the destruction of Iraqi nuclear sites. Resolution 687 put the impetus on Iraq to reveal all of its weapons programs, which the inspectors would document and destroy. Once the inspectors were satisfied, Resolution 687 permitted the lifting of sanctions after a Security Council vote. To make sure Iraq did not rebuild its WMD programs, this resolution established UNSCOM as a long-term monitoring and verification agency.³⁶

Immediately following the end of Desert Storm, Bush administration officials made a series of statements that the United States would neither lift sanctions nor normalize relations

³³ Barton Gellman, “U.S. Officials Reiterate Possibility of Attack on Iraq over Arms Issue,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 1991, A16.

³⁴ Memorandum, Richard Haass to Brent Scowcroft, May 24, 1991, OA/ID CF01585, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 1.

³⁵ Cary, Duffy, Galloway, *Triumph Without Victory*, 432-434.

³⁶ Cary, Duffy, Galloway, *Triumph Without Victory*, 434.

with Iraq while Saddam was still in power. On March 13, 1991, Bush told reporters it would be “impossible to have normalized relations with Iraq while Saddam is in there...it is hard to see how an Iraq with him at the helm can rejoin the family of peace-loving nations.”³⁷ Bush repeated this policy again on April 26 as he discussed how to address the Kurdish humanitarian disaster, saying: “there will not be normal relations with this man as long as I’m President of the United States.”³⁸ Again in May he said: “My view is we don’t want to lift these sanctions as long as Saddam Hussein is in power.”³⁹ This became a common refrain from administration officials for the remainder of his presidency.⁴⁰ This policy, of course, assumed that Saddam was not likely to survive for long under economic and diplomatic isolation.⁴¹

This stance against normalization contrasted with the administration’s plans during the Gulf Crisis to permit the reintegration of Iraq, whether Saddam remained in power or not, into the family of nations once it complied with the U.N. demands. However, throughout this period many Bush officials, including the President, doubted that Saddam would ever cease his crusade to dominate the Gulf and cooperate with U.S. demands.⁴² Saddam’s actions during Desert Storm and its aftermath, including the lobbing of missiles at Israel, the destruction of oil wells in Kuwait and the resultant environmental damage, and his brutal crushing of the postwar

³⁷ George H.W. Bush, “The President’s News Conference with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada in Ottawa,” March 13, 1991, George Bush Presidential Library accessed November 14, 2016, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2795_

³⁸ Andrew Rosenthal, “Once Kurds are Safe, U.S. Will Leave Iraq, Bush Says,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1991, 4.

³⁹ Patrick Tyler, “Bush Links End of Trading Ban to Hussein Exit,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1991, A1.

⁴⁰ See other statements by CIA Director Robert Gates in Tyler, “Bush Links End of Trading Ban,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1991.

⁴¹ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 236.

⁴² For example, Bush wrote to himself on February 15: “How do we now guarantee the future peace? I don’t see how it will work with Saddam in power.” See: Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 471.

rebellions, pushed the administration toward the position that normalization with a Saddam-led Iraq would be impossible. Bush made this point to German foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher on March 1: “How can we negotiate with Iraq as long as he is there? With all of the atrocities and the damage he has done to the environment, it will be impossible for us to do anything constructive with Iraq as long as he is there.”⁴³ This growing consensus within the administration also reflected increasing political criticism at home, as this chapter will explore.

Despite the administration’s declarations against normalization, containment remained their priority in the spring and summer of 1991. The Bush team recognized the tension between opposing normalization, creating conditions for a coup, and ensuring Iraqi weakness and compliance with the United Nations. Bush, Baker, and others reasoned that sanctions and inspections were the best way to “put Saddam Hussein in that cage” where he could not rebuild his military power and threaten regional stability.⁴⁴ Neither of these tools of containment would be feasible without the full cooperation of the allies, who needed to eschew trade with Iraq while backing weapons inspections against Iraqi defiance. Many members of the sanctioning coalition, including France, Russia, and China, saw the purpose of sanctions strictly in terms of compelling Iraqi compliance and intended to normalize relations with Saddam if he acquiesced to the United Nations’ terms.⁴⁵ Overall, the Bush administration’s approach to Iraq changed little in conceptual terms from the Gulf Crisis period, where they sought to maximize military and economic damage to the Iraqi state in order to make regime change by coup more likely.

⁴³ Memorandum of Conversation, Hans-Dietrich Genscher and George Bush, March 1, 1991, OA/ID 91108-005, Brent Scowcroft Collection, Presidential Correspondence Files, Presidential Memcons Files, George Bush Presidential Library.

⁴⁴ Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 441.

⁴⁵ Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 59-60.

Top U.S. officials emphasized that there was no international support for a policy that prioritized regime change, although most countries would accept a coup that removed Saddam. For example, Javier Perez de Cuellar, the UN Secretary-General, said in March 1991: “If the objective of pursuing sanctions is to topple the Iraqi regime, then I do not agree.”⁴⁶ U.S. officials repeatedly stressed that the primary function of sanctions was to compel Iraq to satisfy Resolution 687.⁴⁷ Keeping the focus on containment also bolstered the broader goal of sustaining a New World Order where challenges to international security were addressed through multilateral institutions.⁴⁸ Baker probably came closest to clearly delineating U.S. priorities on April 17, 1991: “We must do all we can to continue to quarantine and ostracize the Saddam regime. That means we must never normalize relations with an Iraqi government controlled by Saddam. And it means that UN sanctions must not be relaxed so long as Saddam is in power.”⁴⁹

Despite its plans for containment, the Bush administration was blindsided by the eruption of Shia and Kurdish rebellions in March 1991. These uprisings stemmed from deep resentment of Sunni Baathist oppression of the Shia and Kurds as well as the humiliation and devastation of the war and sanctions. Returning soldiers sparked the revolt in the south by attacking government forces and buildings in Basra. Although Iranian-aligned groups contributed to the revolt, most rebels lacked meaningful connection to foreign nations. The southern rebellion was concentrated in the cities and featured brutal street fighting and terrible atrocities by both sides.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 416.

⁴⁷ Richard Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2009), 142.

⁴⁸ Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, 212.

⁴⁹ Notes from April 17, 1991 EC Ministerial Working Dinner, James Baker, April 17, 1991, MC 197, Box 110, Folder 2, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library.

Bush came under heavy criticism in the spring of 1991 and afterwards for failing to help the rebels even after making several calls for the Iraqi people to revolt against Saddam. The clearest exhortation came during Desert Storm on February 15 when Bush told an audience of workers at a Raytheon plant in Massachusetts: “And there’s another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside, and then comply with the United Nations resolution and rejoin the family of peace-loving nations.”⁵¹ Bush later said that he made this statement “impulsively” and that he did not intend to encourage the Iraqi people to revolt. Rather, he aimed to signal to the Iraqi military that if they overthrew Saddam and complied with the United Nations’ demands the war would be halted and the sanctions eventually removed.⁵²

As controversial as this call for rebellion later became, it largely aligned with administration policy before and after February 1991. On August 11, 1991, Bush said to reporters: “I hope that the Iraqi people do something about it so that their leader will live by the norms of international behavior that will be acceptable to other nations.”⁵³ When Baker saw a transcript of Bush’s remarks at Raytheon, he simply noted in the text: “Statement of fact.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 241-245.

⁵¹ George H.W. Bush, “Remarks to Raytheon Missile Systems Plant Employees in Andover, Massachusetts,” February 15, 1991, George Bush Presidential Library, accessed November 14, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2711>.

⁵² Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 472.

⁵³ For Bush quote, see “Confrontation in the Gulf: Excerpts From Statements by Bush on Strategy in the Gulf,” *New York Times*, August 12, 1990. For other illustrations of U.S. acceptance of a coup or rebellion as a way out of the confrontation with Iraq before Desert Storm, see Cheney and Baker testimonies in Senate Armed Services Committee, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region*, September 11, 1990, 13; House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Crisis in the Persian Gulf*, September 4, 1990, 13. This passive formulation about fomenting a coup endured into the post war era. For instance, Baker on March 17 told ABC News: “We’ve said on a number of occasions that it’s really up to the Iraqi people to decide who their leadership is. We would like to see a change in government.” For Baker quote, see Eric Schmitt, “Allies Tell Iraq not to Fly Planes,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1991, A1.

⁵⁴ Copy of 2/15/91 Remarks by POTUS to Raytheon Missile Systems Plant Employees, James Baker’s Notes, February 15, 1991, MC 197, Box 109, Folder 10, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley J. Mudd Library.

Baker meant that since August 1990, U.S. policy had always treated the Saddam's overthrow by a coup as a way to resolve the crisis. That did not mean, in the administration's view, that the United States was encouraging a massive revolt or promising direct aid to coup plotters or rebels. The disjunction occurred in their public language rather than in their strategic thinking.

For a brief period in March, it appeared that Saddam's regime was in severe jeopardy. Historian Phebe Marr estimates that the rebels may have controlled large parts of fourteen of Iraq's eighteen provinces.⁵⁵ The rebellions created a major dilemma for the Bush team, which wanted Saddam to fall but intended to remain out of Iraqi politics. The administration decided against supporting the rebels for several reasons. First, the top officials did not think that the rebels would succeed. A CIA report in mid-March concluded that unless uprisings occurred in the Sunni-dominated core of the country around Baghdad or in the military Saddam would be able to use the Republican Guard and the security agencies to beat down the rebels.⁵⁶ The report noted that Saddam had thoroughly cultivated the loyalty of the top brass of the security forces through a mix of perks and punishments, making the defection of entire units unlikely. Saddam had also surrounded the capital with fiercely loyal Republican Guard units with leaders drawn from the Tikriti elite that controlled the Baath Party.⁵⁷

Second, the administration believed that any step toward helping the rebels would likely embroil U.S. troops in fighting and/or an occupation of Iraqi territory. They held that the U.S. military had achieved its objectives in the Gulf and that backing the rebels would expand objectives unnecessarily, breaking up a coalition that had no interest in overthrowing Saddam.

⁵⁵ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 242.

⁵⁶ CIA Report: Iraq: Implications of Insurrection and Prospects for Saddam's Survival, March 16, 1991, CIA.gov, accessed February 6, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0001441917>, 7.

⁵⁷ CIA Report, March 16, 1991, CIA.gov, 7-8.

Many in the media and Congress called for the United States to reverse the agreement at Safwan to allow Iraqi helicopters to fly now that Saddam was using armed helicopters against the rebels. Top Bush officials, however, saw shooting down the helicopters as the first step towards intractable involvement in the Iraqi civil war. State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutweiler spelled out the slippery slope dilemma of grounding Iraqi helicopters:

Once you make that decision [shooting down helicopters], then why aren't you taking on tanks? Why aren't you taking on artillery? How are you going to determine who is going to lead this country? Why would you be putting American lives at risk to interject yourself in something that was never a stated goal or objective either militarily or politically, to somehow change the Iraqi leadership?"⁵⁸

In sum, the administration, especially Powell, thought that direct military intervention would transform a successful war for clear goals into a desert version of Vietnam, draining U.S. resources, lives, and credibility for uncertain purposes.⁵⁹

The third reason that Bush decided against helping the rebels was the fear that a victory by the Shia rebels would transform Iraq into an Iranian client, creating a powerful Shia bloc that would challenge U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia and Egypt for preeminence in the Gulf. Iran voiced its support for the Shia rebels and sent some militia forces to fight in southern Iraq. Many rebels carried portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and used Iranian revolutionary slogans. Iranian involvement was too moderate to tip the balance against Saddam, but it was sufficient to frighten the Bush administration into suspecting that a victorious Shia rebellion would benefit Iran.⁶⁰ The administration recognized that most Shia rebels were not literal agents of Iran, but they

⁵⁸ Ann Devroy and Al Kamen, "Bush, Aides Keep Quiet on Rebels: Defense of Policy Viewed as Risky," April 3, 1991, A1.

⁵⁹ "'Wait and See' on Iraq: Bush Views Aiding Rebels as Potential Morass," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1991, A1; Atkinson, *Crusade*, 490-91. Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 218. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 440.

⁶⁰ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 246.

nonetheless anticipated that a Shia-dominated Iraq would follow pro-Iranian policies and possibly emulate its theocratic style of government. This Shia bloc could then try to subvert the Gulf States and empower religious fundamentalism throughout the region.⁶¹ The Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, told the United States that they opposed any aid to the Shia rebels, preferring a weakened Sunni leadership in Iraq that could still balance against Iran.⁶²

Lastly, the Bush administration avoided helping the rebels because they thought a prolonged civil war might cause a “Lebanon-style power vacuum” in Iraq. The war might break the country into warring ethnic fragments or provoke interventions from regional powers like Iran, Turkey, and Syria. The CIA cautioned that Iran, for instance, might step in to bolster the Shia rebels, while Turkey might intervene to quash the formation of an independent Kurdish state.⁶³ Military support for the rebels would only help them last longer against the government, magnifying the danger of ethnic division. Furthermore, a sense that this civil war was a resumption of timeless sectarian blood feuds in Iraqi history fed the sense that the United States should stay out of this morass. For example, one senior Bush official told a reporter: “The Kurds and Shi’ites were fighting the Sunnis for years before we got there, and they’ll continue killing each other long after we’ve gone.”⁶⁴

In fact, the Bush administration believed that the rebellions saved Saddam rather than bringing about his downfall. The expectation in U.S. policy was that once the war ended a

⁶¹ CIA Report: March 16, 1991, CIA.gov, 4; Joseph McGhee, interview by Charles Stewart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, August 21, 1997, 137.

⁶² Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, 414.

⁶³ CIA Report, March 16, 1991, CIA.gov, 4-5; Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 437.

⁶⁴ G.J. Church and D. Goodgame, “Keeping Hands Off,” *Time Magazine*, April 8, 1991, 22.

faction of the military or Baath party would move against Saddam after realizing how much his gamble had cost the country. The revolts, however, pinned the military down in fighting against the rebels and gave them common cause with Saddam in protecting the Sunni core and their own positions of power.⁶⁵ Siding with Saddam became their path to survival, giving Saddam, in Baker's words, "a pretty solid basis to argue to his army 'stick with me or we'll all be out.'"⁶⁶ One Bush official later said: "The uprisings made it inevitable that there would not be a coup."⁶⁷

The Baathist regime had crushed both rebellions by early April. In the south, the Iraqi government executed thousands in retribution. In the North, terrified Kurds, expecting a massacre, fled by the millions toward the Turkish and Iranian borders. They suffered Iraqi air attacks and insufficient food, clothing, and shelter as they moved into mountains. Soon these refugees were dying at a rate of 500-1000 per day while receiving little help from Turkey.⁶⁸

The administration hesitated to intervene to help the Kurds, viewing them as another nasty, feuding set of factions within the unpleasant scene of Iraqi politics.⁶⁹ One State Department official reflected this perspective in saying: "They're nice people, and they're cute, but they're really just bandits. They spend as much time fighting each other as central authority. They're losers."⁷⁰ John Kelly, the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, later said that

⁶⁵ Andrew Rosenthal, "What the U.S. Wants to Happen in Iraq Remains Unclear," *New York Times*, March 24, 1991, E3.

⁶⁶ James Baker, interview by Frontline, PBS, 1995, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/baker/1.html>

⁶⁷ Ann Devroy and Al Kamen, "Saddam's Power Seen Increasing: U.S. Officials no Longer Regard His Ouster as Likely This Year," *Washington Post*, April 20, 1991, A1; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 246-247. Also see statements that the rebellions prevented a coup from administration officials: Colin Powell quoted in Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 456; Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 489.

⁶⁸ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 253-255.

⁶⁹ Church and Goodgame, "Keeping Hands Off," *Time*, 22.

⁷⁰ Christopher Dickey, "Could the Rebels Really Rule?" *Newsweek*, April 15, 1991, 27.

while the media latched onto the Kurds for “feel good articles,” his office tried to limit contact with them because “many have a lot of blood on their hands and are certainly no great defenders of human rights.”⁷¹ Powell and other senior military officers disliked the idea of an indefinite presence in Iraqi territory.⁷²

Several factors nonetheless prevailed upon Bush to help the Kurds. In early April, James Baker visited the refugee camps on the Turkish border, witnessing a “human nightmare.” An emotionally stirred Baker called Bush on the plane out of Turkey and told him “There’s a true disaster in the making if we don’t move fast... We’ve got to do something and we’ve got to do it now. If we don’t, literally thousands of people are going to die.”⁷³ Baker pressed for a massive humanitarian effort and the use of U.S. forces to create safe havens for the refugees.⁷⁴ Great Britain, France, and Turkey called for aid for the Kurds, as did many in Congress and large portions of the American public.⁷⁵ The crisis was especially destabilizing for Turkey, which did not want desperate Kurds setting up camp in an area awash in Kurdish separatism.⁷⁶

For these reasons, on April 16 Bush started Operation Provide Comfort, a massive humanitarian effort in which U.S. troops deployed to northern Iraq as coalition air power created a safe zone for the refugees. The United States and the United Nations funneled immense quantities of aid to the refugees, and by the end of June they had facilitated the return of most of

⁷¹ John Kelly, interview by Charles Stewart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, December 12, 1995, 303.

⁷² Stephen Budiansky, “Saddam’s Revenge,” *U.S. News and World Report*, April 15, 1991, 26.

⁷³ Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 433-434.

⁷⁴ Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 434.

⁷⁵ Gerald Seib, “Mideast Mess: How Miscalculations Spawned U.S. Policy toward Postwar Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 1991, A1.

⁷⁶ Elaine Sciolino, “How Bush Overcame Reluctance and Embraced Kurdish Relief,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1991, A16.

these refugees to their homes. At this point, the coalition troops withdrew from northern Iraq while the NFZ remained in place to deter Iraqi military incursions into Kurdish territory and to safeguard U.N. aid activities.⁷⁷ The United States, Great Britain, and France also formed a legal basis for protecting the Kurds by passing Security Council Resolution 688 on April 5, 1991. This resolution condemned the atrocities against the Kurds, required that Iraq permit humanitarian agencies to operate in Kurdish areas, and insisted that: “the human and political rights of all Iraqis are respected.”⁷⁸ This last statement created a mandate for the continuation of the NFZ beyond the current crisis to guarantee the safety of the Kurds. It also provided a legal foundation for military intervention in Iraq in the coming years.⁷⁹

President Bush stressed that this intervention was for humanitarian purposes only and that no U.S. forces would take part in Iraq’s civil war. He said in mid-April, “I do not want one single soldier or airman shoved into a civil war in Iraq that’s been going on for ages.”⁸⁰ The administration also aimed to avoid being dragged into intra-Kurdish politics, fearing that the Kurds might try to bait the Iraqi military into a fight to force the United States to choose between attacking the Iraqi forces and letting the Kurds be slaughtered.⁸¹ A central part of U.S. strategy throughout the crisis had been to preserve Iraqi territorial integrity and avoid a prolonged presence there. By mid-April, despite every attempt to avoid intervention, the United States now

⁷⁷ Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 255-258.

⁷⁸ Cary, Duffy, Galloway, *Triumph without Victory*, 437.

⁷⁹ David Malone, *The International Struggle Over Iraq: Politics in the U.N. Security Council 1980-2005* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 90, 95.

⁸⁰ Maureen Dowd, “Bush Stands Firm on Military Policy in Iraqi Civil War: No Backing for Rebels,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1991, 1.

⁸¹ Memorandum, Richard Haass to Brent Scowcroft, “Keeping the Pressure on Saddam Hussein’s Regime: Strategy and Actions,” May 24, 1991, OA/ID CF01585, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 3.

had ground and air units devoted to protecting a large swath of sovereign Iraqi territory, all without a clear sense of when that protective cover could be lifted.

By May 1991, it had become clear that Saddam would most likely survive these postwar domestic challenges. While Bush still anticipated that Saddam would fall to a coup within a year, this realization prompted the United States to seek more ways to “turn the screw” and incentivize the generals and political elites to move against Saddam.⁸² Aside from keeping the sanctions intact while Saddam remained in power, Richard Haass wrote that the United States should encourage all members of the coalition to cut off ties to the regime to increase their diplomatic isolation.⁸³ The Iraqi people, Haass wrote, needed to absorb “the message that only Saddam’s removal will lead to substantial improvement in their lives and livelihoods.”⁸⁴ Haass further projected that deliberate infringements on Iraq’s sovereignty, including inspections, reparations, and the presence of coalition forces in northern Iraq, created “a grinding irritant to the highly developed nationalism of Iraq’s educated classes and the Baathist military leadership.”⁸⁵

Visa restrictions, the denial of aid from global financial organizations, and the freezing of Iraqi assets would compound the Iraqi elite’s deprivation and humiliation. In meetings with Iraqi officials, the United States and its allies reinforced the fact that “relations are not normal because of Saddam’s continued role” while promising aid and the easing of sanctions in exchange for Saddam’s removal.⁸⁶ The Bush administration hoped that the combination of these pressures

⁸² Patrick Tyler, “Hussein’s Ouster is U.S. Goal, But at What Cost to the Iraqis?” *New York Times*, April 28, 1991, E1.

⁸³ Memorandum, Haass to Scowcroft, “Keeping the Pressure,” May 24, 1991, 2.

⁸⁴ Memorandum, Haass to Scowcroft, “Impact on International Isolation on Iraqi and Saddam Husayn,” May 24, 1991, OA/ID CF01585, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 1.

⁸⁵ Memorandum, Haass to Scowcroft, “Keeping the Pressure,” May 24, 1991, 1.

with the chance to see them relaxed once Saddam was gone would drive the Iraqi elite to decapitate the regime. In early May, Bush accelerated a covert action program to make contacts in the Iraqi military. This program involved funneling aid to exile groups like the Iraqi National Accord (INA), composed of generals who had fled Iraq. The CIA also provided money to a public relations firm called the Rendon group to produce anti-Saddam propaganda that the opposition could use.⁸⁷

The Fallout from Victory: Political Backlash at Home, March-June 1991

By the summer of 1991, in spite of the messy ending to the war, President Bush held that its policy toward Iraq since Desert Storm had largely succeeded. The war and its aftermath had degraded the Iraqi military and ejected it from Kuwait. A CIA report calculated that “Iraq’s ground forces do not constitute a regional threat” and would not recover prewar strength until the late 1990s at the earliest.⁸⁸ A separate report concluded that “Iraq has not abandoned its regional ambitions, but the immediate need to devote its resources to reconstruction, reestablishing domestic stability, securing its borders, and repairing severed political and economic ties to the international community restricts its policy options.”⁸⁹ At the same time, the CIA judged that the

⁸⁶ Memorandum, Haass to Scowcroft, “Keeping the Pressure,” May 24, 1991, 1-3.

⁸⁷ Richard Bonin, *Arrows of the Night: Ahmad Chalabi’s Long Journey to Triumph in Iraq* (New York : Doubleday, 2011), 64; Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 31; Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, 58-9; *ABC News Special Report*, “Unfinished Business: The CIA and Saddam Hussein,” directed by Peter Jennings, ABC News, 1997, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzHHAI-eq2I>.

⁸⁸ CIA Report: Iraq’s Ground Forces: An Assessment, May 1991, US Intelligence on the Middle East, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/us-intelligence-on-the-middle-east/cia-report-iraqs-ground-forces-an-assessment-may-1991-secret-cia;umeoumeob0908>, 5.

⁸⁹ CIA Report: Iran-Iraq: Renewed Rivalry, July 1991, US Intelligence on the Middle East, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/us-intelligence-on-the-middle-east/cia-report-iraniraq-renewed-rivalry-july-1991-secret-cia;umeoumeob09089>, 3.

Iraqi military could defend Iraq against one regional opponent, suggesting that the United States had achieved the “Goldilocks outcome” of a weakened Iraq that could balance Iranian power.⁹⁰

Furthermore, the administration had struck a serious blow against Saddam’s WMD ambitions, destroying much of his capacity during the war and compelling him to let weapons inspectors into Iraq, the first of which arrived in June 1991. While U.S. forces remained engaged in Operation Provide Comfort, they had avoided becoming embroiled in the postwar rebellions and had saved countless Kurdish lives. The coalition continued to support inspections and sanctions, although the Bush administration differed from its allies about the conditions for the lifting of sanctions. Bush defended these achievements in an interview in June: “Don’t change the goalposts, I tell my critics. The goalposts were, aggression will not stand. And aggression didn’t stand. And it was an enormous victory.”⁹¹

The domestic political reaction to the events of the spring of 1991, however, challenged Bush’s assertions that the United States had won a great victory in Iraq. During the spring of 1991, Americans from across the political and ideological spectrum believed there was a window of opportunity to solve the Saddam problem by removing him from power. He appeared to be teetering on the edge of oblivion, and advocates of a tougher line in both parties, the press, and intellectual circles wanted Bush to give him a final push. These “simple solutionists,” as Colin Powell derisively labeled them, identified many ways this could be done: backing the rebels by attacking Iraqi helicopters and tanks, keeping troops in southern Iraq until Saddam was removed,

⁹⁰ CIA Report, *Iraq’s Ground Forces*, May 1991, US Intelligence on the Middle East, 5; Quote about the Goldilocks Outcome is taken from Haass, *War of Necessity*, 126.

⁹¹ George Bush, interview by Linda Douglas, July 15, 1991, George Bush Presidential Library, accessed November 13, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/3099>.

holding on to oil fields in southern Iraq, passing a Security Council resolution declaring Saddam's ouster as a coalition goal, and material support for rebels or the opposition in exile.⁹²

Two convictions united the diverse critics of Bush's handling of the end of the Gulf War. First, they pointed to the nature of the Iraqi regime to bolster the argument that Saddam needed to be removed from power now while the opportunity lasted. The core of their argument was that the Baathist regime and ideology, as well as Saddam personally, were immutable in their brutality, hostility, and desire to dominate the Gulf. Solving the Saddam problem completely required seizing the opportunity while he and his regime were weak. *New York Times* columnist A.M. Rosenthal wrote in March: "As long as the man who brought about war is still in power, the peace will not be secure. It was precisely Iraq's most intimate internal affair-the character of its Government-that forced us into war."⁹³ In April, Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) called for the pursuit of "final victory" over Saddam using "all reasonable diplomatic, economic, and military means to achieve his removal from power. He reasoned: "Until that end is realized, the peace and stability of the region will not have been fully accomplished."⁹⁴

The United States, these critics argued, needed to go beyond hoping for a coup and declare a democratic Iraq as a primary goal. Otherwise, there would be persistent aggression and human rights abuses from Iraq, even if another Baathist replaced Saddam. Senator Al Gore (D-

⁹² Powell quote is from his memoir: *My American Journey*, 511. For suggestions made about how to help the rebels in the spring of 1991, see also: Editorial, "George Bush's Elbe," *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 1991, A14; Laurie Mylroie, "Help the Iraqi Resistance," *Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 1991, A22; Charles Krauthammer, "It's Time to Finish Saddam," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1991, A21; Editorial, "Desert Shame," *The New Republic*, April 29, 1991, 7-8. Policy recommendations by Al Gore in *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., April 18, 1991, 8646; See also Gore's letter to Bush pleading for aid to the rebels: Letter, Al Gore to Bush, April 5, 1991, George Bush Presidential Library, accessed November 28, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/persian-gulf/41-CO072-225587-229981/41-co072-226456.pdf>.

⁹³ A.M. Rosenthal, "How to Lose the Peace," *New York Times*, March 12, 1991, A23.

⁹⁴ *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., April 9, 1991, 7643.

TN) reflected this logic in a letter to Scowcroft on April 3 calling for an NFZ against Iraqi helicopters: “Saddam’s external behavior is of a piece with the internal character of his regime.”⁹⁵ Democratic Senators Robert Kerrey (NE), Claiborne Pell (RI), Lee Hamilton (IN), and Ted Kennedy (MA) all advocated openly making democracy a goal in Iraq, citing “history’s sweep toward democracy.” Kerrey couched his argument in grandly universal terms, claiming that “Yearning for democratic processes is a natural and universal human characteristic—that is what our Founders taught. It is a fundamental aspect of human dignity which cuts across all national, religious, ethnic, and economic barriers.”⁹⁶ Many Republican politicians shared these views, although they voiced these criticisms less loudly out of loyalty to Bush.⁹⁷

The second conviction uniting these critics was a sense of responsibility for inspiring the rebels who were being slaughtered as coalition forces stood by. An influential Congressional Staff Report prepared by Peter Galbraith, an aide to Claiborne Pell, accused Bush of being unprepared for the postwar rebellions and then exacerbating the situation by calling for an uprising. Galbraith, who had traveled to Kurdistan in March 1991, concluded that the United States had “lost an opportunity to overthrow Saddam Hussein in mid-March” by failing to cultivate ties with opposition groups during the crisis or to offer any military support for the rebels.⁹⁸ Galbraith later promised that “had the United States continued on to Baghdad, we would

⁹⁵ Letter, Al Gore to George Bush, April 5, 1991, George Bush Presidential Papers. See also Gore, *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., April 18, 1991, 8644-8648.

⁹⁶ Kerrey quote is from *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., February 27, 1991, 4403. Also see statements advocating democracy as a policy goal in Iraq from Pell and Kennedy: *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., March 7, 1991, 5377; *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., May 22, 1991, 12090.

⁹⁷ For an example of Republican senator who harshly criticized Bush’s handling of the end of the war, see Alphonse D’Amato testimony in *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., April 11, 1991, 7916.

⁹⁸ “Civil War in Iraq,” A Staff Report to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, S. Rpt. 102-27, 102nd Congress, 1st Session, May 1991 (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1991) 1-2.

have been received with kisses and as liberators every step of the way.”⁹⁹ Other calls proliferated for aid to the rebels, or at least to the refugees. Stephen Solarz declared it “morally and politically unacceptable to stand by and do nothing while Saddam brutally crushes a revolt we helped inspire.”¹⁰⁰ Numerous prominent Congressmen and senators, including many who had opposed the war, demanded that Bush take action to stop the killing and the refugee crisis, especially in Kurdistan.¹⁰¹ They emphasized that the Shia rebels were not Iranian pawns, even arguing that the Iraqi Shia tradition “opposes all religious involvement in politics.”¹⁰² In this view, the United States was throwing away a chance to build a better Iraq by betraying pro-democracy forces out of sheer myopia, cynicism, and an outsized fear of becoming enmeshed in Iraqi affairs.¹⁰³

Bush also came under fire for his management of the ending of hostilities, especially the Safwan accords. Conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer accused Bush of a naïve mercy in halting the war before the Republican Guard was crushed, saying: “He spared the lives of

⁹⁹ Peter Galbraith, Speech to Women’s National Democratic Club, Records of the U.S. Senate, Foreign Relations Committee, Subject Files, Persian Gulf-Iraq Invasion of Kuwait, War Powers, Box 100, Folder Iraq 1992 (2 of 2), National Archives, 11.

¹⁰⁰ George Lardner Jr., “Solarz Wants U.N. to Demand Saddam Resign,” *Washington Post*, April 11, 1991, A32. See also: Stephen Solarz, “Get Involved: U.N. Must Oust Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 1991, A14.

¹⁰¹ George Lardner Jr., “Solarz Wants U.N. to Demand the Saddam Resign,” *Washington Post*, April 11, 1991, A32. Prominent senators and Congressmen who argued for intervention to halt the killings of Shia and Kurdish rebels and civilians included Stephen Solarz, Al Gore, Alphonse D’Amato, Joseph Liebermann, Lee Hamilton, Ted Kennedy Al Gore, and Gregory Mitchell. For examples, see Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Refugee Crisis in the Persian Gulf*, 101st Cong., 1st sess., April 15 and May 20, 1991.

¹⁰² Krauthammer, “It’s Time to Finish Saddam,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 1991. See also: Mylroie, “Help the Iraqi Resistance,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 1991; “Civil War in Iraq,” A Staff Report to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, May 1991, 11.

¹⁰³ Editorial, “Ashes in Our Mouths,” *The National Review*, April 29, 1991, 12-13. See also: William Safire “Follow the Kurds to Save Iraq,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1991, A25. Safire called the Kurds the “last best hope of the beginning of freedom in Iraq.”

soldiers who went on to massacre civilians.”¹⁰⁴ Others called for the United States to renege on the Safwan accords, reproaching Schwarzkopf for letting himself be hoodwinked.¹⁰⁵ Numerous military figures piled on to this condemnation of the “early end” to the war. In March 1991, Schwarzkopf gave an interview where he claimed to have recommended that the Bush administration “continue the march,” asserting that if the civilians had not ended the war the military could have achieved “a battle of annihilation” against the Republican Guard. Schwarzkopf also questioned Bush’s fear of killing too many Iraqis as a good reason to stop the war, even quoting General William Tecumseh Sherman’s line that “war is the remedy our enemy has chosen; therefore let them have as much of it as they want.” The Bush administration responded by issuing a statement clarifying that Schwarzkopf had been consulted and had not objected to the ending of the war at the 100-hour mark.¹⁰⁶ Schwarzkopf quickly recanted and told Congress that ending the war and staying out of the rebellions was a smart decision.¹⁰⁷

Despite this surge of criticism, many politicians and media figures continued to support Bush’s avoidance of postwar involvement in Iraq beyond Operation Provide Comfort. These skeptics of regime change repeatedly asked what the United States would do if the first step toward involvement, such as shooting down helicopters, failed to tip balance in the rebels’ favor. Columnist Leslie Gelb argued that “the logic of intervention leads on, inevitably, to capturing

¹⁰⁴ Krauthammer, “It’s Time to Finish Saddam,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 1991. For a summary of other politicians and public figures who called for intervention on behalf of the rebels, see: R. Watson and A. McDaniel, “Unfinished Business?” *Newsweek*, April 8, 1991, 18.

¹⁰⁵ A.M. Rosenthal, “Reverse the Reversals,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1991, A23.

¹⁰⁶ Ann Devroy, “Bush, Cheney Dispute General on End of Fighting,” *Washington Post*, March 28, 1991, A1.

¹⁰⁷ House Committee on Armed Services, *Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., June 12, 1991, 332. Nonetheless, numerous military figures in the coming years would continue to question the failure to close the gate on the Republican Guard. See: Joseph Galloway, “We Stopped Too Damned Soon,” *U.S. News and World Report*, April 15, 1991, 28; Cushman, “Desert Storm’s End Game,” 76-80.

Baghdad” and governing Iraq, something outside of U.S. interests and abilities. He and other skeptics highlighted the risk of Iraq fragmenting if the United States prolonged the civil strife by joining sides.¹⁰⁸ Few in Congress actually called for massive intervention in the civil war, especially if it involved U.S. ground forces or an occupation.¹⁰⁹ Although most Americans regretted that Saddam had not fallen in the aftermath of the war, they generally agreed that avoiding involvement in Iraqi affairs was wise, with only 29% in the spring of 1991 favoring the resumption of ground operations to help the rebels.¹¹⁰

Some supporters of intervention and regime change accused these skeptics of treating Middle Eastern peoples as too mentally or culturally backwards to embrace democracy and pluralism. The Iraqi opposition leader Ahmed Chalabi, for instance, claimed: “These realists dismiss people in our part of the world as savages who have been killing each other for centuries.”¹¹¹ Skeptics of intervention retorted that it would be foolish to assume that the United States knew how to re-engineer Iraqi politics and society or that a post-Baathist Iraq would blossom into a liberal democracy. One of these skeptics, the conservative writer George Will, pointed out the inconsistency of other conservatives who opposed “social engineering” at home but would take that task on in a foreign country that Americans did not understand. He also argued that there was no evidence that the Iraqis possessed “the social, institutional, and moral preconditions” for constitutional democracy. He and other skeptics of intervention lambasted

¹⁰⁸ Leslie Gelb, “A Unified, Weak Iraq: Not Another Lebanon,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1991, A29; Editorial, “How Can the U.S. Stand Idly By?” *New York Times*, April 2, 1991, A18.

¹⁰⁹ Guy Gugliotta and Tom Kenworthy, “Congress is Reluctant to Intervene in Iraq: U.S. Options Seen as Limited, Public Called Unenthusiastic,” *Washington Post*, April 3, 1991, A28.

¹¹⁰ Peter Hahn, *Missions Accomplished?: The United States and Iraq since World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 108.

¹¹¹ Ahmed Chalabi, “Democracy is ‘Realism’ for Iraq,” *The Defense Democrat: A Newsletter on Foreign Affairs and National Defense*, April 1991, 1; Safire, “Follow the Kurds,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1991.

these “imperial conservatives” as naive do-gooders who would get the United States stuck in a quagmire.¹¹² Scholar Daniel Pipes advised: “That region is a politically sick place; outsiders would do well to keep a prudent moral distance.”¹¹³ Phebe Marr likewise argued that the entire region had no history of democracy and suffered from vast social and economic problems. She recommended that the United States focus on its containing Iraq and creating the conditions for Saddam’s downfall rather than transformative crusades.¹¹⁴

Another casualty of the postwar fallout from victory was the credibility of Bush’s New World Order. Bush officials had employed high-minded rhetoric about human rights, international law, and morality in arguing for the war, and their moral outrage at Saddam was genuine. After Desert Storm, however, the public watched the administration stand by as Saddam, whom Bush had compared to Hitler, recovered from defeat and massacred thousands of civilians. For the Bush administration, letting the Iraqis settle their own affairs after the war did not contradict the justification for the war, which was to counter aggression rather than address other states’ internal problems. As Bush said in early April: “The United States and these other countries with us in this coalition did not go there to settle all the internal affairs of Iraq.”¹¹⁵ Critics now saw clearly, and with disappointment, that the New World Order would not prioritize democracy or human rights, with the exception of Operation Provide Comfort.¹¹⁶ Bush’s

¹¹² George Will, “The Imperial Conservative,” *Washington Post*. For skeptics of deep involvement in Iraqi politics, see also: Leslie Gelb, “A Unified, Weak Iraq,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1991; “Don’t Intervene,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1991, E13; Editorial, “Direct Help for the Kurds,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 1991, A20.

¹¹³ Daniel Pipes, “Why America Can’t Save the Kurds,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 1991, A15.

¹¹⁴ Senate Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Middle East*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., May 9, 1991, 81-83, 90.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Friedman, “Decision Not to Help Iraqi Rebels Puts U.S. in an Awkward Position,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1991, A1.

¹¹⁶ Richard Cohen, “A Moral Failure,” *Washington Post*, April 5, 1991, A19.

reluctance to intervene in the former Yugoslavia, where fighting broke out soon after Desert Storm, added to this disillusionment about the New World Order.¹¹⁷ As the editors of *The New Republic* lamented: “In his new world, states may be gently criticized for brutalizing people within their borders, but no decisive action can be taken against them for doing so.”¹¹⁸

For many of these critics, especially neoconservatives and liberal hawks, Bush’s Iraq policy following Desert Storm represented everything wrong with the realist school of foreign policy. Underlying this dissatisfaction was a conviction that U.S. power and values could topple tyrants and transform nations if only political leaders had the foresight and courage to exercise that power. Joshua Muravchik and other neoconservatives pointed to the examples of Japan and Germany as nations where the United States had transformed hostile nations into friendly, prosperous democracies. They argued further that there was global momentum behind democratization in the post-Cold War world that the United States should capitalize on.¹¹⁹

The “murky, fantasy realpolitik” of restoring a weakened but still dictatorial Iraq to balance the equally autocratic Iran and Syria would only cause more instability. The region needed democracy rather than a balance of power because democracies do not act aggressively or terrorize their own people.¹²⁰ If U.S. allies did not support a foreign policy based on exporting democracy and toppling tyrants, so be it: U.S. power would suffice. In fact, most

¹¹⁷ Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America’s Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 88-91.

¹¹⁸ Editorial, “Desert Shame,” *The New Republic*, April 29, 1991, 7.

¹¹⁹ Joshua Muravchik, “Right to Intervene,” *Washington Post*, April 23, 1991, A19. For Muravchik’s complete defense of a foreign policy centered on democracy promotion, see: *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America’s Destiny*, (Washington, D.C., AEI Press, 1991).

¹²⁰ Fred Hoffman and Albert Wohlstetter, “The Bitter End by Fred Hoffman and Albert Wohlstetter,” *The New Republic*, April 29, 1991, 20-24.

neoconservatives blamed the failure to remove Saddam on Bush's focus on coalition-building and international institutions, which they saw as pointless restraints on U.S. might.¹²¹

Like many neoconservatives, Krauthammer believed that the United States should use its post-Cold War primacy, what he termed the "Unipolar Moment," to "shape a world order congenial to our interests and values."¹²² One way to do this was by toppling tyrants and spreading democracy. He accused Bush of failing to seize opportunities to reshape rogue nations like Iraq, which thereby undermined the moral credibility the United States needed for the benign exercise of hegemony.¹²³ In addition, neoconservatives and liberal hawks accused Bush of a Kissinger-like willingness to tolerate dictators rather than press for democracy. Krauthammer called this trend the "Tiananmen Mode," referring to the Bush's discreet response to the massacre in Beijing and his toleration of Mikhail Gorbachev's rough handling of independence movements in the Baltic states.¹²⁴

The aftermath of the war witnessed the re-emergence of partisan politics from their wartime hibernation. This trend intensified criticism of Bush's handling of the postwar period and accelerated calls for tougher action against Saddam. Both parties recognized political weaknesses in the other's approach to Iraq. Democrats seized on Saddam's invasion to lambaste

¹²¹ Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 77. For overviews of neoconservative foreign policy thought at the end of the Cold War, see: Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter, 1996/1997): 32-43; Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 120-122; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 80-81, 101; Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 209-210.

¹²² Charles Krauthammer, "Bless Our Pax Americana," *Washington Post*, March 22, 1991, A25. For a more developed version of the Unipolar Moment concept, see: Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (Winter 1990/1991): 23-33.

¹²³ Charles Krauthammer, "Tiananmen II," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1991, A19.

¹²⁴ Krauthammer, "Tiananmen II," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1991; Editorial, "Desert Shame," *The New Republic*, 7.

the failure of the engagement policy, which many of them had critiqued for years. They claimed that Bush's "appeasement" merely convinced Saddam he could get away with seizing Kuwait and that imposing sanctions beforehand might have convinced Saddam to stay his hand. If Bush had taken a tougher stand with Iraq, these critics argued, the war might have been prevented.¹²⁵ When former U.S. ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie appeared before Congressional hearings in March 1991, Democrats blasted her for failing to communicate to Saddam that the United States would oppose an invasion of Kuwait. When Glaspie told a House panel that she had given Saddam "repeated and crystal warnings," Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA) responded: "I am appalled by the frighteningly flawed judgment you displayed... To say in retrospect that Saddam Hussein absolutely knew that we would move in a military way is simply absurd."¹²⁶

The Democrats also seized on the "Iraqgate" controversy of 1991 and 1992 to undermine Bush's political position on Iraq. This scandal had actually emerged before the Gulf War. In 1989, federal prosecutors found that the Atlanta branch of the Italian Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL) had issued \$5 billion in illegal credits to Iraq. The branch's manager, Christopher Drogoul, had made some of these loans through a U.S. export credit program for Iraq, the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), which had been a key plank of the engagement strategy. These loans vastly exceeded the limits set by the CCC program, and Drogoul received roughly \$2.5 million in kickbacks from Iraq for his services. After the Gulf War, evidence started to

¹²⁵ See statements by Berman and Lantos, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Sanctions Against Iraq*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., August 1-2, 1990, 20, 42. For a summary of Democratic criticism, see: John Goshko and Jeffrey Smith, "State Dept. Assailed on Iraq Policy: Democrats Cite Failure to Avert Invasion," *Washington Post*, September 19, 1990, A1.

¹²⁶ Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *United States-Iraqi Relations*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., March 21, 1991, 14.

trickle out that Iraq had abused virtually every U.S. aid program, adding to the sense that the Bush administration had erred in sticking to engagement for so long.¹²⁷

Congressional Democrats launched extensive investigations and held numerous hearings about this scandal. Henry Gonzalez (D-TX) and Sam Gejdenson (D-CT) accused top Bush officials of knowing about the abuses of aid programs, including Iraqi purchases of weapons with CCC-derived funds and Iraqi imports of materials and equipment with potential use in WMD programs. They argued that the administration allowed these activities to continue in order to woo Iraq into the U.S. orbit. They also claimed that Bush had established a team to cover up their knowledge of these abuses.¹²⁸ Gejdenson was uncompromising in his accusations, saying in May 1992: “This administration used every vehicle within the government to make sure that Saddam Hussein got what he wanted. It clearly emboldened Saddam Hussein.”¹²⁹ These investigations ginned up little evidence of legal or ethical wrongdoing in the administration, but the public airing of just how far the engagement strategy had gone to appeal to Saddam, along with Drogoul’s trial, became a significant headache for Bush.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Jentleson, *Friends Like These* 123-127; Kenneth Timmerman, *The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 225-246; George Lardner and R. Jeffrey Smith, “CIA Shared Data with Iraq Until Kuwait Invasion,” *Washington Post*, April 28, 1992, 16; Elaine Sciolino, “U.S. Documents Raise Questions Over Iraq Policy,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1992, A1; John Fialka and Peter Truell, “As ‘Iraqgate’ Unfolds, New Evidence Raises Questions of Cover-Up,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 9, 1992, A1.

¹²⁸ See statements by Gonzalez and Gejdenson: Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *United States Exports of Sensitive Technology to Iraq*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., April 8, 1991, 1-2, 91-93; House Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, *The Banca Nazionale Del Lavoro (BNL) Scandal and the Department of Agriculture’s Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) Program for Iraq, Part 1*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., May 21, 1992, 646-663; Elaine Sciolino, “Bush’s Greatest Glory Fades as Questions on Iraq Persist,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1992, A1; “Export Controls: Gejdenson Alleges Iraq Cover-Up,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly*, April 13, 1991, 905-906.

¹²⁹ Gejdenson statement found in: House Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, *White House Efforts to Thwart Congressional Investigations of Pre-War Iraq Policy: The Case of the Rostow Gang*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., May 29, 1992, 8.

¹³⁰ Particularly embarrassing was a series of reports from Murray Waas and Douglas Frantz of the *Los Angeles Times* throughout 1992 that showed multiple federal departments ignoring of evidence that Iraq was abusing aid programs and seeking WMD-related technology. See, for example: Murray Waas and Douglas Frantz, “Abuses in

The Republicans in turn defended themselves against these charges that the Gulf Crisis was partially their fault. They argued that engagement was a sensible policy at the time and accused the Democrats of trying to criminalize and politicize a policy error.¹³¹ They seized on the overwhelming Democratic skepticism about the war to blast the Democrats as weak on defense. Only ten Democrats in the Senate and eighty-six in the House had voted to authorize the use of force against Iraq, and they had frequently predicted that the war would cause thousands of U.S. casualties. Afterwards, Democrats had to defend their skepticism about a war that proved a massive, low-cost success.¹³²

The Republicans determined to make the Democrats pay for their votes on the war. Shortly after the vote to authorize the use of force in January 1991, Clayton Yeutter, the then Agriculture Secretary who soon became chairman of the Republican National Committee warned that the Republicans would make the vote a “very significant factor” in the 1992 election. Some Republicans began wearing buttons declaring “I Voted With the President.”¹³³ Moreover, the National Republican Senatorial Committee sent out a fundraising letter labeling Democratic opponents of the war as “appeasement-before-country liberals.”¹³⁴ Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX),

U.S. Aid to Iraqis Ignored,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1992, A1. Moreover, columnists Jim Hoagland and William Safire became obsessed with Iraqgate, writing dozens of columns on the topic in the early 1990s. See: Jim Hoagland, “Engulfed,” *Washington Post*, October 11, 1992, C2; William Safire, “Crimes of Iraqgate,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1992, A17.

¹³¹ Brent Scowcroft, “We Didn’t Coddle Saddam,” *Washington Post*, October 19, 1992, A27; Lawrence Eagleburger, House Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, May 21, 1992, 65.

¹³² The hostile death count for U.S. forces was 147, according to the Department of Defense. “Defense Casualty Analysis System Report,” Department of Defense, accessed August 30, 2017, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_gulf_sum.xhtml. For a summary of the Democrats’ fears of being labelled as weak following Desert Storm, see: Carroll Doherty and Pat Towell, “Democrats Try to Bury Image of Foreign Policy Weakness,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* (March 23, 1991): 752-759.

¹³³ Carroll Doherty, “Parties Split Into Postwar Camps After Giving Victory Cheer,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* (April 27, 1991): 611-613.

¹³⁴ Thomas Edsall, “Political Warfare Erupts Over Gulf,” *Washington Post*, January 25, 1991, A4.

the chairman of this committee, said on March 1 that the Democratic vote against the war fit “the pattern of Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, and Michael Dukakis. It says to the nation once again that the Democrats cannot be trusted to define the destiny of America.”¹³⁵

Democrats like John Kerry (MA) and Lee Hamilton retorted that their party’s votes emerged from the exercise of conscience and judgment rather than political calculation.¹³⁶ Stephen Solarz, moreover, added that most living secretaries of defense had also been skeptical of the war and that the Republicans should be careful about using the war for partisan gain given their support for the failed engagement policy.¹³⁷ In sum, both parties were unclear on Iraq policy, but each tried to exploit the other side’s errors, creating an escalatory political dynamic that biased the public discourse on Iraq toward harsher policies. Both sides sought to distance themselves from the shortcomings of engagement, reinforcing for the remainder of the decade the “lesson” that any attempts to incentivize Saddam to behave were doomed. This “lesson” became an important part of the regime change consensus.

By the early summer of 1991, once it was clear that Saddam had survived the postwar challenges, Bush’s critics derided his failure to bring down the Iraqi leader. In July, *The New Republic* editors asserted: “What’s happened in Iraq since our grand ‘victory’ isn’t a bit of rain at a Fourth of July picnic; it’s a deluge, washing the guests, the food, and the marching band out to sea.”¹³⁸ Saddam was only 54 years old, critics noted, and had proven himself a dogged survivor.

¹³⁵ David Broder and Thomas Edsall, “GOP Seeking to Exploit Public Support for Bush,” *Washington Post*, March 1, 1991, A33.

¹³⁶ Editorial, “Politics and the Gulf,” *Washington Post*, January 28, 1991, A10; Lee Hamilton, “Who Voted Wrong?” *Washington Post*, March 10, 1991, D7; See Kerry testimony on this matter in *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., March 13, 1991, 5923.

¹³⁷ Stephen Solarz, “Don’t Argue With Victory,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1991, A15.

¹³⁸ Editorial, “Staying There,” *The New Republic*, July 29, 1991, 5.

The question suffusing political debates was whether Desert Storm had positively changed the struggle with Saddam or whether it had merely postponed a day of reckoning. The conversation now shifted to containment. Those who criticized Bush's restrained approach to the end of the war would now demand a hardline approach to Iraqi compliance, oppose any normalization, and push for ever tougher measures in order to bring down Saddam and his regime.

Enforcing Containment: June 1991-November 1992

Starting in June 1991, the United States set out to enforce a containment policy based on sanctions, inspections, the NFZ in Northern Iraq, and pressuring Saddam in order to spark a coup. They continued to prioritize containing Saddam and compelling him to comply with the U.N. resolutions, especially on WMD disarmament. Saddam countered U.S. efforts to contain and overthrow him with a two-part strategy. In the short term, he sought to prevent the sanctions from destabilizing his regime and to convince the inspectors that he was complying in order to get the sanctions lifted. In the long term, he tried to break up the sanctioning coalition by provoking confrontations and encouraging defections, which he hoped would lead to the end of sanctions and inspections. Saddam even established a committee under Tariq Aziz to harass the inspectors and conceal the materials and information that Iraq wanted to keep hidden.¹³⁹

The IAEA and UNSCOM began inspections in June 1991. The IAEA quickly unmasked Iraq's undeclared uranium enrichment program, followed by the discovery in July of several kilograms of highly enriched uranium and stores of uranium ore.¹⁴⁰ The IAEA concluded that

¹³⁹ The Duelfer Report features a helpful discussion of Saddam's strategy against the United Nations in the 1990s: Department of Central Intelligence, Iraq Survey Group, *Key Findings*, September 30, 2004, cia.gov, accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/, 1-3; Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 103-104.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Krasno and James Sutterlin, *The United Nations and Iraq: Defanging the Viper* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 50-52; Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, 62.

Saddam had been much closer to an advanced nuclear weapons capacity than most experts estimated before Desert Storm. Hans Blix, the head of the IAEA, said that Iraq might have been two to three years from producing enriched uranium by centrifuge, which would have enabled it to make several nuclear weapons per year.¹⁴¹ David Kay of the IAEA described the Iraqi program as one with “technical vision and direction that, if it had proceeded unhindered by the Gulf War, would have resulted in Iraq, in a relatively short period of time, joining the ranks of the nuclear weapons states.”¹⁴² U.S. intelligence had drastically underestimated the extent of this program. In the meantime, UNSCOM uncovered and oversaw the destruction of massive quantities of ballistic missiles, chemical weapons, and, after its revelation in 1992, implements of a biological warfare program.¹⁴³

These successes in uncovering and destroying Iraqi WMD programs did not come easily. The United States and the coalition faced off against Saddam in a series of confrontations in which Iraq refused to comply with the inspectors. Bush officials read each of these episodes as a test, thinking that if Saddam received some slack he would lose respect for the coalition and continue to push.¹⁴⁴ The first of these challenges occurred in the summer of 1991 when Saddam repeatedly refused to let U.N. personnel into suspected nuclear facilities and inspectors caught Iraqi agents smuggling nuclear equipment out of a facility they were examining.¹⁴⁵ Bush

¹⁴¹ David Kay, “Denial and Deception Practices of WMD Proliferators: Iraq and Beyond,” *The Washington Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1995), 86; “Promise of a Saddam Surprise,” *The Economist*, January 25, 1992, 69.

¹⁴² Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Nuclear Proliferation: Learning from the Iraq Experience*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., October 17, 1991, 16.

¹⁴³ Krasno, *Defanging the Viper*, 60-66; Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, 63.

¹⁴⁴ See, for examples, Proposed Agenda Meeting with the President, James Baker, April 19, 1992, MC 197, Box 115, Folder 9, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, 1; Proposed Agenda Meeting with the President, James Baker, April 24, 1992, MC 196, Box 115, Folder 9, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, 5.

threatened air strikes against Iraq in order to induce cooperation. In the midst of this crisis, Bush reiterated his call for the Iraqi military to take action against Saddam, promising leniency if they succeeded: “Before the war started I made very clear...that our argument was not with the people of Iraq-it wasn’t even with the regime in Iraq-it was with Saddam Hussein.”¹⁴⁶ Colin Powell and the Joint Chiefs of Staff cautioned Bush against coercive strikes because they feared they would achieve little and lead the military into deeper involvement.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, key members of the coalition vacillated over the use of force, including France, Egypt, and Turkey.¹⁴⁸ The Iraqi government reversed itself in July and allowed the inspectors into the suspected sites, which by this point had been cleaned of illegal materials.

It did not take long for the Iraqi government to obstruct inspections once again. In September 1991, Saddam detained 40 inspectors for about 12 hours after they discovered hidden Iraqi documents on nuclear weapons. He also protested the inspectors’ use of helicopters to move freely around Iraq. Bush again accused Iraq of failing to comply with the United Nations and of secretly trying to reconstruct its nuclear weapons program.¹⁴⁹ The administration determined that Saddam was not a current threat, but they stressed the need to discipline him and show that the United States and the coalition would not bend on its commitment to

¹⁴⁵ John Yang and John Goshko, “Bush Says Iraq Violates Cease-Fire; Pentagon Preparing Range of Options,” *Washington Post*, June 29, 1991, A1.

¹⁴⁶ George H.W. Bush, “The President’s News Conference with the French President Francois Mitterand, July 14, 1991, George Bush Presidential Library, accessed November 17, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/3188>, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum, Richard Haass to Brent Scowcroft, July 10, 1991, OA/ID CF01585-006, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Working Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Krasno, *Defanging the Viper*, 57-59; Patrick Tyler, “U.S. Faces Trouble Maintaining Unity of Allies on Iraq,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1991, A1.

¹⁴⁹ Paul Lewis, “Baghdad Detains 40 UN Inspectors Who Find A-Plans,” *New York Times*, September 24, 1991, A1.

disarmament.¹⁵⁰ The inspectors themselves resolved this showdown through a compromise that allowed them to make copies of documents from these buildings.

On January 28, 1992, UNSCOM director Rolf Ekeus reported that Iraq was in material breach of Security Council Resolution 687 because of its persistent obstruction of inspections. Iraqi agents had destroyed large quantities of missiles and chemical weapons, but the inspectors still had not received documentation showing what weapons and equipment the Iraqis actually had possessed. This situation left uncertainty as to what the Iraqis had unilaterally destroyed and what they still possessed.¹⁵¹ The Iraqi government by this point had issued six “Full, Final, and Complete Declarations” of its weapons programs, draining the patience of the inspectors.¹⁵²

Once again, the Bush administration drew up plans to strike suspected WMD sites and coerce Iraq into compliance. Powell, however, argued against these strikes, saying that they would do little to change Saddam’s behavior while creating significant military risks. Powell considered these types of limited and “surgical” strikes to be politicians’ ways of convincing critics they were addressing the problem without having a clear strategic aim for the use of force. Baker and Scowcroft disagreed, saying that the United States needed to strike Iraq to demonstrate resolve and end the cycle of confrontation.¹⁵³ Baker later expressed his frustration to Bush about Powell’s opposition to the use of force: “You know well that Saddam respects force,

¹⁵⁰ Andrew Rosenthal, “The Bush-Hussein Duel: U.S. Aides Admit Iraq is No Armed Threat but Say That Control Must Be Established,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1991, A1.

¹⁵¹ “Losing Patience,” *The Economist*, February 15, 1992, 70.

¹⁵² Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 107.

¹⁵³ Barton Gellman and Ann Devroy, “Powell Said to Oppose New Strike on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 1992, A1. For more on Powell’s hesitation to use force to enforce the Security Council resolutions post-Desert Storm, see FA article: Colin Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead,” *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 5 (Winter, 1992): 37-42.

not exhortations. But there is a profound allergy at JCS to back-up that entails the use of force.”¹⁵⁴ Cheney emphasized that the administration still focused on compliance and did not want to run risks to overthrow Saddam, saying in January: “It’s an irritant that he’s still in power in Baghdad, but I don’t think it’s the kind of thing that merits, for example, risking additional military casualties-American casualties-to get him out of there.”¹⁵⁵ Saddam backed down in late March and promised to cooperate with the inspections, but this promise again did not last.

In July 1992, UNSCOM personnel sought to enter the Ministry of Agriculture to locate hidden documents on ballistic missile development. The Iraqi government refused to let them in, leading to a 17-day standoff in the parking lot in which government agents threatened the inspectors and mobs pelted them with rocks and rotten vegetables.¹⁵⁶ Scowcroft and Haass reasoned that the United States had to show Saddam that he could not “defy the U.N. with impunity” or he would continue his intransigence.¹⁵⁷ The lack of international enthusiasm for military action, however, balanced against the this desire to punish Saddam.¹⁵⁸ Bush dreaded that a punitive attack would further weaken the coalition without definitively changing Iraqi willingness to cooperate.¹⁵⁹ On July 26, Iraq backed down and agreed to allow U.N. personnel into the Agriculture Ministry. He did so, however, largely because of a deal made with Rolf

¹⁵⁴ Baker, Proposed Agenda Meeting with the President, April 24, 1992, 5.

¹⁵⁵ R. Jeffrey Smith, “White House Prepares to Step Up Pressure on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 9, 1992, A1.

¹⁵⁶ Jon Alterman, “Coercive Diplomacy against Iraq, 1990-98,” in *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, eds. Robert Art and Patrick Cronin (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2003), 285; Scott Ritter, *Endgame: Solving the Iraqi Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 37.

¹⁵⁷ NSC Meeting Notes, Richard Haass, July 23, 1992, OA/ID CF 01404-002, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Presidential Meeting Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 2.

¹⁵⁸ NSC Deputies Committee Meeting Notes, Brent Scowcroft, July 27, 1992, OA/ID CF 01404-004, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Presidential Meeting Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 1.

¹⁵⁹ NSC Meeting Notes, Richard Haass, July 23, 1992, George Bush Presidential Library, 2.

Ekeus that allowed the Iraqi government to remove U.S. and British personnel from the team that would inspect this ministry. The Bush administration was displeased with Ekeus for compromising on UNSCOM's right to determine the national composition of the inspectors, but they accepted this deal as international backing for a strike crumpled once Saddam conceded.¹⁶⁰

Hardly had this crisis settled when a new one erupted over Saddam's continued assaults on the Shia population of southern Iraq. In response to this and other provocations, the United States, Great Britain, and France imposed an NFZ over a large portion of southern Iraq in August 1992. The Southern zone was not a "safe haven" like the northern zone because the United States only denied air access to government aircraft, allowing Saddam to retain an administrative and security presence on the ground.¹⁶¹ The United States also hoped that the denial of Saddam's aircraft in the southern zone would further undermine his legitimacy at home and possibly spark a coup.¹⁶² Scowcroft told Bush that one of the strengths of the NFZ was that it "communicated a sense of momentum moving away from Saddam."¹⁶³ The new NFZ established in Operation Southern Watch, however, garnered even less international support than the NFZ in the north. This policy lacked specific Security Council approval, and many countries began to suspect the United States was stretching existing resolutions beyond their original meaning in order to topple Saddam. Moreover, countries like China, India, and Russia did not want to sponsor a policy that

¹⁶⁰ This overview of major crises does not capture the true extent of the harassment and non-cooperation that Iraqi personnel inflicted on the inspections teams. For example, Tim Trevan, a biological weapons expert in UNSCOM, logged over 200 minor and major incidents in a nine month period in 1992. See: Tim Trevan, *Saddam's Secrets; The Hunt for Iraq's Hidden Weapons*, (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 220; Michael Gordon, "Iraq Won its Point on U.N. Inspections, Top U.S. Aides Say," *New York Times*, July 28, 1992, A1.

¹⁶¹ Malone, *International Struggle Over Iraq*, 99.

¹⁶² John Lancaster, "U.S. Moves to Toughen Iraq Stance: Flight Ban is Called 1st Step in Campaign to Pressure Saddam," *Washington Post*, August 29, 1992, A1.

¹⁶³ Memorandum, Brent Scowcroft to George Bush, August 26, 1990, OAID CF01404-012, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Presidential Meeting Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 1.

involved the violation of sovereignty to protect oppressed minorities.¹⁶⁴ Great Britain and France were the only two major allies who participated in Operation Southern Watch.¹⁶⁵

In the meantime, the economic sanctions and embargo of Iraq were devastating the Iraqi economy but having less of an impact on Saddam and his regime. Iraq lost billions of dollars in export revenue because of the severing of oil sales, and its industrial output declined by 50%. Inflation surged to more than 5,000% as per capita income plummeted.¹⁶⁶ Unemployment also increased as the Iraqi state laid off hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers to save money.¹⁶⁷ This economic decline, combined with the massive damage done to infrastructure during the war, ravaged public health. The sanctions technically did not prohibit food imports, but bureaucratic delays, corruption, and the Baathist regime's deliberate denial of resources to rebellious populations drastically lowered ordinary Iraqis' access to basic staples, causing a surge in malnutrition.¹⁶⁸

At the United Nations, the committee responsible for determining what Iraq would be permitted to import allowed any Security Council member to veto any trade item. The United States and Great Britain used this veto to stop Iraq from importing goods that were important for agriculture and public health, including insecticides, refrigeration equipment, and chlorine,

¹⁶⁴ Gerald Seib, "Bush Faces Tricky Decisions in Trying to Get Tougher with Saddam Hussein," *Wall Street Journal*, August 3, 1992, A13; "The Push for a Southern Haven," *The Economist*, August 8, 1992, 48.

¹⁶⁵ John Lancaster, "Allies Endorse U.S. Plan for 'No Fly' Zone in Iraq," *Washington Post*, August 19, 1992, A1.

¹⁶⁶ David Cortright and George A. Lopez, "Are Sanctions Just? The Problematic Case of Iraq," *Journal of International Affairs* 52, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 741; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 268-270.

¹⁶⁷ Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 161.

¹⁶⁸ The scholar Joy Gordon provides a useful account of the bureaucratic problems that obstructed the importation of essential goods to Iraq, both in the U.N. and Iraqi bureaucracies. See: Joy Gordon, "Sanctions as Siege Warfare," *The Nation*, March 22, 1999, 18-22.

because of possible applications in WMD research or production.¹⁶⁹ The damage to Iraq's electric, water, and sanitation systems increased childhood mortality, mainly from diarrhea, hunger, and respiratory diseases. Crime, black markets, prostitution, and other social ills also surged.¹⁷⁰ The Bush administration acknowledged that this situation threatened the sanctions regime by creating a humanitarian imperative to ease sanctions. For instance, Baker wrote in early 1992: "It will be harder to maintain sanctions as Arab and regional opinion increasingly objects to the perceived hardships inflicted on ordinary Iraqis."¹⁷¹

In response to growing outrage about this situation, the United States led the passage of Security Council Resolutions 706 and 712 in August and September of 1991. These resolutions allowed Iraq to sell \$1.6 billion in oil over a renewable six-month period for the import of food, medicine, and other humanitarian goods. The United Nations would control this money in an escrow account so that the Iraqi government could not access it directly. These resolutions formed the basis of the oil-for-food plan of the mid-late 1990s, but in 1991 Saddam Hussein rejected these proposals, calling them an infringement on Iraqi sovereignty.¹⁷² Citing these

¹⁶⁹ This committee was called the "661 Committee," named after the Security Council Resolution that authorized sanctions against Iraq in 1991. Some of the items vetoed appear to have little military or WMD relevance, including equipment to manufacture tomato paste, salt for food, and aluminum lids for canning, and numerous other agricultural, health-related, and industrial goods. The 661 Committee did not require its members to provide justification for their vetoes. The strictness with which the United States and Great Britain vetoed these items suggested a desire to maximize pressure on Iraq society in the hope of forcing Saddam from power. For an extended discussion of the 661 committee, see: Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 49-55, 191-199.

¹⁷⁰ Gordon, *Invisible War*, 86-103; Sarah Graham-Brown and Chris Toensing, "A Backgrounder on Inspections and Sanctions," in *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Christopher Cerf and Micah Sifry (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 168-169; "When Sanctions Don't Work," *The Economist*, April 8, 2000, 25.

¹⁷¹ Proposed Agenda Meeting with the President, James Baker, May 28, 1992, MC 197, Box 115, Folder 9, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley J. Mudd Library, 3.

¹⁷² Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 270.

resolutions, the Bush administration argued that Saddam was responsible for this suffering and that the sanctions should not be lifted.¹⁷³

Although Iraqi citizens suffered immensely, Saddam managed to insulate his key political supporters in the army, security services, and the Sunni minority from the impact of sanctions through smuggling, the use of goods stolen from Kuwait, and other means.¹⁷⁴ In historian Charles Tripp's phrasing, he continued to convince these groups with a mixture of threats and rewards that "his leadership was better for their interests than that of any imaginable alternative and that they would lose everything if he were to be overthrown and a new dispensation of power established in Baghdad."¹⁷⁵ In September 1991, a CIA report concluded: "the odds are that Saddam will still be ruling over Iraq one year from now. Only significant erosion of support from key groups would alter this judgment."¹⁷⁶ A National Intelligence Estimate in June 1992 reported that Saddam was much stronger than last spring and would likely survive another year, although it noted that he relied on a shrinking set of loyalists and family members.¹⁷⁷

As it maneuvered through these crises, the Bush administration frequently revisited the basic tenets of its Iraq policy. Each time, however, it found no better strategy than what it was already doing. Issues like the Middle East Peace Process and the Bosnian Crisis seized the

¹⁷³ See statements of Timothy Pickering and John Wolf: House Subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and Human Rights and International Organizations of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *U.N. Role in the Persian Gulf and Iraqi Compliance with U.N. Resolutions*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., October 21, 1991, 160-163, 181-187.

¹⁷⁴ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 117-122; Department of Central Intelligence, Iraq Survey Group, *Key Findings*, September 30, 2004, 1-3.

¹⁷⁵ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 264.

¹⁷⁶ CIA Report, National Intelligence Estimate 36: Saddam Husayn's Prospects for Survival Over the Next Year, September 1991, National Security Archive Online, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB167/08.pdf>, 7.

¹⁷⁷ CIA Report, National Intelligence Estimate 97-2: Saddam Husayn: Likely to Hang On, June 1992, National Security Archive Online, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB167/10.pdf>, 3; Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. Reports a Stronger Saddam Hussein," *New York Times*, June 16, 1992, A3.

administration's attention, and they largely felt that the Iraq problem should not monopolize time and resources. Richard Haass later recalled: "It was a continuing problem, but a problem within bounds. We weren't solving the problem, we were at best managing it."¹⁷⁸ Moreover, Bush had ordered the CIA to seek out contacts in the Iraqi military to foment a coup, but these efforts amounted to little in Bush's last two years.¹⁷⁹

A major part of the administration's unwillingness to go beyond the current policy was that it perceived the exiled Iraqi opposition to be weak, disunited, and untrustworthy.¹⁸⁰ The two major external opposition groups were the Iraqi National Congress (INC) under Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Accord (INA) under Ayad Allawi. The INC formed as a political umbrella group in June 1992 to coordinate the major opposition groups, build a presence in Iraq, and ultimately challenge the regime. It managed to unite various opposition groups behind an agenda of replacing the Baathists with a federal democratic government, although the INC leadership exerted minimal authority over the disparate groups.¹⁸¹ The INA, in contrast, was composed of former regime officials and military officers who aimed to use contacts in the Iraqi government to launch a coup. Within Iraq, the main opposition groups were the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) under Jalal Talabani, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) under Massoud Barzani, and an Iran-backed Shia group called the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).

¹⁷⁸ Richard Haass, interview with Joseph Stieb, October 4, 2017.

¹⁷⁹ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 149.

¹⁸⁰ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 149.

¹⁸¹ For an account of the formation of the INC and early contacts with the Bush administration, see Hamid Bayati, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: An Insider's Account of the Iraqi Opposition to Saddam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 38-42. For a summary of the opposition groups see Dilip Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends: Iraq and Iran After the Gulf Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 58-60.

The Bush administration generally viewed the opposition as fractious and unreliable. Of these groups, the U.S. intelligence worked most closely with the INA by providing money and CIA agents in order to foster contacts in the Iraqi elite.¹⁸² It encouraged INC efforts to unite the opposition, and Baker even met with INC leaders in July 1992 to voice support for its efforts. Still, the administration supplied the INC with only about \$20 million in its first year.¹⁸³ The CIA in particular saw the INC as liability because of its squabbling members and its inability to project power into Iraq.¹⁸⁴ U.S. officials doubted Chalabi because he often exaggerated his influence inside Iraq, and he was on the run from bank fraud charges in Jordan.¹⁸⁵ State Department analyst Wayne White called Chalabi and his entourage “political dilettantes” who reminded him of a “used car salesman.”¹⁸⁶ Haass wrote to Dennis Ross that in principle it would be desirable to give a higher profile to the opposition, but “our efforts to encourage opposition unity continue to undermined by the weaknesses and rivalries of the opposition.”¹⁸⁷ The constant feuding between Barzani and Talabani, the only opposition groups with any meaningful military forces, further dampened enthusiasm for the opposition.¹⁸⁸ Any regime change strategy that centered on these groups, the administration concluded, would have little chance of succeeding and might drag the United States into fighting inside Iraq.

¹⁸² Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 57.

¹⁸³ Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 78.

¹⁸⁴ Jane Mayer, “The Manipulator,” *The New Yorker*, June 7, 2004, 29; Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 166.

¹⁸⁵ David Mack, interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, February 4, 1997, 374.

¹⁸⁶ Wayne White, interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, April 21, 2005, 206-207.

¹⁸⁷ Memorandum, Richard Haass to Dennis Ross, March 31, 1992, OA/ID CF01585-015, Working Files, Richard Haass Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 1.

¹⁸⁸ Memorandum, Haass to Ross, March 31, 1992, 2.

Richard Haass noted that in this period, U.S. Iraq policy closely resembled “classic containment in its emphasis on limiting Iraq’s capability and reach and in its secondary interest in fostering regime change.”¹⁸⁹ The administration increasingly felt, in Baker’s words, that “the tide is running against us” in the struggle to maintain sanctions and inspections, leaving few officials eager to prioritize the even tougher effort to overthrow Saddam.¹⁹⁰ As Scowcroft wrote in July 1992, the United States needed to distinguish between “the objective (full compliance) and the desirable outcome (Saddam’s ouster).”¹⁹¹ Bush’s Iraq policy never strayed from that hierarchy of goals. Their stance against normalization of relations with a Saddam-led Iraq, moreover, persisted from 1991-1992. If anything, the frustration of dealing with Iraqi intransigence hardened this position, as did mounting political pressure at home.¹⁹²

Early Critics of Containment: 1991-1992

Once containment had settled in, Bush’s struggle to make Saddam comply with the Security Council resolutions took place in an atmosphere of intense scrutiny from the media and Congress. The schools of thought of containment clustered into three schools. I call the first school the conditional approach because their views for the policy depended on how it developed and whether it could plausibly lead to regime change. They could be described as both critics and defenders of containment, depending upon its effectiveness and likely future prospects.

¹⁸⁹ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 148. Haass says something similar in: Memorandum, Haass to Ross, March 31, 1992, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Proposed Agenda Meeting with the President, James Baker, May 28, 1992, 3.

¹⁹¹ NSC Meeting Notes, Richard Haass, July 25, 1992, OA/ID CF 01404-003, National Security Council, Presidential Meeting Files, Richard Haass Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 4.

¹⁹² For examples of this hardening, see: Memorandum, Haass to Ross, March 31, 1992, 1-3; Testimony of Edward Djerejian, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department in House Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Developments in the Middle East*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., June 24, 1992, 8.

Consisting mostly of centrist, hawkish Democrats and defense intellectuals, they argued that the policy could work as long as the United States maintained significant pressure on the regime, worked to preserve the coalition, and adjusted the policy as circumstances changed.¹⁹³

Most members of this school agreed with Bush's stance against normalization but saw problems with the regime change by coup policy. They generally believed that replacing Saddam with a bloodstained general would not address the roots of Iraqi misbehavior, namely the Baathist regime and ideology. However, many members of this school thought that reforming and rebuilding the Iraqi political system was beyond U.S. means or knowledge. They believed containment might lead to Saddam's ouster if the United States enforced it strictly, but they often saw Bush as insufficiently devoted to the rigorously enforcing containment and unwilling to seek new ways to pressure the Baathist regime.

Senator Al Gore best represents the thinking of the conditional school of thought on containment. He was a potential candidate for president and member of the Democratic Leadership Council, a group of centrist Democrats including Les Aspin (WI) and Charles Robb (VA), who were also hawks on Iraq.¹⁹⁴ Gore, who voted in favor of Desert Storm, argued afterwards that the United States must not normalize relations with Saddam and use the tools of containment, sanctions, inspections, air power, and support for the opposition, to overthrow him.¹⁹⁵ Gore took the political concept of the regime seriously. Even if Saddam fell in a coup, he argued, the United States had to keep pressing his successor for a transition to democracy. He

¹⁹³ *New York Times* editorials provide a great example of consistent urging for Bush to prioritize containment and compliance but demand full Iraqi cooperation. For example, see: Editorial, "Time to Punish Hussein-Again," *New York Times*, July 24, 1992, A24.

¹⁹⁴ Julian Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security from World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 378.

¹⁹⁵ *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., April 18, 1991, 8646. Gore fleshed this position out in a letter to George Bush on April 3, 1991. See Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 214.

reasoned: “Until Saddam Hussein is gone, until his government is gone, and until the Iraqi state is reestablished on a new footing, there can be no solution on an enduring basis for the hundreds of thousands of refugees, no durable basis for regional security and stability.”¹⁹⁶

Gore spoke extensively on Iraq from 1991-1992, supporting the administration when it demanded full compliance from Iraq and excoriating it for hesitation and compromise. In November 1991, for example, he led every member of the House Select Committee on Intelligence in sending a letter to Bush that declared: “In our judgment, the current policy towards Iraq does not seem to be working.” The letter called for greater willingness to use force to punish Saddam as well as a stronger effort to delegitimize the Baathist regime, including war crimes trials.¹⁹⁷ Like many critics of containment, Gore suspected, not without reason, that Bush still saw Saddam as useful for preserving a balance of power in the region and preventing Iraq from disintegrating on ethnic lines. He accused Bush of holding the “persistent view of Saddam Hussein as an acceptable part of the landscape, if and when we finally get him down to size.” He stressed that it was not enough to say the United States would not normalize relations with Saddam; one could no sooner have a constructive relationship with Saddam than one could “housebreak a cobra.”¹⁹⁸ Rather, Bush needed to maximize operations short of war that would topple him in the short term. For Gore and others in the conditional approach to containment was tolerable as long as it remained a firm base upon which the United States pursued regime change.

The reaction of members of this conditional approach to the confrontation at the Agriculture Ministry in July 1992 captures their thinking well. Gore, Aspin, and others

¹⁹⁶ *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., April 18, 1991, 8446.

¹⁹⁷ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 274.

¹⁹⁸ Al Gore, “Defeating Hussein, Once and for All,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1991, A27.

portrayed this case as an Iraqi victory that “made the non-negotiable, negotiable” by giving Iraq a say in the national composition of the inspections teams and “opened the door for Iraq to negotiate many of the more onerous elements of the U.N. resolutions.”¹⁹⁹ In Aspin’s colorful phrasing, Iraq was winning “the war of nerves and inches” because of Bush’s feckless policy of “threat and forget.”²⁰⁰ If Bush did not stand strong on the minor points, Saddam would continue to chip away at the coalition’s resolve. Still, the United States could restore this policy by launching airstrikes to demonstrate resolve and by demanding full compliance with the inspectors.²⁰¹ The conditional school’s support for the use of force against Iraq had broad popular backing. One Gallup poll in July 1992 showed that 67% of Americans supported resuming military action to enforce U.N. resolutions and force Saddam from power.²⁰²

A second, tougher set of actors took a categorical approach to containment, defining it from the outset as a policy that could not work against regimes like Baathist Iraq and individuals like Saddam. I call this the “inevitable decline” school because, unlike the conditional approach, members of this approach believed containment was doomed to fail from the outset. They mostly came from neoconservative circles, although it included some liberal hawks and conservatives. Whereas containment focused on limiting Iraqi capabilities, these critics argued that the real problem was not the regime’s capabilities at any given time but its unchanging intent to develop and use those capabilities. Moreover, containment could not last because it relied on a fickle

¹⁹⁹ Quotes are from Aspin, *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., July 28, 1992, 19686. See Gore on the same point: “Defeating Hussein,” September 26, 1991.

²⁰⁰ Quotes are from Aspin: *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., July 31, 1992, 20822. See Lieberman on same point: *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., July 27, 1992, 19450.

²⁰¹ For air strike recommendations from liberal sources, see Les Aspin in *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., July 31, 1992, 20824. Editorial: “Iraq’s Nuclear Menace,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1991, A20.

²⁰² Hahn, *Missions Accomplished*, 128.

international coalition that did not share the American stance against normalization. Whereas members of the conditional school believed that containment could form a baseline from which regime change could be achieved, members of the inevitable decline school saw containment and regime change as incompatible strategies from the beginning. Because Bush would not take the aggressive actions needed to topple Saddam for fear of harming the coalition needed for sanctions and inspections, containment actually precluded the pursuit of regime change.

Critics in the inevitable decline school further claimed that the current policy could not remove Saddam because its main regime change mechanism was sanctions, which could not even force Saddam out of Kuwait. Once the inspectors left and the sanctions were lifted Saddam or his Baathist successor would return to building WMD.²⁰³ Any policy that did not address the fundamental problem of the regime and its intentions was therefore dangerously inadequate. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* editors wrote in July 1991: “The real problem here is less the weapons than the regime sitting in power in Baghdad...The weapons are dangerous because the Baath Party is incorrigibly dangerous. So long as these people are in control, no amount of inspecting can ever guarantee that we have found it all.”²⁰⁴ Charles Krauthammer stressed the same set of problems: “The Iraqi bomb is today a problem of intent, not capability. The capability is there, and it is extremely difficult to destroy piece by piece. It can only be taken care of by going after intent: by producing a leadership in Baghdad willing to give it over to us.”²⁰⁵

These critics pointed to Iraqi non-compliance with the inspections as evidence that under the current regime Iraq would never comply and would inevitably hide some WMD capabilities.

²⁰³ William Safire, “Saddam’s Deadline,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1991, A15; Jim Hoagland, “Unfinished Business in the Gulf,” *Washington Post*, September 12, 1991, A23; Editorial, “Ashes in our Mouths (cont.),” *The National Review*, July 8, 1991, 17.

²⁰⁴ Editorial, “Saddam’s Compliance,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 10, 1991, A12.

²⁰⁵ Charles Krauthammer, “What to Do About Saddam,” *Washington Post*, July 26, 1991, A23.

They also mocked UNSCOM and the IAEA as bumbling “Inspector Clouseaus” and claimed that the inspections created a false sense of security.²⁰⁶ In contrast to the conditional critics, they contended that containment was too dangerous and feckless to be given a chance to work. With each confrontation, they pressed Bush to launch sustained air strikes on the Iraqi military, security services, and infrastructure in order to truly break his regime.²⁰⁷ Later in the decade, they developed a strategy for regime change called rollback, which will be discussed in a later chapter.²⁰⁸ Without more concerted action, Saddam would simply keep up this “Baghdad Shuffle” until the coalition became exhausted and withdrew the inspectors.²⁰⁹

Another major issue for both of these schools was war crimes trials for top Baathists. Numerous Congressmen from both parties wrote to Bush and passed resolutions requesting that he form an international tribunal to gather information on the crimes of the Iraqi leadership and

²⁰⁶ Quote is from: Editorial, “Clouseau in Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 1991, A10. For a variation on this argument, see Albert Wohlstetter, “Wide Open Secret Coup,” *The National Review*, March 16, 1992, 34-36.

²⁰⁷ Safire, “Saddam’s Deadline,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1991, A15.
Jim Hoagland, “Is it Time to Strike at Saddam Again?” *Washington Post*, March 27, 1992, A27; Editorial, “The President and Iraq,” *Washington Post*, August 18, 1992, A12.

²⁰⁸ For some calls for rollback in 1991 and 1992, see: Gerald Seib, “Washington Insight: Shake-Up by Saddam Hussein Rekindles U.S. Hopes for Overthrow of Iraqi Leader,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 1991, A10. Charles Krauthammer, “Saddam Won,” *Washington Post*, July 29, 1992, A23; Laurie Mylroie, “Still Standing,” *The New Republic*, April 13, 1992, 11-12. Letter, Robert Torricelli, Stephen Solarz, Dante Fascell, et. al. to George Bush, March 6, 1992, George Bush Presidential Library, November 28, 2016, accessed November 28, 2016, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/persian-gulf/41-CO072-302096-323770/41-co072-313772.pdf>. See also Joseph Liebermann testimony in *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., July 27, 1992, 19450.

²⁰⁹ Editorial, “Rethinking Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 1992, A12; Jim Hoagland, “Advantage Saddam Hussein,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1992, A19.

issue indictments.²¹⁰ House Democrats held several hearings on this topic.²¹¹ The calls for war crimes trials stemmed from the desire to go beyond the removal of Saddam to the dismantling and discrediting of the entire Baathist system. They hoped that war crimes trials would further delegitimize Saddam in global politics and inhibit attempts by any nation to normalize relations with Iraq. In contrast, the Bush administration opposed the formation of war crimes trials in absentia because without the actual criminals in hand, these tribunals would make the United States look weak.²¹² They would also work against the hope for a coup because they directly threatened the Baathist and military elite, the exact people to whom the United States was trying to assure leniency if they overthrew Saddam.²¹³

The third school of thought on containment was the humanitarian school. Most of them came from the political and academic left, religious organizations, and humanitarian activism. Although they generally agreed that Iraq should be contained, they prioritized lifting sanctions to relieve the Iraqi health crisis, noting that sanctions affected ordinary Iraqis far more than Saddam's regime. They frequently pointed out that most Iraqis had become dependent on government ration cards, allowing the state to control them further.²¹⁴ David Bonior (D-MI)

²¹⁰ For examples of calls for war crimes trials made directly to Bush, see: Letter on Concurrent Resolution on War Crimes, Thad Cochran, Richard Lugar, John McCain, Alan Simpson, et. al., to Bush, March 4, 1991, ID 211871, CO-072, WHORM: Subject File on Iraq, Bush Presidential Records, George Bush Presidential Library; Statements by Pell and Hamilton: Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Persian Gulf: The Question of War Crimes*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., April 9, 1991, 2; House Subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and Human Rights and International Organizations of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *U.N. Role in the Persian Gulf*, April 23, 1991, 35.

²¹¹ For examples, see: House Subcommittee on International Law, Immigration, and Refugees of the House Committee on the Judiciary, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., March 13, 1991.

²¹² Memorandum, Bruce Riedel to Jonathan Howe, July 29, 1992, OA/ID CF01404-006, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Presidential Meeting Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 4.

²¹³ NSC Deputies Committee Meeting Notes, Richard Haass, August 12, 1992, OA/ID CF01404-010, National Security Council, Richard Haass Files, Presidential Meeting Files, George Bush Presidential Library, 3; Memorandum, Moving Beyond Security Council Resolution 686, March 7, 1991, 3.

argued that an enfeebled Iraqi people stood no chance against the Baathist security system, saying, “Saddam Hussein will not be brought down by starving the Iraqi people.”²¹⁵

In the House Select Committee on Hunger, Democratic Congressmen Byron Dorgan (ND), Timothy Penny (MN), and Jim McDermott (WA) heard dozens of testimonies about the suffering in Iraq and urged Bush to allow for normal commerce with the exception of military goods. At the minimum, they called for Iraq to be permitted to use its frozen assets to purchase essential goods abroad.²¹⁶ McDermott questioned the basic morality of the “turn the screw” policy: “We have to ask ourselves: at what point does the starvation of 18 million people take precedence over our attempts to remove one person from power?”²¹⁷ The humanitarian critics argued that this suffering largely stemmed from the Desert Storm bombing campaign, which devastated crucial Iraqi infrastructure like power plants and water treatment facilities.²¹⁸ Furthermore, they argued that waiting for Saddam to accept Security Council Resolutions 706 and 712 was insufficient given the gravity of the humanitarian situation. Instead, the United States had to take the initiative in alleviating this suffering even if it meant weakening a cornerstone of containment.²¹⁹ Congressman Henry Gonzalez, for instance, wrote to Bush in May 1991 calling for an “immediate and massive international effort” to provide relief for the

²¹⁴ Achim Rohde, *State-Society Relations in Ba’thist Iraq* (New York: Routledge Press, 2010), 68; Meghan O’Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions: Statecraft and State Sponsors of Terrorism* (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 137.

²¹⁵ International Task Force of the House Select Committee on Hunger, *Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq: Challenge for U.S. Policy*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., November 13, 1991, 95.

²¹⁶ See testimonies of religious and humanitarian organizations in: International Task Force of the House Select Committee, *Humanitarian Dilemma in Iraq*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., August 1, 1991.

²¹⁷ House Select Committee on Hunger, *Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq*, November 13, 1991, 3.

²¹⁸ See testimony by Congressman Henry Gonzalez in *Cong. Rec.*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., June 24, 1991, 16079.

²¹⁹ See testimonies of Tim Penny and Jim McDermott in House Committee on Hunger, *Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq*, November 13, 1991, 3-7.

Iraqi people.²²⁰ Of these three schools of thought, the humanitarian argument was the most distant from centers of power in politics and the media. The leadership of both major parties did little to support this criticism as they were both.²²¹ Nevertheless, this argument would gain traction over time as Saddam remained in power and the Iraqi people's suffering continued.²²²

Conclusion

For the remainder of the decade, the key figures of the Bush administration continued to defend the limited victory of Desert Storm and argue that containment was working by managing and minimizing the Iraqi threat. Colin Powell best spelled out this defense in September 1991:

There is also this romantic view that all we had to do was sail up the river valley to Baghdad and Saddam Hussein would be waiting at the gate, that all we had to do was snatch him, and that there was some Jeffersonian democrat waiting in the Baath Party to take over. I think the President showed great wisdom in not getting himself mired down in a Mesopotamian mess. I am confident that regional stability is intact. Saddam Hussein is threatening none of his neighbors."²²³

In an interview in 1996, Brent Scowcroft backed up this view: "As long as we are alert and observant Saddam Hussein is not a threat to his neighbors. He's a nuisance, he's an annoyance, but he's not a threat."²²⁴ Indeed, many parts of containment worked well in the early 1990s. The multinational coalition behind the Security Council resolutions remained intact. The sanctions continued to prevent Saddam from rebuilding his military and economic strength. The

²²⁰ Gordon, *Invisible War*, 149.

²²¹ Gordon, *Invisible War*, 141-142.

²²² For more on how the humanitarian critique of sanctions developed in the 1990s, see essay collections in: Phyllis Bennis and Michel Moushabeck, eds. *Beyond the Storm: A Gulf Crisis Reader* (Brooklyn: Olive Branch Press, 1991); Anthony Arnone, ed., *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002).

²²³ Powell quote from Senate Armed Services Committee, *Nominations Before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., September 27, 1991. 314. For a similar point, see Cheney testimony in: House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Future of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., March 24, 1992, 416.

²²⁴ Scowcroft, interview by Frontline, 1995.

NFZs limited his ability to oppress vulnerable populations and project force against his neighbors. Lastly, the inspections had uncovered and destroyed most of his WMD capabilities.²²⁵

The Bush administration may have won the policy battle over Iraq after the Gulf War, but it lost the political war to defend that policy. Few figures in politics and the media accepted the idea that the Saddam problem was being contained and would continue to be in the future. Most politicians and commentators accepted Bush's stance against normalization of relations with Saddam without concurring with the Bush team's sense that containment sufficed long as it postponed the resurrection of Saddam's military and WMD programs. Many political figures supported the no-normalization stance because they thought Saddam had proven himself incapable of change and impervious to positive incentives like those offered in the prewar engagement policy. He had rejected trade and aid in order to annex and brutalize Kuwait, developed WMD, attacked Israel, caused immense environmental damage, and massacred tens of thousands of his own people in order to hold on to power.²²⁶

This line of thinking about Iraq drew conceptual strength from the problem of the regime, or the belief that the nature of totalitarian regimes like the Baathist state drove them to be aggressive, anti-American, and incapable of change. Congressman Mel Levine (D-CA), a staunch supporter of the war, summarized this moral outrage about Saddam's survival and the impossibility of normalization in saying: "It is just exasperating that having shed the blood and treasure that we did for what was clearly an appropriate purpose that we still have this barbarian

²²⁵ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 151-2.

²²⁶ C. Lane and M.G. Warner, "His Head on a Plate," *Newsweek*, March 4, 1991, 40.

in power exercising the type of discretion that he does and in the duplicitous manner that he appears to be unable to change.”²²⁷

The impossibility of redemption was the bitter “lesson” of Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait. This lesson was then calcified by the anguish and disappointment of an incomplete victory and one and a half subsequent years of frustration in trying to contain Saddam and compel his cooperation with the United Nations. The principle of no-normalization formed an absolute baseline of U.S. political discourse for the rest of the decade, with few dissensions. Debates would rage over whether containment was working or not, whether the United States needed to seek democracy or could accept a more pliable strongman, or how much and what kind of direct action the United States should take to topple Saddam. All of these conversations nonetheless occurred on this calcified bedrock. For the remainder of the decade, as Saddam remained in power and key pillars of containment were undermined, more Americans shifted from the conditional idea that containment might work to the inevitable decline perspective.

One additional concept started to harden into a political consensus during the second half of Bush’s term. This position was that containment was at best a temporary way of managing the Saddam problem and postponing his resurrection. This argument followed from the no-normalization principle. If relations with Saddam could not be normalized, the only path out of this dilemma was his removal. Defenders of containment, particularly the Bush administration, did not credibly explain how containment would bring about Saddam’s downfall. Like Powell and Scowcroft, they could say only that Saddam appeared muzzled and that he might be overthrown in a coup. The strength of the Bush administration’s case was that the United States

²²⁷ See, for examples: Editorial, “Without Saddam Hussein,” *Washington Post*, March 12, 1991, A20; Gelb, “A Unified, Weak Iraq,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1991; Daniel Pipes, “Let the Iraqis Get Rid of Saddam,” *Washington Post*, December 22, 1991, C7.

lacked a low-risk means of toppling Saddam, much less handling the aftermath of his ouster. This, however, was a defensive position with an indefinite but inexorable political expiration date. The Bush administration had trapped themselves in this dilemma by ruling out any form of normalization, and domestic politics hemmed them in even further. With Bush's defeat in 1992, he passed these problems to William Jefferson Clinton.

CHAPTER 3: THE LONG WATCH: THE HIGH YEARS OF CONTAINMENT, 1993-1996

Introduction

Sergeant Gary Jordan of the U.S. Army's 24th Infantry Division returned to Kuwait in October 1994 as part of the effort to deter Iraq from invading its tiny neighbor after Saddam positioned combat units on the border. A veteran of Desert Storm, Jordan could not help but voice frustration over his redeployment: "If we'd taken care of the problem the first time, we wouldn't have had a problem this time."¹ In Iraq at the same time, an anonymous waiter slipped a note to two reporters that read: "Dear sir, sorry to trouble you. I know you are very kind and therefore, when you leave the country, could you give me whatever medication you have. I'm poor and I have a big family... Any antibiotics would be a great help."² In Baghdad's hotels, French, Russian, and Chinese businessmen prepared huge oil contracts with the Iraqi government that awaited the end of sanctions. In the United States, congressmen, columnists, and other critics grumbled that containment looked endless while Saddam Hussein never seemed to change.

In sum, the containment of Iraq pleased no one involved, but in its first term the Clinton administration enforced and defended this policy as a way of managing the Saddam problem at reasonable cost. Clinton largely continued Bush' approach of using sanctions to compel Saddam's compliance with the United Nations, keep him weak, and create the conditions to spark a coup. Clinton's strategy for managing Saddam was to maintain the coalition, support

¹ Russell Watson, "But What About Next Time?" *Newsweek*, October 24, 1994, 28.

² Youssef Ibrahim, "Vote Leaves Iraqi as Winner and West at a Loss," *New York Times*, October 18, 1995, A1.

weapons inspectors, preserve sanctions, enforce the no-fly-zones (NFZ), and occasionally use or threaten to use force when Saddam challenged his confinement. The administration hoped that this approach would allow it to focus on other international priorities. In the Clinton's first term, it basically succeeded in these goals. The coalition beat back Saddam's threats to his neighbors, unveiled and destroyed most of his weapons of mass destruction (WMD), inhibited military recovery, and forced Saddam to focus on survival at home.

U.S. policy toward Iraq was suspended between two contradictory principles in Clinton's first term. The first principle was the regime change consensus, or the belief that any true solution to the Saddam problem required his removal at the minimum and the transformation of his regime into a democracy at the maximum. This belief was solidified in political and policy circles under Bush and remained almost unassailable under Clinton. The second principle was that there was no realistic strategic alternative to containment for the foreseeable future because direct attempts at regime change would be ineffective or too costly while breaking up the coalition. The Bush administration had endorsed this view, and Clinton officials did not seriously consider deviating from it in his first term.

Two approaches to the containment Iraq defined political and intellectual debates in Clinton's first term. Members of the conditional school viewed containment as a reasonable policy in the absence of realistic alternatives but argued that Clinton should maximize pressure on Saddam to deter him from aggression, ensure his disarmament, and heighten the chances of his overthrow. Members of the inevitable decline school, in contrast, saw every crisis or Iraqi act of non-compliance as more evidence that the Iraqi threat would not recede until Saddam and his regime were uprooted entirely. Clinton officials responded that occasionally deterring or using force against Saddam was a tolerable cost for containing him and facilitating inspections.

Clinton also had to wrestle with increasingly incompatible demands by international and domestic audiences, both of which Clinton needed to maintain containment. At home, the dominance of the regime change consensus meant that Clinton would pay a price retreating from Bush's demand that sanctions would not be eased until Saddam was out of power. However, the coalition would not countenance an indefinite policy of containment, much less any sign that the real intention of U.S. policy was regime change. Leaning too far to one side of this divide jeopardized the other. If Clinton told the coalition that the United States would accept the easing of sanctions in response to Saddam's cooperation, he would become politically vulnerable to domestic critics. However, the more the coalition, especially France, Russia, and China, suspected that the United States wanted to maintain sanctions regardless of Iraqi compliance, the more they pushed to end sanctions and inspections and normalize relations with Iraq.

In order to deal with irreconcilable domestic and foreign audiences, the administration developed what I call the "Clinton fudge."³ Clinton officials intentionally avoided tying the lifting of sanctions to Saddam's removal from power, as Bush had done following Desert Storm. However, they demanded that Saddam Hussein comply with all Security Council resolutions passed after Desert Storm, including Resolution 688, which called for the Iraqi government to "ensure that the human and political rights of all Iraqi citizens are respected."⁴ The administration argued that it was unlikely that Saddam would fully comply with these demands and that if he did he would fall from power because his totalitarian system hinged on terror and violence. Clinton officials justified this high bar of compliance by arguing for the need to be

³ Foreign policy scholar Laurie Mylroie called Clinton's policy on when to lift sanctions a "fudge." The "Clinton fudge" is my term. See: Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq 3 Years After the Gulf War*, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., February 23, 1994, 19.

⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 688, April 5, 1991, un.org, accessed May 10, 2017, <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/7304973.00624847.html>, 32.

reassured of Saddam's changed intentions, not just his literal compliance, in order to safely lift sanctions. Thus, the Clinton fudge provided a formula to signal to domestic audiences that it was almost inconceivable that sanctions would be lifted with Saddam in power while telling the coalition that it was open to easing sanctions if Saddam met these high standards.

The Clinton administration thus sought to maintain two balancing acts in his Iraq policy. First, it told domestic critics that it wanted regime change and even pursued indirect means of toppling Saddam while firmly prioritizing containment and enforcement of the Security Council resolutions. Second, with the intentional ambiguity of the Clinton fudge, it signaled a hard line to domestic audiences while stressing flexibility to the coalition.

Clinton's policy and these two balancing acts held together as long as several conditions prevailed. First, the administration needed to maintain the possibility that Saddam Hussein might be overthrown in a coup in order to protect Clinton's political flank. The hope for a coup preserved the possibility that containment itself could generate sufficient pressures to solve the Saddam problem without massive U.S. intervention. If containment lacked this outlet and Saddam appeared firmly in power, the policy would seem indefinite, forcing the United States to choose between accepting Saddam's survival and actively pursuing regime change. Second, the United States needed to maintain coalition support for sanctions and inspections because without this cooperation Saddam could export oil and rebuild his WMD and conventional forces.

This chapter argues that by the end of Clinton's first term the conditions necessary for preserving containment had become increasingly tenuous. Between 1992 and 1996, Saddam faced coups, family betrayals, rebellions, and economic scarcity, but he survived through a strategy of brutality and patronage. By the end of 1996, Saddam had crushed the U.S.-backed Iraqi opposition and made his regime virtually immune to coups or rebellions. In addition, the

coalition grew shakier as France, Russia, China, and U.S. partners in the Middle East pressed to end inspections, renew trade with Iraq, and provide relief from the sanctions. These two shifts started the process of moving key policy-makers, politicians, and commentators from the conditional position to the inevitable declinist view that containment cannot work and must be replaced with an open regime change policy. The central tension of Clinton's first term Iraq policy was that containment achieved many goals at a tolerable cost but became less tenable in the long term.

New President, Old Policy: Clinton Takes Over Containment

Iraq policy did not play a central role in the 1992 election, but it had a more important place than many scholars have acknowledged. The Clinton campaign focused on economic issues while seeking to neutralize Bush's experience and accomplishments in foreign affairs. They acknowledged that Desert Storm counted as a victory in the public eye but tried to tarnish Bush's victory by arguing that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait resulted from his coddling of Saddam beforehand. Al Gore, Clinton's running mate, cited Bush's support for export credit aid to Iraq and his muted reaction to Iraqi threats and atrocities as reasons why Saddam thought he could get away with the invasion. In one speech, Gore stated: "His poor judgment, moral blindness, and bungling policies led directly to a war that never should have taken place."⁵ Clinton and Gore further attacked Bush's Iraq record by accusing him of betraying the Iraqi rebels after promising assistance against Saddam, adding that the United States missed an opportunity to bring Saddam down after the war.⁶ One Democratic bumper sticker linked Bush's failure to topple Saddam with the faltering U.S. economy by asking: "Saddam still has his job. What about you?"⁷

⁵ Albert Gore, "Speech before the Center for National Policy," (speech, Washington, D.C., September 29, 1992) C-SPAN.org, accessed November 3, 2017, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?32824-1/clinton-campaign-event>.

⁶ Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 289.

The Bush campaign retorted that Clinton lacked foreign policy experience and that Bush had dealt with Saddam successfully and prudently. They objected to the Clinton's moral reproaches of Bush's handling of authoritarian regimes, arguing: "The objective is to change behavior, not make yourself feel good. Sometimes you isolate. Sometimes you must engage to change behavior."⁸ They also deflected Clinton's Iraqgate accusations onto the Democrats by saying that most Democrats had supported aid to Iraq before 1990 but then voted against the use of force authorization for Desert Storm.⁹

Clinton's criticism of Bush's Iraq record fit into a larger strategy of depicting Bush as both too focused on foreign affairs and too uncertain about democracy and human rights abroad. Clinton accused Bush of "ambivalence about supporting democracy" and a willingness to partner with dictators like Saddam, Hosni Mubarak, and the Chinese communists.¹⁰ He pledged that his foreign policy would prioritize multilateral institutions, expand free trade, and promote democracy and peaceful globalization.¹¹

This vision appealed to many intellectuals who were frustrated with Bush's pragmatic but uninspiring foreign policy. Many liberals, conservatives, and neoconservatives had long criticized Bush for not prioritizing the spread of democracy in an age when it seemed the

⁷ Mark Shields, "The Gulf Glow Fades," *Washington Post*, March 6, 1992, A23.

⁸ Bush Debate Preparation Documents, James Baker, 1992, MC 197, Box 141, Folder 9, James A. Baker III Papers at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, 5.

⁹ Brent Scowcroft, "We Didn't 'Coddle' Saddam," *Washington Post*, October 10, 1992, A27; Bush Debate Preparation Documents, Baker Library, 8.

¹⁰ Thomas Friedman, "Clinton Asserts Bush Is Too Eager to Befriend the World's Dictators," *New York Times*, October 2, 1992, A1.

¹¹ Norman Ornstein, "Foreign Policy and the 1992 Election," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 3 (Summer, 1992): 1-16; Julian Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security from World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 383.

inevitable course of history.¹² The Clinton campaign, in turn, tried to cultivate these groups, especially neoconservatives, in order to undermine a key element of the Republican coalition.¹³ The editors of *The New Republic* backed Clinton because they saw him as a new type of Democrat who believed in strong defense and the global assertion of U.S. values. They accused Bush of failing to recognize the unique historical opportunities created by communism's collapse, writing: "Instead of embracing the democratic revolutions of the late 1980's and using them to formulate a clearly pro-democratic foreign policy, Bush lapsed into an incoherent realism."¹⁴ Bush's policy of supporting a coup in Iraq instead of promoting democracy lent weight to this criticism. These accusations had some public appeal. One November 1992 poll found that 55% of respondents were unsatisfied with Bush's explanation of his handling of prewar aid to Iraq.¹⁵ 70% in a September poll said Bush spent too much time on foreign policy, although his approval ratings for foreign policy as a whole remained solid.¹⁶

Despite its attacks on Bush's performance, the Clinton campaign was vague about how it would change Iraq policy. Campaign officials discussed plans to support the opposition more concretely but did not promise significant changes to containment.¹⁷ Clinton said in January

¹² Other prominent neoconservative and conservative supporters of Clinton in 1992 included Joshua Muravchik, Paul Nitze, Samuel Huntington, Edward Luttwak, Martin Peretz, and James Woolsey. For examples, see: Editorial, "No Fly," *Wall Street Journal*, August 28, 1992, A10; Steven Rosenfeld, "Return of the Neocons," *Washington Post*, August 28, 1992, A23; Joshua Muravchik, "Conservatives for Clinton," *The New Republic*, November 2, 1992, 22.

¹³ Derek Chollet, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 35-36.

¹⁴ Editorial, "Clinton for President," *The New Republic*, November 9, 1992, 8.

¹⁵ Tom Morganthau, "Iraqgate: What Went Wrong," *Newsweek*, November 2, 1992, 22.

¹⁶ *New York Times* Telephone Survey, October 23, 1992, Polling the Nations, accessed November 25, 2017, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

¹⁷ Gore, "Speech Before the Center for National Policy," September 29, 1992.

1992 that he probably would have voted for the authorization to use force against Iraq, although his record at that time was ambiguous.¹⁸ Gore had voted for the war, and during the campaign he went further than Clinton in calling for tough action against Saddam. He told the Senate in March 1992 that the main obstacle to removing Saddam was Bush's mistaken belief that: "Saddam Hussein is somehow essential to the stability of the region and that we must take care to deal with him only within carefully weighted limits."¹⁹

After Clinton won the 1992 election, he began building a foreign policy team and weighing how to handle challenges like Iraq. On January 5, 1993, Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger sent a memo to his successor Warren Christopher that outlined the Iraqi threat

Saddam is anxious to break out of the system of postwar constraints imposed by the U.N. He will test you early in the new Administration, perhaps first with charm, and when that fails, with defiance...If you are not moving forward to keep the pressure on Saddam, you will find yourself sliding backward.²⁰

Eagleburger thus portrayed Iraq as a maintenance problem that required active attention and pressure to prevent Saddam from chipping away at containment.

In fact, the pattern Eagleburger described manifested itself before Clinton even took office when in early January Iraq started challenging the southern NFZ. Iraq moved surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) into the southern zone, activated preexisting anti-aircraft batteries, and sent aircraft into the NFZ, leading to U.S. forces shooting down one Iraqi fighter.²¹ On January 8, Iraqi officials announced that Iraq would have to fly into Iraq on chartered Iraqi aircraft rather

¹⁸ Michael Kelly, "Clinton Defends Position on Iraqi War," *New York Times*, July 31, 1992, A13.

¹⁹ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Mass Killings in Iraq*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., March 19, 1992, 50-51.

²⁰ Memorandum, Lawrence Eagleburger to Warren Christopher, January 5, 1993, State Department FOIA Reading Room, accessed October 14, 2017, <https://foia.state.gov/Search/results.aspx>, 14.

²¹ Michael Gordon, "Iraq is Reported to Move Missiles Into Areas Patrolled by U.S. Jets," *New York Times*, January 5, 1993, A1.

than the normal procedure of using U.N. planes.²² After Saddam moved SAMs into the northern NFZ on January 11, Bush ordered airstrikes on Iraqi SAM sites and other air defenses.²³ U.S. officials made clear that the strike was intended to force Saddam's compliance rather than overthrow him. One official called the strikes "a spanking, not a beating."²⁴ The strike was broadly popular in the United States, with one poll showing 82% of respondents in support.²⁵

Some of Clinton's comments shortly after this confrontation muddled what his Iraq policy would be upon taking office. He told an interviewer that he backed the strikes and added:

The people of Iraq would be better off if they had a different leader. But my job is not to pick their rulers for them. I always tell everybody, 'I'm a Baptist; I believe in deathbed conversions.' If he wants a different relationship with the United States and the United Nations all he has to do is change his behavior.²⁶

Clinton had never hinted that he would accept any normalization with Iraq during the campaign, but now he was suggesting that relations with Saddam could improve if he complied with the U.N.'s demands. His advisers were surprised and quickly urged him to withdraw this comment.²⁷ In the face of media and Congressional criticism, Clinton backtracked a days later and reaffirmed that he had "no intention of normalizing relations" and that "there is no difference between my policy and the policy of the present administration." Clinton officials later said that he feared looking weak on Iraq going into his presidency but also saw a hardline policy as risky.²⁸

²² Frank Piral, "U.N. Condemns Iraq Move," *New York Times*, January 9, 1993, A6.

²³ Eric Schmitt, "Allied Strike: Swift and Unchallenged," *New York Times*, January 13, 1998, A8.

²⁴ Jill Smolowe, "A Spanking for Saddam," *Time*, January 25, 1993, 44.

²⁵ "Poll Finds Strong Support for Raid From Americans," *New York Times*, January 15, 1993, A8.

²⁶ "Excerpts from an Interview with Clinton After the Air Strikes," *New York Times*, A10. For critics of the "Baptist" comment, see: William Safire, "Stumbling into the Oval Office," *New York Times*, January 18, 1993, A17; A.M. Rosenthal, "Bill Clinton's War," *New York Times*, January 19, 1993, A21.

²⁷ Martin Indyk, *Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 31.

The confrontation with Saddam continued on January 17 when Iraqi officials said they would not guarantee the safety of U.N. aircraft that flew into Iraqi airspace. Bush responded by launching 40 cruise missiles against a military complex outside of Baghdad and promising more strikes if Saddam continued his obstruction.²⁹ On January 19, the day before Clinton's inauguration, the Iraqis relented and promised to stop firing on coalition planes and allow inspectors to fly into Baghdad. They portrayed this move as a gesture of good will to a new president they hoped might take a softer approach.³⁰ Nevertheless, Iraqi anti-aircraft sites continued to target U.S. planes, and on January 22 Clinton retaliated with air strikes on anti-aircraft installations near the northern NFZ. Soon thereafter the Iraqis resumed compliance with the inspectors.³¹ Eagleburger's prediction that Saddam would try to woo Clinton with hollow cooperation first and defiance second came true immediately, and the administration's first response demonstrated a willingness to use force to deter Iraqi misbehavior.

Clinton entered office without much experience in foreign affairs or a clear conception of U.S. grand strategy. In terms of domestic politics, he was part of a wave of centrist Democrats who wanted to distance themselves from the left wing of the party and hew more closely to what they saw as a rising conservative tide in U.S. politics. Led by the political strategist Will Marshall, these self-described "New Democrats" wanted the party to escape the shadow of the Vietnam War and Jimmy Carter's foreign policy fiascoes. The New Democrats believed most

²⁸ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 31; Thomas Friedman, "Clinton Affirms U.S. Policy on Iraq," *New York Times*, January 15, 1993, A1.

²⁹ Michael Gordon, "Clinton Backs Step: About 40 Rockets Fired from Navy Ships," *New York Times*, January 18, 1993, A1.

³⁰ Michael Gordon, "Iraq Says It Won't Attack Planes and Agree to U.N. Flight Terms," *New York Times*, January 20, 1993, A1.

³¹ Elaine Sciolino, "New Iraqi Site Raided as White House Vows Firmness," *New York Times*, January 23, 1993, A3.

Americans thought that the Republicans were tougher and more reliable on foreign affairs. For Clinton, Gore, and other centrist Democrats, changing this perception would require more willingness to use U.S. power to spread democracy and liberal values and defend the national interest.³²

At the White House, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake led an effort throughout 1993 to develop an overarching foreign policy framework that would also satisfy these political objectives. He and other Clinton advisors wanted to devise a more transformative vision than Bush's New World Order, which mainly sought to restore cooperation among the great powers in order to maintain international stability. Clinton and Lake believed that Bush had focused too much on stability and had not recognized the opportunities created by globalization and the end of the Cold War. At the same time, the incoming administration believed their political mandate was for domestic issues, and they did not want any foreign policy issue dominating the agenda.³³

Lake delivered an address at Johns Hopkins on September 21, 1993 to lay out Clinton's conception of the U.S. global role. He defined democracy, human rights, and market economics as the "core concepts" of U.S. foreign policy and argued that in recent years these ideas were "more broadly accepted than ever." He made a case that these values had "universal appeal" and that in the wake of the Soviet defeat the United States had an unprecedented opportunity to spread their reach. In a Wilsonian fusion of interests and ideology, he claimed: "To the extent democracy and market economics hold sway in other nations, our own nation will be more secure, prosperous, and influential, while the broader world will be more humane and

³² For more on the Democrats' rightward shift in the 1990s and its consequences for foreign policy, see: Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 318, 324-326; Chollet, *America Between the Wars*, 31-37; Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy*, 378-380, 386, 396.

³³ Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America's Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 102-103, 134.

peaceful.”³⁴ This statement reflected the deep belief of key figures in the Clinton administration in the democratic peace, or the idea that democracies generally acted less aggressively, did not go to war with each other, and cooperated more with other states. To explain this behavior, democratic peace theorists cited institutions and mechanisms like popular control of government, the separation of powers, and more liberal values. Clinton officials connected the democratic peace to free trade, reasoning that as nations built economic interdependence, they would have fewer reasons to fight and would mutually gain in prosperity.³⁵

For Lake, the end of the Cold War meant that the United States should shift from containing the threat to capitalist democracies to enlarging this community. The United States would pursue this goal by example, exhortation, and material support for democratic and market forces. It would also pursue these ends in partnership with allies and multilateral institutions in order to bolster democratic collective security and international law. Lake labeled this approach the “strategy of enlargement.”³⁶ He identified “backlash states” such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, Cuba, and North Korea as one major category of threat to enlargement. Lake defined backlash states as dictatorial regimes that oppressed their own people, fomented ethnic hatred, backed terrorist

³⁴ Anthony Lake, “From Containment to Enlargement,” (speech, Washington D.C., September 21, 1993), accessed April 15, 2017, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html>. For more on the historical U.S. association of market economics and democracy in foreign policy, see: Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 266-268, 272-274; John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 77-79.

³⁵ Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter, 1996-1997): 23-24; Brands, *Berlin to Baghdad*, 106. For a theoretical examination of the democratic peace concept, see: Bruce Russett and Zeev Maoz, “Normative and Structural Causes of the Democratic Peace, 1946-1986,” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (September, 1993): 624-638. For a historical examination of its role in the history of U.S. foreign policy, see Tony Smith, *Why Wilson Matters: The Origin of American Liberal Internationalism and its Crisis Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

³⁶ Lake, “Containment to Enlargement,” September 21, 1993. See also: William Perry, “Defense in an Age of Hope,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 6 (November-December, 1996): 64-79.

groups, and pursued WMD. These countries lacked superpower resources but acted aggressively in their regions and defied international norms.³⁷

According to Lake, these states faced a dilemma in a globalizing, post-Cold War world. If they opened their societies to the forces that enabled economic dynamism they would jeopardize their hold on power by enabling internal resistance. Thus, backlash states severed or limited their people's access to information and trade, which stunted economic growth and increased their isolation. The U.S. role in dealing with these states was: "as the only superpower...to neutralize, contain, and through selective pressure possibly transform these backlash states into responsible members of the international community."³⁸ The tools of this approach were deterrence, non-proliferation, sanctions, isolation, and military force, if needed. The backlash states, if contained, would either succumb to global trends or remain pariahs.³⁹

Within this framework, the Clinton administration defined U.S. goals in the Middle East as fostering a community of "like-minded states that share our goals of free markets, broad democratic values, and controls on proliferation."⁴⁰ Crucial U.S. interests were preserving access to oil, achieving an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, and countering Islamic extremism.⁴¹ They particularly emphasized the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) as the best way to ease tensions and encourage political reform.⁴² The main threat to these objectives was the region's backlash

³⁷ Anthony Lake, "Confronting Backlash States," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (March-April 1994): 46. See also, Michael Klare, *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws: America's Search for a New Foreign Policy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 24-26.

³⁸ Lake, "Backlash States," 45-46.

³⁹ Lake, "Containment to Enlargement," September 21, 1993.

⁴⁰ Anthony Lake, "The Middle East Moment," *Washington Post*, July 24, 1994, C1.

⁴¹ Martin Indyk, "Address to the Soref Symposium," (speech, Washington, D.C., May 20, 1993), accessed November 14, 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-clinton-administrations-approach-to-the-middle-east>

states, especially Iraq and Iran. These states sought nuclear weapons, sponsored terrorist groups, opposed democratization and the MEPP, and threatened U.S. allies and trade interests.

To deal with these threats, the Clinton administration developed a policy called dual containment. The architect of this policy was Martin Indyk, the NSC's Director of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. Indyk founded the policy on the premise that "we do not accept the argument that we should continue the old balance of power game, building up one to balance the other," as the United States had done in the Gulf during the Cold War. He argued that this strategy had set the stage for Iraqi aggression because the United States was mistakenly trying to build up Saddam as a bulwark of stability in the region. The solution under dual containment was for the United States to provide stability in the Gulf by containing both Iran and Iraq. Indyk reasoned that this strategy was feasible in the USSR's absence because Iran or Iraq could not look to another superpower for help.⁴³ Iran and Iraq would also be easier to contain after a decade of war and economic decline. Under dual containment, the United States would have to retain military forces in the region to counter Iranian or Iraqi aggression.⁴⁴

The new administration nevertheless deviated minimally from Bush's version of containment. Clinton officials agreed that Saddam would probably never fully comply with the U.N.'s demands and that the United States could probably never normalize relations with a Saddam-led Iraq.⁴⁵ They saw him as inflexibly committed to rebuilding his conventional and unconventional arsenals, escaping sanctions, and seeking regional domination. One intelligence

⁴² Brands, *Berlin to Baghdad*, 184.

⁴³ Indyk, "Address to the Soref Symposium."

⁴⁴ Lake, "Backlash States," 49; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 36.

⁴⁵ Memorandum to Martin Indyk, Unknown Author, January 1993, OA/ID 255, National Security Council, Near East and South Asian Affairs, Martin Indyk Files, William Clinton Presidential Library, 1.

estimate backed up this statement in saying: “Whether the sanctions remain in effect or not, Baghdad will pursue the following goals, objectives, and policies as long as Saddam remains in power.”⁴⁶ Indyk reasoned further that: “Saddam Hussein will continue to probe for daylight between the positions of President Clinton and his predecessor.” Making him comply with the United Nations would require constant parrying of his threats and provocations as well as patient “hand-holding” of a divided coalition. There was a broad sense that the policy of using sanctions to enforce compliance and possibly oust Saddam would not work indefinitely because: “Saddam Hussein is still in control, the sanctions are eroding, and international support is dissipating.”⁴⁷

The Clinton administration was somewhat split on how to compel Saddam’s compliance while preserving the coalition. Officials like Indyk, Gore, Defense Secretary Les Aspin, and U.N. Ambassador Madeleine Albright recommended a tougher policy of “low tolerance” for non-compliance. In this approach, the United States would respond immediately to Iraqi misbehavior with escalatory strikes on military targets or the expansion of the NFZs.⁴⁸ The prevailing view within the administration, however, was that Saddam was more of a nuisance than a serious military threat. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Colin Powell, Lake, and Christopher saw containment as a cost-effective strategy for managing Saddam while they pursued other priorities.⁴⁹ They referred to Saddam as a “rash,” a “migraine,” or a “toothache,”

⁴⁶ CIA Report, National Intelligence Estimate 93-42, “Prospects for Iraq; Saddam and Beyond,” December 1993, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://primarysources.brillonline.com/reader/open?rotate=1&searchTerms=iraq&starEnabled=1&shareLink=>, 25.

⁴⁷ Quotations are from Unknown Author, Draft Outline: Iraq, January 26 Principal Committee Meeting, January 19, 1993, OA/ID 255, National Security Council Near East and South Asian Affairs, Martin Indyk Files, William Clinton Presidential Library, 1.

⁴⁸ Same Box, Same Folder, January 19, 1993, Draft Outline: Iraq, January 26 Principals Committee Meeting, 7 photos; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 36.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Pollack, phone interview by author, November 6, 2017; Elaine Sciolino, “New Iraqi Site Raided as White House Vows Firmness,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1993, A3.

all periodic problems that are not life-threatening.⁵⁰ Lake recalled that Clinton did not see Iraq as a top issue and that: “Iraq, it seemed to us, was not going to be soluble at any reasonable cost any point soon. I recall describing it...as a dull toothache that you just have to keep dealing with and make sure it doesn’t get worse. But you can’t fix it.”⁵¹

Furthermore, Clinton had seen Bush’s intractable struggle of wills with Saddam and wanted to avoid this draining contest.⁵² Clinton officials stressed “de-personalizing” the conflict with Iraq by focusing on compliance rather than ousting Saddam, which they viewed as unlikely and risky for several reasons.⁵³ Like the Bush administration, they feared that Saddam’s removal might lead to massive revenge attacks by the Shia and Kurds against the Sunni and general chaos that would enable Iran to expand its influence in the region.⁵⁴ The bloodshed that followed Yugoslavia’s collapse in 1991 and the subsequent Balkans Crisis reinforced this dread about the dissolution of multi-ethnic states.⁵⁵

The Clinton approach to regime change remained roughly the same as Bush’s: maintain isolation and economic pressure and hope that a disgruntled general or Baathist launches a coup. Iraqi society, according to one intelligence report, was portrayed as “cowed...making a popular

⁵⁰ The term “rash” was used by an anonymous senior official in: Thomas Lippman, “Iraqi Defiance Expected to Continue,” *Washington Post*, September 22, 1996, A27. “Toothache” was Powell’s term and “migraine” was Albright’s. See: Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 38; Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), 274.

⁵¹ Anthony Lake, interview by Russell Riely, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Miller Center, November 6, 2004, accessed October 5, 2017, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/anthony-lake-oral-history-2004-national-security-advisor>, 24.

⁵² Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002), 65.

⁵³ Paul Lewis, “U.S. and Britain Softening Emphasis on Ousting Iraqi,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1993, A3.

⁵⁴ Richard Bonin, *Arrows of the Night: Ahmad Chalabi’s Long Journey to Triumph in Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 86.

⁵⁵ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 38.

revolt an unlikely means of regime change.”⁵⁶ The United States have to dangle promises of sanctions relief to elite Iraqis as incentives to act.⁵⁷ The administration generally believed that Saddam would not remain in power much longer under these pressures. One 1993 intelligence report, for instance, claimed: “If enforcement of the sanctions continues unabated, there is a better than even chance that Saddam will be ousted during the next three years.”⁵⁸ In the meantime, containment and compliance would remain the priorities. As then CIA Iraq analyst Kenneth Pollack put it: “They were much more committed to containment as an end in itself. They embraced it consciously.”⁵⁹

One key question on Iraq that the administration had to answer in its first months was, as one NSC memo put it: “What are the precise terms under which the United States will agree to lift economic sanctions against Iraq, and must these terms include a change of regime in Baghdad?”⁶⁰ In keeping with the regime change consensus and the broader strategy of enlargement, Clinton officials contended that “the ultimate political solution for all of Iraq is the formation of a democratic government in Baghdad that can both be representative of the Iraqi people and maintain peaceful relations with its neighbors.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, voicing this viewpoint at the United Nations or openly stressing regime change efforts jeopardized the coalition. Key partners like France, Germany, and Russia saw sanctions as a way to compel

⁵⁶ National Intelligence Estimate, “Prospects for Iraq,” December 1993, 24.

⁵⁷ Elaine Sciolino, “Clinton to Scale Down Program to Oust Iraqi Leader,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1993, A3; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 36-38.

⁵⁸ National Intelligence Estimate, “Prospects for Iraq,” December 1993, v; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 38-9.

⁵⁹ Pollack, interview with author.

⁶⁰ Draft Outline, January 26 Principals Committee Meeting, 4.

⁶¹ Quotation is from Robert Pelletreau in: House Committee on International Relations, *Middle East Overview and U.S. Assistance to the Palestinians*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., April 6, 1995, 70.

cooperation with WMD disarmament with the ultimate goal of returning Iraq to its normal status in the world with or without regime change.⁶² However, at home, Congress, most foreign policy commenters, and the public generally opposed normalization. In fact, the public backed tougher regime change efforts. One poll from January 1993 found that 65% of respondents would support renewed U.S. military action to force Saddam from power.⁶³

To balance these contradictory forces, the Clinton administration developed a rhetorical strategy I call the Clinton fudge. This term describes a deliberate non-answer to the questions of what terms Iraq had to meet for the United States to support any easing of sanctions and whether Saddam's removal was one of those terms. Bush had declared that the United States would not lift sanctions as long as Saddam remained in power, but the Clinton administration saw that these statements created problems with the coalition. One example of the Clinton fudge came from White House spokeswoman Dee Dee Myers, who was asked in March 1993 if Clinton would deviate from Bush's position on the lifting of sanctions. She replied:

Our position is that Iraq has to comply with all U.N. resolutions, including those of giving up weapons of mass destruction and stopping violence against his own people... We don't believe that can be achieved with Hussein, with Saddam in power. And therefore there's no practical difference.⁶⁴

The administration argued, in Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Robert Pelletreau's words, that "repression and terrorism are the only pillars of Saddam's regime" to support the claim that he would inevitably fall from power if he complied with all

⁶² Frederic Bozo, *A History of the Iraq Crisis: France, The United States, and Iraq, 1991-2003* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2016), 40-44.

⁶³ *Newsweek* Telephone Survey, January 25, 1993, Polling the Nations, Accessed November 25, 2017, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

⁶⁴ Dee Dee Myers, "Press Briefing," March 28, 1993, The American Presidency Project, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=59938&st=iraq&st1=>

U.N. resolutions, especially those regarding human rights.⁶⁵ This view ignored intelligence assessments arguing that Saddam stayed in power also because of patronage and clan networks as well as the Sunni fear of Shia and Kurdish retaliation if the regime collapsed.⁶⁶ One National Intelligence Estimate from December 1993, for instance, asserted that “Saddam Husayn currently has sufficient economic and security resources, along with the skill to marshal and deploy them, to maintain his hold on power.”⁶⁷

Within this rhetorical strategy, Clinton officials signaled willingness to lift sanctions without regime change in the event of Saddam’s full compliance. In October 1994, for example, Clinton said “I think that the Iraqis are quite well aware of what the United Nations expected them to do to lift the sanctions. And if they do it, then no one will stand in the way of lifting the sanctions.”⁶⁸ Mark Parris, an official at State’s Near East office, explained that this approach was designed to keep the sanctions intact while signaling to the coalition an openness to lifting them in order to create time for sanctions and covert action to overthrow Saddam.⁶⁹ Anthony Lake later admitted that the Clinton fudge was a “roundabout way” of saying that sanctions would not be lifted until Saddam was gone without making regime change the explicit or primary goal.⁷⁰

Clinton’s continuation of Bush’s approach to Iraq was bolstered by the view that Iraq remained economically and militarily feeble. Intelligence reports judged Iraq’s military to be

⁶⁵ House Committee on International Relations, *Overview of U.S. Policy in the Middle East*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., August 2, 1995, 100.

⁶⁶ CIA Report, National Intelligence Estimate 97-2, “Saddam Husayn: Likely to Hang On,” June 1992, National Security Archive Online, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB167/10.pdf>, 3.

⁶⁷ National Intelligence Estimate, “Prospects for Iraq,” December 1993, v.

⁶⁸ “President’s News Conference,” October 7, 1994, The American Presidency Project, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=49247&st=iraq&st1>

⁶⁹ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 37.

⁷⁰ Lake, interview by Russell Riely, 4.

weaker than before 1991 because of the draining effects of sanctions, a morale crisis, and its inability to import high-tech equipment and spare parts. Edward Djerejian, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs until the end of 1993, argued that the sanctions kept Saddam focused on survival by raising his people's anger and reducing his ability to pay off key supporters.⁷¹ One CIA report in 1994 judged: "The weaknesses of the postwar Iraqi military far outweigh its strengths, and Baghdad's military power will decline-or at least not increase-as long as UN sanctions remain in effect."⁷² These conditions seemed likely to hold for the near future, so Clinton tried to push Iraq to the side and focus on his major goals in the region.

The policy toward Iraq under dual containment differed in revealing ways from the approach to Iran. The Clinton administration saw Iran as a backlash state and a threat to U.S. regional interests. Aside from being an oppressive theocracy, Iran sponsored terrorist groups like Hezbollah, threatened Israel and Saudi Arabia, opposed the MEPP, and pursued WMD. Nevertheless, several key factors differentiated Iran from Iraq in U.S. thinking. First, the Iranian government possessed domestic legitimacy that Saddam lacked. While revolutionary fervor had declined from years of war, stagnation, and repression, the government had real credibility among the Iranian people, who would not accept foreign regime change efforts. The Iranian people had a deep and coherent collective identity, unlike the relatively new, multiethnic Iraqi state.⁷³ Second, Iran had countervailing political institutions, some of which were partially democratic, that distributed political power rather than concentrating it in a single dictator. Third,

⁷¹ Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Developments in the Middle East*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., March 9, 1993, 24-25; Intelligence assessments backed up this claim. See: National Intelligence Estimate, "Prospects for Iraq," December 1993, v.

⁷² CIA Report, "Iraq's Military Capabilities," September 12, 1994, CIA.gov, accessed December 31, 2017, 1.

⁷³ Douglas Little, *Us Versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press), 108; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 39.

the United States had no significant Iranian opposition groups to support, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards kept the regime secure from internal and external challenges.⁷⁴ Finally, unlike Iraq, Iran was not openly aggressive, which reduced the urgency of the Iranian threat and made it harder for the United States to rally international action against Iran.⁷⁵

These factors ruled out covert attempts to remove the Iranian regime. Instead, the administration had to treat the regime as a given and try to modify its behavior while preventing it from destabilizing or dominating the region. Still, Clinton opposed the European Union's policy of "critical dialogue" that tried to build trade and diplomatic relations with Iran to incentivize better behavior. Clinton officials believed this approach rewarded Iranian misbehavior and strengthened the regime.⁷⁶ Instead, the administration would punish Iran with sanctions and diplomatic isolation until it ceased objectionable behavior like the pursuit of WMD. Clinton preserved unilateral sanctions on Iran and pressured allies to cease commercial dealings with Iran, especially those that advanced its proliferation efforts. The United States told Iran that it did not seek the regime's overthrow and would ease sanctions and seek better relations once Iran halted its negative behavior.⁷⁷

In contrast to the Iran policy, Indyk stated in his 1993 speech introducing dual containment that the United States would not "seek or expect a reconciliation with Saddam Hussein's regime...the current regime in Iraq is a criminal regime, beyond the pale of

⁷⁴ Robert Litwak, *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000), 159; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 39.

⁷⁵ Lake, "Backlash States," 9.

⁷⁶ Litwak, *Rogue States*, 207.

⁷⁷ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 40-41; Edward Djerejian, phone interview by author, October 20, 2017; Martin Indyk, interview by Daniel Pipes, November 15, 1993, *Middle East Quarterly*, Accessed October 26, 2017, <http://www.meforum.org/219/perspectives-from-the-white-house>.

international society and, in our judgment, irredeemable.”⁷⁸ In contrast to his views on Iraq, Indyk stated about Iran: “We are not opposed to the Islamic government in Iran but to these specific aspects of its behavior...we will not normalize relations with Iran until and unless Iran’s policies change, across the board.”⁷⁹ Because of the domestic legitimacy of Iran’s regime and the greater possibility of outside pressures creating internal change in a less centralized authoritarian state, the administration could envision a “way out” of containing Iran based on behavior change rather than regime change. In Iraq, however, it viewed the only likely outlet as a coup or assassination because Saddam was so deeply entrenched and the Iraqi people so weak, impoverished, and divided.

By the end of 1993, Clinton officials had advanced the interlocking strategic concepts of enlargement, backlash states, and dual containment. Their approach to Iraq mostly continued that of George H.W. Bush, although it stressed compliance with U.N. resolutions and avoided divisive statements about regime change. Like Bush, Clinton believed that Saddam Hussein had to be removed for the United States to achieve its regional goals and eventually restore relations with Iraq. Nevertheless, the administration did not clearly answer whether Saddam had to be removed soon or whether the United States needed to take risks to achieve that goal. It carried this ambiguous strategy into a series of confrontations with Iraq during the first term.

A Chronic Migraine: Crisis after Crisis, 1993-1996

The first major crisis Clinton faced on Iraq came in June 1993 when U.S. and Kuwaiti intelligence found evidence that Iraqi agents had plotted an assassination attempt against former

⁷⁸ Indyk, “Address to the Soref Symposium,” May 20, 1993.

⁷⁹ Indyk, “Address to the Soref Symposium,” May 20, 1993. For additional examples of Clinton administration thought on Iran, see: Lake, “Backlash States,” 9-11; Edward Djerejian testimony in Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Developments in the Middle East*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., July 27, 1993, 8-9.

President Bush during his visit to Kuwait in April 1993. Kuwaiti intelligence foiled the plan, but Clinton was nonetheless outraged by Saddam's attempt to kill his predecessor. He responded by launching cruise missiles at the Iraqi secret police headquarters in Baghdad on June 26 as punishment for the assassination attempt and to deter future Iraqi support for terrorism.⁸⁰ The administration legally justified this attack not in terms of Security Council authorization to use force in order to compel Iraqi compliance but with Article 51 of the U.N. charter, which grants each state the right to self-defense.⁸¹ This approach enabled Clinton to avoid a Security Council vote on the use of force, which would have been troublesome because some coalition members were skeptical about the evidence on the Iraqi plot. He described the strikes as a "firm and commensurate response" and used the plot to bolster the idea that "Saddam Hussein has demonstrated repeatedly that he will resort to terrorism and aggression if left unchecked."⁸² A *Newsweek* poll found that 71% of Americans supported Clinton's actions.⁸³ In addition, the administration hoped that the strikes might push Iraqi elites toward rebellion by convincing them, in Aspin's words, that "following this man is not good for your health."⁸⁴

Containment faced a challenge of a different nature as the U.N. weapons inspectors made significant progress in locating and destroying proscribed Iraqi weapons programs in 1993 and early 1994. In November 1993, UNSCOM achieved a major victory when Iraq agreed to

⁸⁰ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 341-342; Tim Weiner, "Attack is Aimed at the Heart of Iraq's Spy Network," *New York Times*, June 27, 1993, A1.

⁸¹ Letter, William Clinton to the Speaker of the House, June 28, 1993, OA/ID 4057, National Security Council, Mary DeRosa Files, Clinton Presidential Records, William Clinton Presidential Library, 1.

⁸² William Clinton, "Address to the Nation on the Strike on Iraqi Intelligence Headquarters," (speech, Washington, D.C., June 26, 1993), The American Presidency Project, accessed October 12, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46758&st=iraq&st1=>

⁸³ Russell Watson, "A New Kind of Containment," *Newsweek*, July 12, 1993, 30.

⁸⁴ James Collins and Michael Duffy, "Striking Back," *Time*, July 5, 1993, 20.

Security Council Resolution 715's requirement that inspectors be allowed to establish long-term monitoring of sites linked to WMD or ballistic missile production.⁸⁵ The monitoring system included remote cameras at research facilities, the sealing of equipment, chemical sensors, aerial surveillance, and unannounced inspections. It also included procedures for inspecting Iraqi imports and exports that might have WMD applications.⁸⁶ UNSCOM reported increased Iraqi cooperation on WMD and the rapid destruction or sealing of weapons sites, equipment, and materials. Rolf Ekeus, the chief of UNSCOM, said that once he felt comfortable reporting that Iraq was in full compliance, the Security Council should vote to lift the ban on oil exports as required by Resolution 687. This move would allow billions of dollars to flow into Iraqi coffers even though the trade embargo would remain for everything except food and medicine.⁸⁷

Ekeus' interpretation of when to lift the oil export embargo reflected the consensus view of the Security Council. France, Russia, and China, and others pointed to Paragraph 22 of Resolution 687, which stated that once the inspectors verified compliance with the disarmament requirements of the same resolution, the "prohibitions against the import of commodities and products originating in Iraq...shall have no further force or effect."⁸⁸ These countries' reading of the conditions for lifting the export ban reflected their view that the point of sanctions was to

⁸⁵ Paul Lewis, "Bowling to U.N., Iraq Will Permit Arms Monitors," *New York Times*, November 27, 1993, A1.

⁸⁶ Tim Trevan, *Saddam's Secrets: The Hunt For Iraq's Hidden Weapons* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 257-259
Carlyle Murphy, "U.N. Inspectors in Iraq Prepare to Shift to Monitoring Role," *Washington Post*, July 14, 1994, A18.

⁸⁷ Paul Lewis, "U.N. Is Holding Talks on Lifting Its 3-Year Ban on Iraqi Oil Sales," *New York Times*, September 6, 1993, A2.

⁸⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 687, April 8, 1991, un.org, accessed May 10, 2017, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/687.pdf>, 14.

change Iraq's behavior on WMD and then allow the renewal of normal relations. They did not accept the U.S. use of sanctions to try to force Saddam from power or contain him indefinitely.⁸⁹

France, Russia, China, and other countries further claimed that the United Nations needed to send an "encouraging gesture from the international community" by sticking to the text of Resolution 687.⁹⁰ They feared that if the Security Council refused to recognize or partially reward Iraq for cooperation, Iraq would simply cease compliance. As the inspectors made progress, these nations repeatedly introduced text into U.N. sanctions reviews praising Iraqi cooperation. The United States and Great Britain blocked these amendments, arguing that they would "only confirm to the Iraqi regime that its policy of defiance was working."⁹¹ On a more fundamental level, France, Russia, and China viewed the U.S. hard line on Iraq as evidence of its unilateral and hegemonic behavior in the aftermath of the Cold War.⁹² Furthermore, they saw the U.S. requirement that Iraq comply with Resolution 688's call for human rights protections as evidence of domineering behavior and improper interference in Iraq's internal affairs. China particularly opposed this resolution because it did not want to set a precedent of U.N. punishment for human rights abuses.⁹³

These countries also had strong economic interests in the resumption of Iraqi oil exports. France and Russia hoped to restore their lucrative trade connections with Iraq. In the short term,

⁸⁹ Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 59-60.

⁹⁰ Paul Lewis, "U.N. Council Split on Iraq, Keeps Its Ban," *New York Times*, May 18, 1994, A10.

⁹¹ Quotation is from Robert Pelletreau in Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Developments in the Middle East, March 1994*, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., March 1, 1994, 58. See also: Paul Lewis, "U.N.'s Team in Iraq Sees Arms Gains," *New York Times*, July 26, 1994, A3.

⁹² Bozo, *Iraq Crisis*, 7.

⁹³ Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 79; Bozo, *Iraq Crisis*, 40.

they believed the restoration of Iraqi oil income would enable the repayment of billions in Iraqi debt. Turkey, which started calling for the phased lifting of sanctions in 1993, lost around \$27.3 billion in trade with Iraq between 1991 and 1996, especially from pipeline closures.⁹⁴ Moreover, China's rapid industrialization required immense quantities of oil, and they hoped to make Iraq into a major source. Oil companies from all three nations had already started to negotiate contracts with Iraq, although they could not sign anything until the lifting of the embargo.⁹⁵

The United States and Great Britain, however, applied a much higher standard to Iraq before they would consider lifting the oil export ban. Even after Ekeus verified Iraqi cooperation, U.S. officials called for "a demonstrable track record of compliance" before they would consider acting on the embargo.⁹⁶ Clinton officials also argued that Iraq had to clear up "longstanding gaps and inconsistencies" in its reports to inspectors, including its foreign procurement network for WMD-related materials, its biological weapons programs, and missing ballistic missile equipment.⁹⁷ The administration further insisted that Iraq comply with all of the Security Council resolutions, including recognizing Kuwaiti sovereignty and respecting human rights.

The Clinton administration demanded this high level of compliance even though this demand violated the letter of Resolution 687's terms for lifting the embargo. Clinton did so for several reasons. For one, Clinton officials believed that the United States needed evidence of Saddam's changing intentions, not just his literal compliance. Because it had taken so much effort to get Saddam to cooperate even partially, the administration felt justified in demanding

⁹⁴ Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 68.

⁹⁵ Dilip Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends: Iraq and Iran After the Gulf Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 75.

⁹⁶ Paul Lewis, "U.N. Is Holding Talks on Lifting Its 3-Year Ban on Iraqi Oil Sales," *New York Times*, September 6, 1993, A2.

⁹⁷ Trevan, *Saddam's Secrets*, 252. Paul Lewis, "Bowling to U.N., Iraq Will Permit Arms Monitors," *New York Times*, November 27, 1993, A1.

evidence that he would not start building WMD and threatening his neighbors once he had oil revenue. Resolution 687 supplied some justification for this focus on intentions because it called for “the need to be assured of Iraq’s peaceful intentions in the light of its unlawful invasion and occupation of Iraq.”⁹⁸ One U.S. official stated that even if Iraq complied with the WMD provisions of Resolution 687, “the overall pattern of Iraq’s behavior...is still one of generalized non-compliance,” making it “difficult to believe Baghdad is sincere.”⁹⁹

The Clinton administration interpreted Saddam’s intentions from his behavior. It saw Iraq’s grudging, inconsistent, and opportunistic cooperation as evidence of unchanged intentions, meaning that Iraq merely desired to escape sanctions and return to its old ways.¹⁰⁰ Aside from demanding compliance with all U.N. resolutions, the United States also requested a 6-12 month period of Iraqi cooperation with U.N. monitoring to test its intentions before lifting the export ban. Albright described this period as a test of Iraq’s “readiness to rejoin society.”¹⁰¹ Iraqi improvement on human rights would be another sign of changed intentions. Albright and other officials noted that Iraq was regressing in this area, noting that it had started punishing deserters and petty criminals with branding, blinding, and amputation.¹⁰² Moreover, Clinton officials feared that once the export ban was lifted, France, Russia, and China would block any effort to re-install the ban because they would be importing oil and receiving debt repayment.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 687, un.org, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/687.pdf>, 11.

⁹⁹ Paul Lewis, “U.S. Is Hardening Its Stand on Iraq,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1993, A1.

¹⁰⁰ Warren Christopher, “Wobbly on Iraq,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1994, A27.

¹⁰¹ Lewis, “Hardening Its Stand,” *New York Times*, December 19, 1993.

¹⁰² Max van der Stoep, “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Iraq,” February 15, 1995, repository.un.org, accessed November 20, 2017, http://repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/213156/E_CN.4_1995_56-EN.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y, 9-11.

¹⁰³ Lewis, “Hardening Its Stand,” *New York Times*, December 19, 1993.

The conflict over lifting the embargo accelerated in the summer of 1994 when Ekeus announced that the monitoring system was ready and that he was close to verifying Iraqi compliance on WMD.¹⁰⁴ France, Russia, and China began to push for a timetable for lifting sanctions and threatened to call for a Security Council vote on the matter. In September, however, Ekeus reported that he could not yet verify compliance, citing missing information and materials. Saddam tried to bully his way out of this impasse by mobilizing Republican Guard divisions totaling 64,000 troops on the Kuwaiti border in October 1994. He threatened to invade if the Security Council did not lift sanctions immediately.¹⁰⁵

Clinton responded swiftly to this threat by surging U.S. ground forces in Kuwait up to about 50,000 and sending hundreds of combat aircraft and a second aircraft carrier to the Gulf.¹⁰⁶ On October 10, the NSC met at the White House to discuss the crisis. Defense Secretary William Perry and Martin Indyk recommended demanding not only Iraqi withdrawal from the border but the creation of a no-drive-zone (NDZ) for Iraqi military vehicles below the 32nd parallel. This option, he contended, would intensify pressure on Saddam, contain him more effectively, and inhibit assaults on the Shia populations. However, Albright and JCS Chairman John Shalikashvili argued that an NDZ would put an immense burden on the military because it would have to respond to any vehicle the Iraqis sent to this area, giving Saddam the ability to provoke the United States at will. Moreover, they argued that the coalition would oppose this idea as an overreach into Iraqi territory. They claimed that containment was basically working and that

¹⁰⁴ Charles Duelfer, *Hide and Seek: The Search for Truth in Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 105; Carlyle Murphy, "U.N. Inspectors In Iraq Prepare to Shift to Monitoring Role," *Washington Post*, July 14, 1994, A18.

¹⁰⁵ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 153.

¹⁰⁶ W. Eric Herr, "Operation Vigilant Warrior: Conventional Deterrence Theory, Doctrine, and Practice," M.A. Thesis, School of Advance Air Power Studies, 1996, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a360732.pdf>, 27-28; Douglas Jehl, "Clinton's Line in the Sand," *New York Times*, October 10, 1994, A1.

there was no good reason to experiment with dangerous innovations.¹⁰⁷ Clinton concurred with the more limited approach, in large part because he wanted to put Saddam back in the box and switch his attention to the MEPP.¹⁰⁸

In public, Clinton officials sternly warned Saddam not to set foot into Kuwait and implied that the United States would use force to stop him.¹⁰⁹ Perry said quite bluntly “We’re talking about military action” to prevent Saddam from underestimating U.S. willpower as he did in 1990.¹¹⁰ Clinton viewed the threat as another test of the United Nations’ resolve to enforce the resolutions and keep Saddam in the box. He said shortly after the crisis: “I guess he figured that if he mounted a provocation, I would send Jimmy Carter over there to make a deal, and he could wheedle something out of us.”¹¹¹

Saddam’s actions backfired in the international arena, even among nations like France, Russia, China that wanted sanctions relief.¹¹² Swift U.S. diplomacy plus the overt nature of Saddam’s threat left him isolated, and the Security Council unanimously voted on October 15 to condemn Iraq’s actions and demand the withdrawal of its forces from the border.¹¹³ The next day, Iraq started to recall its forces. Iraq also announced it would formally recognize Kuwaiti

¹⁰⁷ Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, 70.

¹⁰⁸ Chollet, *America Between the Wars*, 184; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 154-157; Elaine Sciolino, “U.S. Offers Plan to Avoid Threat from Iraq Again,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1994, A1.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Gordon, “U.S. Sends Force as Iraqi Soldiers Threaten Kuwait,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1994, A1.

¹¹⁰ Michael Gordon, “U.S. Warns Iraq to Complete Pullback,” *New York Times*, October 15, 1994, A7.

¹¹¹ Taylor Branch, ed., *The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 207.

¹¹² Steven Greenhouse, “Arab States Withholding Their Support for Baghdad,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1994, A13.

¹¹³ Barbara Crossette, “Security Council Condemns Iraqis’ Threat to Kuwait,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1994, A12; Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, 80-81.

sovereignty and its current borders, fulfilling one major obligation of the Security Council resolutions.¹¹⁴ The United States and Great Britain tried to deter Saddam from further threats like this by sending him demarches on October 20 warning that they would “use military force to stop any new buildup of Iraqi troops south of the 32nd parallel.”¹¹⁵ Clinton received widespread praise at home for resolving this crisis. 74% of respondents in one poll supported the troop deployment, and his overall approval rating for Iraq policy increased to 69% in another survey.¹¹⁶

Saddam’s reckless threat saved the Clinton administration from having to confront significant problems in the containment policy. His blatant troop movements allowed for a deterrent response with conventional forces that briefly reunited the coalition. If Saddam had not threatened Kuwait, the United States may have had to veto an attempt by France, Russia, and China to lift the oil embargo. A veto would have preserved the sanctions but may have endangered the coalition by confirming the suspicion that the United States intended to punish Iraq indefinitely.

Unfortunately, containment had other implications, especially the massive economic and humanitarian damage caused by sanctions. By 1996, Iraq’s GDP had fallen to \$10.6 billion compared to \$66.2 billion in 1989. The health crisis in Iraq had only worsened by the mid-1990s, particularly when the Iraqi state cut food rations by a third.¹¹⁷ The United Nations estimated that

¹¹⁴ Youssef Ibrahim, “Iraq Signals Acceptance of U.N. Move,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1994, A10.

¹¹⁵ Herr, “Operation Vigilant Warrior,” 33.

¹¹⁶ 74% is from Gallup Telephone Survey, October 19, 1994. 69% is from NBC Telephone Survey, October 1994. Both surveys accessed in Polling the Nations, accessed November 25, 2017, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

¹¹⁷ Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 21, 36.

by 1996, in the worst-hit areas of Iraq in the south, as many as 34% of all children were underweight and at least 10% were wasting.¹¹⁸ While Congress remained supportive of sanctions, U.S. partners on the Security Council and in the Middle East were growing restive over this unpopular policy. Sanctions were especially unpopular among the populations of U.S. allies in the Middle East, who largely blamed the United States for the health crisis in Iraq.¹¹⁹ Like the Bush administration, Clinton officials assigned responsibility for this crisis to Saddam for his failure to import adequate food and medicine and his denial of basic goods and services to disloyal populations. Saddam technically had the money to provide these items to his people but chose to spend it on his security services and key clients he needed to preserve his power. Nevertheless, Iraq's inability to export oil and obtain hard currency inhibited the importing of basic goods.¹²⁰

Keeping the coalition intact required the United States to find a way to allow more essential goods to be imported into Iraq without permitting cash to flow to the Iraqi government. The solution came with the passage of Security Council Resolution 986 in April 1995. This plan expanded the oil-for-food offerings of Resolutions 706 and 712 by permitting Iraq to sell \$2 billion of oil every six months. The proceeds went to an escrow account controlled by the Security Council. Iraq could then submit requests to a Security Council-appointed panel to release funds to pay for imports of essential goods. Resolution 986 further mandated surveillance over the distribution of these goods inside Iraq to ensure that they reached the neediest populations as well as full control over distribution in the Kurdish areas. Some of the money in the escrow

¹¹⁸ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 123.

¹¹⁹ Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 70-74, 179-190; Gordon, *Invisible War*, 148-149.

¹²⁰ Eric Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Toward Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 1 (January-February, 1995): 63.

account would also be funneled to Kurdish relief, Kuwaiti reparations, and the inspectors' operating costs.¹²¹ Iraq dismissed Resolution 986 as an insulting violation of its sovereignty at first, but it expanded talks on the plan a year later as its economic situation deteriorated. The U.N. and Iraq finally reached an agreement in May 1996 in which the Iraqis caved to U.S. terms, but the implementation of this plan would be further stalled by events in 1996.¹²²

Oil-for-food came to play several important roles in sustaining containment. It deflected criticism about sanctions' effects, enabling the United States to continue demanding a high standard of compliance. Oil-for-food also put the burden of guilt for Iraqis' suffering on Saddam because at any point he could accept this resolution and import vital goods. Albright, for example, quipped that it prevented Saddam from shedding "crocodile tears" for his people while using their suffering to undermine sanctions.¹²³ Rather than a precursor to lifting sanctions, oil-for-food would allow them to be maintained. Robert Pelletreau clarified this point to Congress in 1996: "Implementation of this resolution is not a precursor to lifting sanctions. It is a humanitarian exception that preserves and even reinforces the sanctions regime."¹²⁴

The question of Iraqi compliance with inspections took an odd turn in August 1995 with the defection to Jordan of Saddam's son-in-law Hussein Kamel, who was one of the most powerful members of Saddam's inner circle. He and his brother's marriages to Raghad and Rana, respectively, formed key links between Saddam and the powerful al-Majid clan that had been a

¹²¹ United Nations Security Council 986, April 14, 1995, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/986>.

¹²² Barbara Crossette, "Accord Reached by Iraq and U.N." *New York Times*, May 21, 1996, A1; Paul Lewis, "U.N. and Iraq Suspend Talks on Limited Oil Sales," *New York Times*, April 25, 1996, A10.

¹²³ Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. Says It's Won U.N. Votes to Keep Sanctions on Iraq," *New York Times*, March 5, 1995, A1.

¹²⁴ House Committee on International Relations, *Developments in the Middle East*, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., June 12, 1996, 4.

pillar of his regime for decades. Kamel worked his way up through the security service, and by the 1990s he had become the director of the Iraqi military industrialization agency and the team dedicated to concealing information from inspectors.¹²⁵ Kamel had a long-standing dispute with Saddam's erratic son Uday, who felt threatened by Kamel's political ascension. Uday attacked Kamel in the state media and tried to take control of several of his economic and bureaucratic holdings. Saddam appeared to be siding with his son, so on August 7, 1995, Kamel, his brother, and their wives fled in the night to Jordan. Once in Amman, he pledged to work to overthrow Saddam and offered inside information about Iraqi WMD programs to the United Nations. Kamel eventually returned to Baghdad on a promise of clemency from Saddam, but Iraqi security killed him days after his return.¹²⁶

Before Kamel's defection, Rolf Ekeus suspected Iraq of retaining a major biological weapons program, and he resisted calls to certify compliance until Iraq came clean.¹²⁷ Iraq had denied the existence of this program since 1991, but thanks to persistent scrutiny from UNSCOM, the Iraqi government confessed in July 1995 to possessing an offensive biological weapons program before the Gulf War that included botulism and anthrax.¹²⁸ Now that Kamel appeared poised to spill the beans, Saddam decided to pre-empt his revelations and show UNSCOM its full biological weapons program.¹²⁹ Iraqi officials led inspectors to a chicken

¹²⁵ Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 200.

¹²⁶ Douglas Jehl, "Iraqi Defectors Killed 3 Days After Returning," *New York Times*, February 24, 1996, A1; Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 144-163, 191-210.

¹²⁷ Barbara Crossette, "Iraq Hides Biological Warfare Effort, Report Says," *New York Times*, April 12, 1995, A8; Trevan, *Saddam's Secrets*, 288.

¹²⁸ United Nations Special Commission, "UNSCOM Final Compendium," January 29, 1999, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20051124075332/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/UNSCOM/disarmament.htm>, 7; Trevan, *Saddam's Secrets*, 288-290. Barbara Crossette, "Iraq Admits It Produced Germ Arsenal," *New York Times*, July 6, 1995, A3.

shack outside Baghdad that featured millions of pages of information about a massive biological weapons program. Iraq had tried to preserve from inspectors by hiding infrastructure, selectively destroying materials and equipment, and covertly continuing research. These unprecedented revelations included the fact that Iraq had created Scud warheads that could deliver biological weapons. Iraq had also possessed ten times the amount of anthrax than it had previously claimed as well as an undisclosed crash nuclear weapons program started after the invasion of Kuwait.¹³⁰ Lastly, this trove divulged the existence of Kamel's official concealment team.¹³¹ The chicken shack documents now gave UNSCOM a huge quantity of data that had to be painstakingly accounted for. This task was made even harder by Iraq's claims that it had unilaterally destroyed all of its biological weapons materials after the Gulf War.¹³²

The Clinton administration portrayed Hussein Kamel's defection as a sign of containment's effectiveness in dividing the Iraqi elite and keeping Saddam occupied. A CIA Report from earlier in 1995 noted that members of the Iraqi elite, including the Republican Guard, were feeling the impact of sanctions and selling personal possessions to buy basic goods.¹³³ Mark Parris, Indyk's successor as special assistant on the NSC for the Near East and South Asia, argued after the defection: "We have seen over the past several years a steady

¹²⁹ "Iraq Rushes to Preempt Defectors' Arms Disclosures," *Washington Post*, August 15, 1995, A13.

¹³⁰ United Nations Special Commission, "UNSCOM Final Compendium," January 29, 1999; Department of Central Intelligence, Iraq Survey Group, *Key Findings*, September 30, 2004, [cia.gov](https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/), accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/, 1-2; R. Jeffrey Smith, "Iraq Admits Working on Biological Weapons Systems," *Washington Post*, August 19, 1995, A17; Trevan, *Saddam's Secrets*, 331, 341-342.

¹³¹ Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 200.

¹³² Barbara Crossette, "Germ War Plan Underreported, Iraq Tells U.N.," *New York Times*, August 23, 1995, A1.

¹³³ CIA Report, "No Rest for Iraq's Weary," June 20, 1995, [CIA.gov](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0001435821), accessed October 16, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0001435821>.

deterioration in the coherence of the Iraqi power structure.”¹³⁴ While the role of containment in causing Kamel’s defection was uncertain at best, his and other high-level defections did show significant dissension within the Iraqi elite. Kamel’s actions validated UNSCOM’s suspicions that Iraq was hiding more information and material and eased pressure for sanctions relief at the United Nations.¹³⁵

Nevertheless, while the Kamel episode demonstrated that containment was imposing pressure on the regime, it also showed that the coalition was further than ever from a solution. Kamel’s actions exposed the depths of Iraqi cheating on WMD and its masking of a deadly biological weapons program. As Clinton put it to Congress in 1996:

The August 1995 revelations virtually erased what little credibility Saddam Hussein may have had left...Saddam clearly planned to hide this weapons information until he could use it to facilitate the reconstruction of his WMD programs. Saddam’s intentions are hardly peaceful. There is every reason to believe that they are as aggressive and expansionist as they were in 1990.¹³⁶

However, the Hussein Kamel crisis ironically boosted the regime change consensus run by bolstering the impression that Saddam’s intentions had not changed and that no matter how thoroughly the inspectors searched Saddam would always be hiding something.

Support of Iraqi opposition groups formed another significant aspect of Clinton’s Iraq policy. Vice President Gore had called for greater support for the Iraqi National Congress (INC) during the 1992 campaign. Gore preferred the INC because it called for democracy whereas the CIA’s preferred group, the Iraqi National Accord (INA), promised a new strongman. He and

¹³⁴ Background Briefing by Mark Parris, August 10, 1995, OA/ID 590000, National Security Council Cables, Clinton Presidential Records, William Clinton Presidential Library, 2. See also the testimony of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Toby Gati in: Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States and Its Interests Abroad*, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., February 22, 1996, 151.

¹³⁵ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 165-166.

¹³⁶ Letter, William Clinton to Speaker of the House, October 23, 1995, OA/ID 1200000, National Security Council, Clinton Presidential Records, William Clinton Presidential Library, 2.

Warren Christopher met with the INC in April 1993, praised its commitment to human rights and democracy, and announced that the United States would seek to establish war crimes trials for Iraq. However, the administration and the CIA doubted that the INC could unify the various opposition groups enough to challenge Saddam. They put more trust in the INA, which they saw as more likely to remove Saddam through the “silver bullet solution.”¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the basic problem with the opposition was that groups like the INA that had access to the center of the Iraqi regime did not share U.S. hopes for democratic rule in Iraq. On the other hand, the organizations on the periphery, like the INC and Shia and Kurdish groups, supported more democratic goals but lacked access to the power centers of the state. Moreover, the administration suspected Shia opposition groups of connections to Iran and believed that Turkey would oppose support for Kurdish groups for fear of encouraging Kurdish separatism.¹³⁸

The Iraqi opposition launched several attempts to remove Saddam in Clinton’s first term. Since 1991, CIA teams had assisted the INA, which was mostly based in Jordan, in making contacts in the military and Baath party. Saddam faced several coup plots and minor rebellions but managed to unravel and crush them all.¹³⁹ The largest INA coup, which received CIA backing, was planned for June 1996, but Iraqi intelligence infiltrated it and executed hundreds of the conspirators. After this failure, the despairing CIA team in Amman returned to the United States, giving up on a coup for the time being.¹⁴⁰ One CIA official lamented the regime’s tight

¹³⁷ Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 174; *ABC News Special Report*, “Unfinished Business: The CIA and Saddam Hussein,” directed by Peter Jennings, ABC News, 1997, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzHHAI-eq2I>.

¹³⁸ This center v periphery formulation is borrowed from: Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 21, 34-35.

¹³⁹ For a summary of coups and rebellions against Saddam, see: Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 270-271; Blaydes, *State of Repression*, 293-303.

security and the incompetence of the coup plotters: “There are two great realities that govern here. First, if we know about it, Saddam does. Second if someone comes to us needing help [to mount a coup], they are probably incapable of pulling it off.”¹⁴¹

Rather than seeking a coup that would put a new strongman in power, the INC under Ahmed Chalabi wanted to spark a rebellion from its base in the Kurdish zone of Northern Iraq. The INC had built up a presence of several thousand personnel in Salahuddin.¹⁴² The Clinton administration intended for the INC to unite the opposition groups and show the media and Congress that Clinton was actively aiding the opposition. However, Chalabi quickly started forming his own scheme to topple Saddam.¹⁴³ His plan, which he called “End Game,” was to attack Iraqi forces from the Kurdish zone to encourage defections and possibly spark a revolt from the disaffected regular army.¹⁴⁴ The INC reconciled disputes between the KDP and PUK in 1994, creating the possibility that they could provide ground forces against Saddam. The defection of a high-level general named Wafiq al-Samarrai to the INC in 1994 bolstered the INC’s optimism that the regime could be toppled. The INC hoped to use Samarrai’s contacts inside the regime to foment a military uprising while INC forces attacked government troops.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Kevin Fedarko, “Saddam’s CIA Coup,” *Time*, September 23, 1996, 42; Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 226-229. For an overview of the 1996 coup plan, see: Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, 102-108.

¹⁴¹ R. Jeffrey Smith and David Ottaway, “Anti-Saddam Operation Cost CIA \$100 Million,” *Washington Post*, September 15, 1996, A1.

¹⁴² Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 92.

¹⁴³ Aram Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War: The Extraordinary Life, Adventures, and Obsessions of Ahmad Chalabi* (New York: Nation Books, 2008), 120.

¹⁴⁴ Elaine Sciolino, “A Failed Plot to Overthrow Hussein is Reported in Iraq,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1995, A6. Robert Baer, *See No Evil: The True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA’s War on Terrorism* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), 191; Roston, *Man Who Pushed*, 106; Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 166-167; Jim Hoagland, “How the CIA’s Secret War on Saddam Collapsed,” *Washington Post*, June 26, 1997.

¹⁴⁵ Smith and Ottaway, “Anti-Saddam Operation cost CIA \$100 Million,” *Washington Post*, September 15, 1996; Baer, *See No Evil*, 183; Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 179.

Confusion was the order of the day when the INC launched its campaign against Iraqi forces in March 1995. Chalabi expected U.S. assistance in this rebellion because of an August 1993 letter from Gore to the INC that issued vague statements of support, including: “I can assure you that the U.S. intends to live up to these commitments...and give whatever additional support we can reasonably provide to encourage you in your struggle for a democratic Iraq.”¹⁴⁶ The chief of the CIA mission in Iraq, Robert Baer, promised support for this plan, further convincing Chalabi that United States would help him with force if necessary.¹⁴⁷

However, when the Clinton administration found that the INC, with Baer’s support, was about to launch a coup attempt and ground offensive, it quickly tried to stop the risky plot. Lake had told the CIA that it must request the White House’s approval before supporting any rebellion. Now the administration had discovered the INC plan, by intercepting an Iranian transmission no less, just as it was about to be launched. Moreover, U.S. intelligence had reported that Iraqi security knew the attack was coming.¹⁴⁸ A furious Lake warned all opposition groups that the plan was compromised and “any decision to proceed will be on your own.”¹⁴⁹

The administration feared that a failed rebellion might force the United States to intervene to save its clients from annihilation.¹⁵⁰ Chalabi later made clear that he hoped for this exact situation: “I told them that if we attack, the United States will have to make a choice-

¹⁴⁶ “Letter from Albert Gore to Ahmed Chalabi,” in: House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., September 25, 1996, 87-88.

¹⁴⁷ Clinton administration officials later claimed that Baer exceeded his authority in claiming that the United States would back the Iraqi rebellion. See: Alan Cooperman, “Rolling Up in Iraq,” *U.S. News and World Report*, September 23, 1996, 50; *ABC News Special Report*, “Unfinished Business,” 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 163. Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 97, 102, Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 188.

¹⁴⁹ Baer, *See No Evil*, 173.

¹⁵⁰ Lake, interview by Russell Riely, 7; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 160; Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, 73.

whether or not to let us be slaughtered. I told them the Americans wouldn't let us be slaughtered."¹⁵¹ With U.S. support out of the question, Massoud Barzani pulled all KDP forces out of the offensive.¹⁵² Chalabi decided to launch the attack without U.S. support on March 6, claiming the coup plotters were already in motion. The INC offensive, composed mainly of PUK units, forced some Iraqi units into retreat and attracted several hundred defectors. However, no wider Iraqi military rebellion or coup ensued, and the offensive petered out.¹⁵³

These failures soured relations between the administration and the opposition, especially the INC. The CIA came to see Chalabi and Samarraï as liars who provided faulty intelligence about Saddam's regime, worked simultaneously with Iran, and wanted to draw the United States into direct fighting.¹⁵⁴ CIA analyst Bruce Riedel summarized the problems with the opposition in September 1996: "I don't know of any reputable analyst of the situation in Iraq who believes those opposition forces were on the verge of overthrowing the Saddam dictatorship. They have been weak since their inception...and they remain weak and very badly divided."¹⁵⁵ After the failed March 1995 uprising, the CIA drastically cut its budget for the INC and by the end of 1996 it refused to communicate with Chalabi.¹⁵⁶ One CIA agent involved with the opposition issued a more explicit threat to Chalabi: "If I see you on the streets here in London and get the chance, I'll

¹⁵¹ Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 101.

¹⁵² Sciolino, "A Failed Plot to Overthrow Hussein is Reported in Iraq" *New York Times*, March 14, 1995.

¹⁵³ Smith and Ottaway, "Anti-Saddam Operation Cost CIA \$100 Million," *Washington Post*, September 15, 1996; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 163; Baer, *See No Evil*, 207.

¹⁵⁴ Steven Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979: Hegemony, Oil, and War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 130; Lake, interview by Russell Riely, 7; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 163; Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 110.

¹⁵⁵ Bruce Riedel, House Committee on National Security, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., September 26, 1996, 72.

¹⁵⁶ Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 111; Roston, *Man Who Pushed*, 119.

fucking run you over.”¹⁵⁷ With the opposition in tatters, the only hope for regime change now seemed to be a direct war against Saddam, which the administration would not consider. These fiascoes thus bolstered the argument of advisors like Warren Christopher, who wanted to eschew hazardous regime change efforts and focus on containing Iraq and compelling it to comply with the United Nations.¹⁵⁸

The administration’s hopes that Saddam would be toppled from within took another devastating blow in August 1996 when Saddam took advantage of intra-Kurdish fighting to crush the INC in Northern Iraq. The KDP and the PUK had long feuded over control of smuggling routes into Turkey and Iran. The PUK used arms and advisors from Iran to launch an offensive against the KDP in August 1996. Barzani countered by asking Saddam for help. Sensing a golden opportunity, Saddam allied with Barzani and rushed 40,000 troops into the Kurdish zone to attack the PUK. Aside from striking a major blow against the PUK, Saddam seized Erbil and destroyed the INC’s headquarters in Iraq while executing hundreds of INC agents.¹⁵⁹ The CIA team in northern Iraq hastily fled the country, leaving behind communications equipment and intelligence documents.¹⁶⁰ Saddam reasserted control over a semi-autonomous region of Iraq, left security agents in some areas, gained access to valuable smuggling routes, and proved to potential challengers that he still ruled Iraq.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Roston, *Man Who Pushed*, 120.

¹⁵⁸ Hurst, *United States and Iraq*, 130; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 163.

¹⁵⁹ Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, 81-84.

¹⁶⁰ Tim Weiner, “Iraqi Offensive Into Kurdish Zone Disrupts U.S. Plot to Oust Hussein,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1996, A1.

¹⁶¹ John Lancaster, “Saddam Took Risk for Domestic Gain,” *Washington Post*, September 3, 1996, A11.

The Clinton administration had been debating throughout the first half of 1996 whether to increase pressure on Iraq. Mark Parris and Bruce Riedel argued in an NSC meeting that conditions were ripe to press for regime change because Saddam was still weak at home and the coalition would not get any stronger. Christopher and Lake argued in response that containment was managing the problem and allowing the administration to focus on priorities like the MEPP and the Balkan crisis. The hard-liners failed to convince any of Clinton's principal advisors, but Saddam's northern incursion resurrected the conversation. The foreign policy team agreed that a military response was necessary for this major provocation, but it saw intervention in the north as a hopeless tangle. The administration did not want to take sides in the intra-Kurdish fighting, and the Defense Department warned that U.S. troops would be needed to expel Saddam's forces from the north. Their intention to launch an airstrike, however, was stymied by Saudi Arabia and Turkey's refusal to support strikes or grant access to bases. Saudi Arabia feared public backlash for supporting the United States, while Turkey was pleased see Saddam pound the PUK.¹⁶²

Instead of an air campaign, U.S. naval forces launched 44 cruise missiles on September 3-4 against military targets in the south such as anti-aircraft batteries and command centers.¹⁶³ Clinton also extended the southern NFZ northward to the outskirts of Baghdad to punish Saddam and restrain his ability to threaten his neighbors. After these strikes and further U.S. threats, Saddam withdrew most of his forces from the north. Clinton framed this response as helping to "increase America's ability to contain Iraq over the long run" while tightening the "strategic

¹⁶² Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, 78-79, 82-83; Mike McCurry, "Press Briefing," September 4, 1996, The American Presidency Project, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=48820&st=iraq&st1=>

¹⁶³ Steven Lee Myers, "Pentagon Says Command Site Was Struck," *New York Times*, September 3, 1996, A1.

straightjacket.”¹⁶⁴ To address public confusion as to why the United States had retaliated in the south for actions in the north, officials argued that the most crucial U.S. interests were in blocking Iraqi aggression toward the Gulf rather than interceding in intractable Kurdish feuds.¹⁶⁵ Polls suggested public approval of this response, with 69% in one poll supporting the missile attacks and 66% agreeing that the United States should limit Saddam’s power inside Iraq.¹⁶⁶

The crisis over Saddam’s Kurdish incursion further harmed containment by widening fissures in the international coalition. Great Britain, Japan, and Germany supported the strikes, but France, Russia, and China believed Saddam’s actions were part of a sovereign affair. These nations argued that neither Resolution 687 nor 688 automatically authorized this attack and criticized the United States for failing to seek Security Council authorization.¹⁶⁷ The United States and Great Britain failed to convince their allies to pass a Security Council resolution merely rebuking Saddam’s actions.¹⁶⁸ Russia’s ambassador to the United Nations, Sergei Lavrov, called the attacks “disproportionate” and accused Clinton of using force to prove his toughness for the 1996 election.¹⁶⁹ Russian public opinion was also turning against the United States, as seen in a U.S. Information Agency survey that found that 63% of Russian respondents opposed

¹⁶⁴ Quotation is from Clinton, see: Alison Mitchell, “Clinton Rebutts G.O.P Attacks on Iraq Policy,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1996, A1; Alison Mitchell, “U.S. Continuing Bid to Smash Air Defense,” *New York Times*, September 4, 1996, A1.

¹⁶⁵ Press Briefing by Mike McCurry and Mark Parris, September 3, 1996, OA/ID 3604, National Security Council, James Baker Files, Clinton Presidential Records, William Clinton Presidential Library, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Janet Elder, “Most Americans Support Clinton on Iraq,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1996, B11.

¹⁶⁷ Barbara Crossette, “Clinton Finds Little Support at the U.N. for Iraqi Strikes,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1996, A10.

¹⁶⁸ John Goshko, “U.N. Drops Resolution Rebuking Iraq,” *Washington Post*, September 7, 1996, A17.

¹⁶⁹ Adam Nagourney, “Muting His Criticism of Clinton, Dole Backs Troops in Iraq Raid,” *New York Times*, September 4, 1996, A1; Craig Whitney, “From Allies, U.S. Hears Mild Applause or Silence,” *New York Times*, September 4, 1996, A10.

the U.S. strikes.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, Jacques Chirac, who became president of France in 1995, criticized the U.S. attacks and withdrew from the southern NFZ in December 1996 in order to distance France from U.S. policy.¹⁷¹

Clinton defended his first-term Iraq policy as the effective management of a weak and contained threat. The inspectors had destroyed most of Saddam's WMD and ballistic missile arsenals and sanctions had inhibited military reconstruction. Saddam had recognized Kuwaiti sovereignty and relented in most showdowns with the coalition.¹⁷² After the elimination of the coup and rebellion options in 1996, Clinton had to double down on this management paradigm as regime change looked increasingly improbable. One senior official described the U.S. role as: "We know he's going to knock on that door from time to time to see if there's anybody out there who still cares. He's got to recognize we're still here and we ain't going away."¹⁷³

Nevertheless, the Clinton administration ended its first term with a deep sense of frustration about Iraq. In a memorandum to incoming Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Robert Pelletreau wrote "Our policy of containment is time-consuming, fraught with repeated crises, and costly to maintain in terms of our relationships," leading to "containment fatigue within the international community." Pelletreau predicted that the United States would have to devote "regular, high level attention" to containing Saddam and preserving the coalition."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ United States Information Agency Poll in Russia, 1996, Polling the Nations, Accessed November 25, 2017, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

¹⁷¹ Craig Whitney, "France to Pull Its Planes Out of Patrols Over Northern Iraq," *New York Times*, December 28, 1996, A5; Steven Erlanger, "Paris Offers Scant Backing, But London Is Supportive," *New York Times*, September 6, 1996, A17.

¹⁷² For a summary of Clinton's defense of containment, see testimony of Madeleine Albright in: House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., March 28, 1996, 1-6.

¹⁷³ Johanna McGeary, "Slamming Saddam Again," *Time*, September 16, 1996, 32.

¹⁷⁴ Chollet, *America Between the Wars*, 188.

Moreover, for Americans and the international coalition to believe that this costly management might end someday, the administration needed to show that there was a way out of containment, especially if virtually everyone in U.S. politics and foreign policy circles believed Saddam's intentions would never change. For the domestic audience, the administration contended that sanctions and other pressures would force a coup or rebellion against Saddam. For the international coalition, it emphasized the potential for easing sanctions if Saddam adhered to incredibly high standards. The management paradigm of containment depended on these ways out, both of which suffered egregious blows by the end of Clinton's first term. The steady disintegration of the coalition and the loss of the possibility of a coup or rebellion started to erode the domestic legitimacy of containment and empower its detractors.

Debating Containment at Home, 1993-1996

Iraq garnered less public attention in this period than problems like the Balkan crisis or the MEPP. It mainly became a political issue during Saddam's confrontations with the coalition or the inspectors. This section lays out two major positions in the domestic debate over Iraq policy in Clinton's first term: the conditional and inevitable decline schools of thought. The conditionalists agreed with the basic framework of the policy established by Bush and continued by Clinton. However, they argued that Clinton needed to strictly enforce the Security Council resolutions and intensify pressures on the regime because containment might not last indefinitely. They also supported adjusting the policy to meet changing conditions. Most of them were realists or liberals in terms of foreign policy, including many Democrats.

One important point for the conditional school was that Clinton should react to Saddam's provocations with disproportionate punishments rather than proportional responses. They recognized that the coalition's willingness to sanction Saddam would not last forever and

concluded that the United States should increase pressure on Saddam to facilitate his ouster. A mere slap on the wrist, such as a few dozen cruise missiles, inflicted no real damage to Saddam's military or political power and did not deter him from aggression. Proportional responses also undermined deterrence by enabling Saddam to calculate just how far he could go and how much punishment he could receive.¹⁷⁵ The strategic analyst Anthony Cordesman, for instance, argued "force is only effective when it is large enough to show that each new provocation or crisis will do Saddam far more harm than the provocation is worth."¹⁷⁶ Policy scholars like Cordesman, Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft, and Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that the United States should have responded to provocations like the 1996 northern incursion with massive, multi-day airstrikes against the key elements of the regime, including Republican Guard units, communications networks, suspected WMD sites, and Saddam's palaces.¹⁷⁷

Members of the conditional approach varied on whether Clinton should demand full compliance with all Security Council resolutions before considering sanctions relief. Most believed that the United States should not lift sanctions on Iraq until Saddam fell, just as Bush and Clinton did. A significant body of conditionalists nonetheless argued that the policy would be improved if Clinton clearly promised that the oil export ban would be lifted if UNSCOM certified Iraqi compliance on WMD. The *New York Times* editorial board held this position,

¹⁷⁵ Michael Eisenstadt, "Target Iraq's Republican Guard," *The Middle East Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (December, 1996): 11-16.

¹⁷⁶ Anthony Cordesman, "The Folly of 'Proportionate Escalation,'" *Washington Post*, January 18, 1993, A29.

¹⁷⁷ For examples, see: Henry Kissinger, "No Objective, No Will," *Washington Post*, October 6, 1996, A47; testimonies of Richard Haass and Michael Eisenstadt in: House Committee on National Security, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, September 26, 1996, 4, 6; John McCain in *Cong. Rec.*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., September 11, 1996, 10279; Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Differentiated Containment: U.S. Policy toward Iran and Iraq* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1997), 9.

arguing: “He should make plain that by full compliance Iraq, even under Saddam Hussein, can have the embargo lifted and recover its sovereignty.”¹⁷⁸

This kind of statement implied that the United States might have to accept some level of normalization with Saddam if he complied with the Security Council. Advocates of this viewpoint believed that not “raising the goalposts” on the terms of lifting sanctions was necessary both to keep the coalition intact and induce Iraqi cooperation. Historian and Iraq expert Amatzia Baram warned that the United States should “expect the worst” if Saddam is convinced that he can do nothing to reduce the sanctions.¹⁷⁹ These critics also accused Clinton of maintaining this hard line for short-term domestic political gain rather than sound strategy.¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, conditionalists generally accepted containment as a reasonably effective and low-cost way to manage the Iraqi threat and compel compliance with the United Nations as long as Clinton enforced it rigorously. Richard Haass, for example, told Congress in September 1996: “Saddam Hussein’s Iraq is significantly weaker today than it was at the start of this decade and is better understood as constituting a dangerous nuisance rather than an actual strategic threat.”¹⁸¹ Regime change would be desirable, but as the historian of Iraq Phebe Marr argued, it was “likely to prove difficult and costly and can only take place at the hand of Iraqis inside

¹⁷⁸ Editorial, “Hanging Tough Isn’t Enough,” *New York Times*, January 7, 1993, A16.

¹⁷⁹ Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *3 Years After the Gulf War*, 3.

¹⁸⁰ Quotation is from: Editorial, “To Contain Saddam Hussein,” *Washington Post*, February 16, 1994, A18. For other supporters of this approach, see: Charles Maynes, “Clinton is Right on Iraq,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1993, A21; Editorial, “Now What About Iraq?” *New York Times*, January 21, 1993, A24; Editorial, “Sanctions on Iraq,” *The Economist*, March 27, 1993, 15; Editorial, “Bill’s Gulf Adventure,” *The Nation*, October 21, 1994, 478-479.

¹⁸¹ House Committee on National Security, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 4. For more on this line of argument, see: Brent Scowcroft, “Why We Stopped the Gulf War,” *Newsweek*, September 23, 1996, 17.

Iraq.”¹⁸² 60% of Americans, according to a 1996 poll, agreed that the United States should not put ground troops in Iraq to achieve regime change.¹⁸³

Members of the conditional perspective concurred with Clinton’s multilateral approach to containment, saying that unilateral sanctions would not work and would make the United States look like a bully. They faulted Clinton mainly for not putting enough effort into preserving the coalition and for not pressing Middle Eastern allies to limit sanctions violations. Furthermore, they backed oil-for-food as a way of alleviating the Iraqi humanitarian crisis and justifying the maintenance of sanctions.¹⁸⁴ They acknowledged that the limitation of U.S. goals on Iraq was deeply “unsatisfactory,” as Scowcroft put it, because the United States could do little about Iraq’s human rights abuses or Saddam’s odious presence. Nevertheless, they claimed there was no other short-term, low-risk way of ousting Saddam, which made containment the best approach until conditions changed. Making regime change an explicit goal just bolstered Saddam’s image in Iraq while disrupting the coalition.¹⁸⁵

In contrast to the conditionalist approach, members of the inevitable decline school argued for a total revision of U.S. policy and the open declaration of regime change as a goal. This group included neoconservatives, liberal hawks, and, with a Democrat in office, more conservative Republicans. These critics believed that the nature of Saddam’s totalitarian regime

¹⁸² House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 17.

¹⁸³ Yankelovich Partners Telephone Survey, September 6, 1996, Polling the Nations, Accessed November 25, 2017, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

¹⁸⁴ Scowcroft and Brzezinski, *Differentiated Containment*, 20.

¹⁸⁵ Scowcroft, “Why We Stopped the Gulf War,” *Newsweek*, September 23, 1996, 17. For other supporters of this approach to Iraq during Clinton’s first term, see: Richard Haass testimony in House Committee on National Security, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 5; Amatzia Baram testimony in Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *3 Years After the Gulf War*, 9; Daniel Pipes Testimony in Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq and Iran*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., March 2, 1995, 54; Cordesman, “Proportionate Escalation,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 1993; Maynes, “Clinton is Right,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1993; Thomas Friedman, “Keep It Simple,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1996, A21.

and Saddam as a person precluded meaningful change in Iraqi behavior. Management was impossible with a totalitarian state, as the *Wall Street Journal* editors claimed: “We will never be able to fully supervise or control a relatively large totalitarian state.”¹⁸⁶ Rather than arguing that Saddam might escape the box down the road, they claimed that he was not and could not be contained. Saddam was “setting the agenda” by whittling away at international unity and provoking the United States whenever he wanted.¹⁸⁷ These critics pointed to each crisis between 1993 and 1996 not as evidence of the stresses imposed on Saddam but as signs of the growing cracks in containment and Saddam’s belief that the coalition lacked the will to stop him.¹⁸⁸

Inevitable decline critics like Charles Krauthammer mocked Clinton’s missile strikes as “pinpricks” that conveyed “timidity” and encouraged Iraq to misbehave even more.¹⁸⁹ To mount a serious campaign to bring down Saddam, they recommended extensive punitive strikes, military training for the INC, war crimes tribunals, the formation an NDZ in the south and an NFZ over the entire country, and the maintenance of permanent sanctions.¹⁹⁰ This group also opposed relenting on sanctions until Saddam was gone, even if that broke up the coalition. In

¹⁸⁶ Editorial, “Beyond Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 13, 1993, A14; For similar arguments, see: Jim Hoagland, “Saddam’s Game,” *Washington Post*, January 14, 1993, A29; A.M. Rosenthal, “Saddam Moves Along,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1996, A27.

¹⁸⁷ Editorial, “Beyond Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 13, 1994.

¹⁸⁸ Editorial, “End of Illusions,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 1993, A16.

¹⁸⁹ Charles Krauthammer, “The Pinprick Response to Aggression,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 1996, A19.

¹⁹⁰ For examples of this category of argument, see: Mylroie testimony in Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *3 Years After the Gulf War*, 6, 14; Richard Perle testimony in House Committee on National Security, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 19; A.M. Rosenthal, “Shrinking Saddam,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1994, A35; Jim Hoagland, “Don’t Let Saddam Get Away Again,” *Washington Post*, October 16, 1994, C7; Paul Wolfowitz, “Clinton’s Bay of Pigs,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 1996, A18; Editorial, “Dangerous Curves,” *National Review*, November 7, 1994, 6; Fouad Ajami, “Hosing Down the Gulf’s Arsonist,” *U.S. News and World Report*, November 7, 1994, 48.

fact, many inevitable decline critics, especially Republicans, denounced oil-for-food as a “foot in the door” for Saddam to destroy the entire sanctions regime.¹⁹¹

One key idea in the inevitable decline argument that emerged in Clinton’s first term was that Saddam was fixated on revenge against the United States for Desert Storm. They believed that Saddam was not a rational survivor but a maniac obsessed with vengeance. Laurie Mylroie, a scholar who worked at various neoconservative think tanks, promoted this idea with an argument that Saddam was ultimately responsible for the 1993 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. There were some potential links between Iraq and this attack, including the fact that one minor figure in the conspiracy had fled to Iraq after the attack.¹⁹² Mylroie, however, concocted a highly tendentious story that pinned responsibility on Saddam, including the unsubstantiated claim that the United States had not apprehended the real Ramzi Yousef, the al-Qaeda affiliated orchestrator of the 1993 bombing, whom she asserted was an Iraqi agent who had stolen the identity of a Kuwaiti citizen.¹⁹³

Extensive investigations of this attack by the FBI, the State Department, and several U.S. intelligence agencies found no evidence for her claims, but she nonetheless became widely influential in neoconservative and Republican circles.¹⁹⁴ Her conspiracy theory sustained the fear

¹⁹¹ Quote is from Senator Alphonse D’Amato (R-NY) in: *Cong. Rec.*, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., May 16, 1994, 5768. See also: Robert Dole, “Statement by Senator Bob Dole on Iraq Sanctions Relief,” May 20, 1996, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=115384&st=iraq&st1>; Patrick Clawson, “The Stakes in the Iraq Oil Sales Dispute,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch Paper 200, May 14, 1996, accessed September 17, 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-stakes-in-the-iraq-oil-sales-dispute>.

¹⁹² Michael Isikoff and David Korn, *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), 71.

¹⁹³ Mylroie spells out her argument about Saddam’s responsibility for various terrorist attacks in: Laurie Mylroie, “Saddam’s Fingerprints on N.Y. Bombings,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 1993, A16. Mylroie compiled her arguments in: *Study of Revenge: Saddam Hussein’s Unfinished War Against America* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute Press, 2000).

that Saddam would do anything to get back at the United States, or in Mylroie's words, "I am not sure now that I can say that there is anything that Saddam would not do."¹⁹⁵ The implication was that the United States could not contain or deter a madman with WMD and links to terrorist groups.

These condemnations of Clinton's Iraq policy fit within an overall Republican and neoconservative political agenda as well as their case against his foreign policy. They claimed Clinton had inherited an unprecedentedly peaceful world with no superpower rivalry and then wasted this opportunity by cutting military spending, focusing on "international social work" in places like Haiti and Somalia, and neglecting core strategic regions like the Gulf.¹⁹⁶ In Iraq and elsewhere, these critics claimed that Clinton let himself be chained into inaction by U.N. procedures as well as irresolute or duplicitous partners rather than showing leadership and taking action.¹⁹⁷ They believed Clinton's weakness invited provocations from Saddam and other foes. For instance, Senator Robert Dole (R-KS), Clinton's challenger in the 1996 election, claimed after the 1996 Kurdish crisis: "The fact is that in the last few months Saddam Hussein has been testing American leadership and finding it lacking."¹⁹⁸ In addition, many advocates of ballistic

¹⁹⁴ Mylroie's claims have been thoroughly debunked by experts and U.S. intelligence agencies. See: Paul Bergen, "Did One Woman's Obsession Take America To War?" *The Guardian*, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jul/05/iraq.iraq>; Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 95; Peter Bergen, "Armchair Provocateur: Laurie Mylroie: The Neocons' Favorite Conspiracy Theorist," *Washington Monthly* 35, no. 12 (December 2003), 28-29; Isikoff and Korn, *Hubris*, 72.

¹⁹⁵ Mylroie, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *3 Years After the Gulf War*, 31.

¹⁹⁶ Quote is from Krauthammer, "Pinprick Response," *Washington Post*, September 5, 1996. See also: Robert Kagan, "A Retreat from Power?" *Commentary*, July 1995, 19-25; Zalmay Khalilzad, "Losing the Moment? The United States and the World After the Cold War," *Washington Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Spring, 1995), 85-107.

¹⁹⁷ Paul Wolfowitz, "Clinton's First Year," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 1 (January-February 1994): 30-33.

¹⁹⁸ R.W. Apple, "What's Bad for Hussein Seems Good for Clinton," *New York Times*, September 5, 1996, A11.

missile defense, of which Clinton was skeptical, contended that Iraq was the exact type of rogue state that United States needed these systems for: irrational, vengeful, and risk-tolerant.¹⁹⁹

Several events bolstered the arguments of the inevitable decline school during Clinton's first term. They contended that the 1995 revelations about Iraqi biological weapons meant that the inspectors could not find everything in Saddam's arsenal or change his desire to produce WMD. The discovery of the biological weapons program was largely dumb luck, they claimed, and if not for Hussein Kamel's actions UNSCOM and the IAEA might have wrongly certified Iraqi compliance in 1996.²⁰⁰ The idea of Saddam coming clean on WMD thereafter lost any credibility, especially in Congress and the media. How could the United States know that future Iraqi WMD disclosures were not "self-serving selective glimpses?"²⁰¹ Furthermore, inspectors like David Kay argued that virtually any modern industrial country could produce chemical and biological weapons from existing industrial and pharmaceutical infrastructure.²⁰² They also noted that Iraq had not dispersed the teams of scientists that built these programs and its foreign procurement network remained obscure.²⁰³ These persistent problems with inspections reinforced

¹⁹⁹ Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 89; Frank Gaffney, "Saddam's Message for the Senate," *Wall Street Journal*, August 30, 1995, A10.

²⁰⁰ For examples of this claim, see: Mylroie testimony in Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *3 Years After the Gulf War*, 20; William Safire, "Iraq's Threat: Biological Warfare," *New York Times*, February 16, 1995, A27.

²⁰¹ Quote is from: Editorial, "Don't Take Iraq's Word For It," *New York Times*, August 24, 1995, A22.

²⁰² David Kay, "Denial and Deception Practices of WMD Proliferators: Iraq and Beyond," *The Washington Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Winter, 1995): 88-90. For a similar argument, see: Michael Eisenstadt, "Still Not Bomb-Proof," *Washington Post*, February 26, 1996, A19.

²⁰³ Kenneth Timmerman, Staff Report, "Iraq Rebuilds Its Military Industries," in Subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and International Security, International Organizations, and Human Rights of the House Committee on International Relations, *Iraqi Nuclear Weapons Capability and IAEA Inspections in Iraq*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., June 29, 1993, 77-106; Testimony of David Kay in House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 20.

the idea that the true problem was, in Kay's words, the "motivation and intentions" of the regime itself rather than their capacity to generate and hide these programs.²⁰⁴

The crushing of the Iraqi opposition in 1996 further strengthened the inevitable decline case against containment. Few in the media or Congress doubted that Iraq had gained more in this showdown than it lost. Paul Wolfowitz called this crisis "Clinton's Bay of Pigs" and claimed that it signaled the failure of "inept covert operations" and the "passive containment policy."²⁰⁵ Bob Dole and John McCain (R-AZ) said that Clinton's "weak leadership" and "vacillation" prompted Saddam to strike at the opposition.²⁰⁶ These critics claimed the loss of the two main options for toppling Saddam meant that the United States should shift to a more open and aggressive regime change policy. Legislators like McCain, Trent Lott (R-MI), Robert Kerrey (D-NE), and Richard Lugar (R-IN) said that with the fading of the coup possibility the United States should, as Kerrey put it, "do more than just contain" and declare regime change as "an open objective."²⁰⁷ The editors of *The New Republic* likewise argued that after September 1996 "the only solution to the threat posed by Saddam is the overthrow of Saddam."²⁰⁸

The simmering policy debate between the conditional and inevitable decline approaches to containment was not just over different means for reaching the same end. Each camp had distinct views of what end point for Iraq and Saddam would be tolerable for U.S. security and

²⁰⁴ Kay, "Denial and Deception," 101; Editorial, "Four Years of Lies," *Washington Post*, July 7, 1995, A20.

²⁰⁵ Wolfowitz, "Bay of Pigs," *Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 1996.

²⁰⁶ The first quotation in this sentence is from Dole, and the second is from McCain. Both quotations found in: Myers, "Pentagon Says Command Site was Struck," *New York Times*, September 3, 1996. See also: Editorial, "Where Are the Allies?" *Wall Street Journal*, September 4, 1996, A14.

²⁰⁷ First quotation is from Robert Kerrey in: Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Iraq Report*, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., September 19, 1996, 21. Second quotation is from John McCain in: *Cong. Rec.*, September 11, 1996, 10279. See also: "G.O.P. Leaders Hit President On Iraq Policy," *Washington Post*, September 13, 1996, A33.

²⁰⁸ Editorial, "Operation Desert Prick," *The New Republic*, September 30, 1996, 7; See also: Michael Ledeen, "Bill Clinton's Bay of Pigs," *The Weekly Standard*, October 7, 1996, 29.

national interests. For conditionalists, a weak Saddam was acceptable for the moment, a compliant successor was vastly more preferable, and a democratic Iraq was a laudable goal but not necessarily one the United States could achieve. Analysts like Cordesman stressed the bounds of U.S. power and knowledge: “We cannot invade, occupy, or change the fundamental political character of either Iraq or Iran.”²⁰⁹

For inevitable declinists, limiting U.S. goals to keeping Saddam weak and compliant made his return to power in the region inescapable. Only his removal and the transformation of Iraq from a totalitarian dictatorship to a democracy would eliminate the threat of Iraq’s WMD and military power as well as its human rights abuses. Because Iraq remained a secondary issue in Clinton’s first term, the conditionalist view won in the Clinton administration and the larger political debate. However, the tools and assumptions of containment were being eroded by the dwindling unity of the coalition, the collapse of hope for a coup or indigenous rebellion, and the persistent limits of inspections. This change set the ground for the inevitable decline critique to become the politically dominant view of containment in Clinton’s second term.

Conclusion

Iraq played a minor role in the 1996 presidential election, which hinged on domestic politics. Dole and his running mate Jack Kemp went after Clinton for not maintaining the coalition and hitting back weakly against Saddam’s provocations.²¹⁰ However, they faced the awkward position of supporting Clinton’s September 1996 missile strikes while critiquing the overall policy. Despite their criticism, Dole and Kemp did not make Iraq a central plank of their

²⁰⁹ Senate Committee on Armed Services, *The Situation in Iraq*, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., September 12, 1996, 39. See also: A.M. Rosenthal, “On Clinton’s Watch,” September 10, 1996, *New York Times*, A27; Zalmay Khalilzad, “The U.S. Failure in Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 1996, A22.

²¹⁰ Dole, “Bob Dole on Iraq Sanctions Relief,” May 20, 1996.

campaign or offer specific changes. Compared to the criticism of Bush's handling of the end of Desert Storm, Congress was relatively quiet on Clinton's Iraq policy.

While Iraq stayed on the political back burner between 1993 and 1996, these were highly consequential years for the long-term trajectory of containment. In his memoir, Martin Indyk illuminated the larger significance of this period:

The policy of containment of the Soviet Union, first articulated by George Kennan, was based on the idea that the Soviet system was rotten to the core and would collapse of its own weight if the United States could only keep the pressure on it. Containment of Iraq was based on a similar calculation. But the Clinton administration's critical assumption was that the combination of sanctions and covert operations would force the collapse of Saddam's regime in five years, not the five decades that it took for the Soviet Union to collapse. And that would prove to be a fatally flawed judgment.²¹¹

Indyk's analysis and the material covered in this chapter highlight the importance of having a theory of change in any containment policy. By nature containment does not directly seek the overthrow of the target state, so it must create an atmosphere conducive to the target changing either its behavior or its ruling government lest containment start to appear indefinite.²¹² The containment of the Soviet Union had a theory of change that resembled Clinton's approach to Iran: maintain economic pressures and block expansion so that forces within each society would create either regime or behavioral change.²¹³ In contrast, in the Iraq case behavioral change was considered virtually impossible while regime change by invasion or assassination were unacceptable. This impasse left regime change by coup or uprising as the only solutions. Containment remained stable in political and policy terms only while these outlets remained viable.

²¹¹ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 38-39.

²¹² Robert Litwak, *Regime Change: U.S. Strategy Through the Prism of 9/11* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2007), 87, 107.

²¹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19-23, 35-43.

The loss of the coup option and the crushing of the opposition in 1996 discredited the idea that Saddam could be removed through these tools, both of which limited risk to the United States. Moreover, the steady dissolution of the coalition and Saddam's ongoing attempts to mask his WMD programs fed the idea that containment could not hold for long nor solve the problem of Saddam's regional ambitions and pursuit of deadly weapons. The domestic audience and the international coalition were heading in opposite directions, and Clinton's rhetorical gymnastics—the Clinton fudge-on the goals of U.S. policy toward Iraq could not bridge this gap forever.

Clinton's first term was therefore a deceptively quiet time for containment. The policy achieved many successes, and it was most viable when Saddam made obvious, conventional threats to his neighbors. Nevertheless, the containment's foundations were being hollowed out from within, and frustration with the policy was mounting at home. This hollowing out would shift the domestic political momentum toward the inevitable decline critique of containment once these problems were exposed by renewed challenges from Saddam. In Clinton's second term, the expanding inevitable decline group would try to wrest control of Iraq policy away from Clinton and fundamentally shift U.S. policy toward regime change.

CHAPTER 4: SADDAM HUSSEIN MUST GO: ENTRENCHING THE REGIME CHANGE CONSENSUS, 1997-2000

Introduction

On February 11, 1998, National Security Advisor Sandy Berger met with a group that his staff labelled the “Iraq Influentials.” They met during yet another standoff between the Iraqi government and UNSCOM, and Clinton had already threatened to use force against Iraq if it did not comply with inspections. The visitors included Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, William Kristol, and Francis Fukuyama, all critics of containment. According to his notes, Berger tried to convince his guests that containment “has kept Saddam under pressure and muzzled,” and that in each crisis sparked by Iraq, “we have consistently and firmly put Saddam back in his box.” “Remember Aideed,” his notes read, referring to the ill-fated U.S. special forces raid against the Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid in which 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in street fighting. He meant to warn his guests that even if the United States overthrew the Baathist regime there was no guarantee they could find Saddam or avoid heavy casualties.¹

The “Influentials,” led by Wolfowitz, responded with an attack on containment. Wolfowitz argued that the United States should “back out of containment rhetoric” now that they had the “xth demonstration that we can’t live w. SH.” Perle and Wolfowitz put forth a regime change strategy that was gaining political momentum: declare Saddam’s regime to be illegitimate, build up U.S. forces in the region, and back the Iraqi opposition’s war against Saddam. Rumsfeld interjected that ground troops should be kept out of Iraq, citing the U.S.

¹ Memorandum, Steven Naplan to Sandy Berger, February 11, 1998, OAID 3108, National Security Council Office of Press and Communications, Matthew Gobush Files, William Clinton Presidential Library, 4-5.

intervention in Lebanon in the early 1980s as a warning about occupying Middle Eastern cities. The meeting was cordial, but neither side convinced the other to shift their views on Iraq.²

This meeting demonstrated the rising influence during Clinton's second term of a group of intellectuals, Iraqi exiles, and politicians who sought to discredit and replace containment with an active regime change strategy. The most devoted members of this movement were neoconservatives like Perle and Wolfowitz, Republican legislators, and the Iraqi National Congress (INC) under Ahmed Chalabi. Numerous liberals and Democrats also backed a shift to regime change. The Clinton administration's handling of repeated inspections crises in Iraq convinced its critics that it had no broader strategy beyond maintaining inspections and sanctions and mending the faltering international coalition. They believed Clinton was shifting toward a strategy of limited containment and deterrence that abandoned serious efforts to remove Saddam and accepted that he might develop some weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

This strengthened political movement focused on convincing Congress and the public that containment must be replaced with a regime change strategy. Generally speaking, They argued that sanctions were collapsing, the international coalition was unworthy of trust, inspections had outlived their usefulness, and Saddam was still determined to build WMD and ballistic missiles. Moreover, they contended, as containment seemed on the verge of collapsing, that the United States had a narrow window of time to achieve regime change before Saddam reconstituted his WMD and military strength. Pursuing his ouster would require that the United States recognize regime change and containment as incompatible strategies, in contrast to the Bush and Clinton approach of sporadically pursuing regime change from a baseline containment policy. Containment required the maintenance of a coalition behind sanctions and inspections,

² Notes, Influentials Session with Sandy Berger, February 11, 1998, OAID 3108, National Security Council Office of Press and Communications, Matthew Gobush Files, William Clinton Presidential Library, 2-4.

regime change advocates claimed, which precluded the bold steps that were needed to overthrow Saddam. Finally, the enhanced push to discredit containment drew on the assumption within the regime change consensus that any strategy that did not prioritize the removal of Saddam and the Baathist system was at best a temporary salve and, increasingly, a postponement of Saddam's revival.

The culmination of this movement's efforts was the Iraq Liberation Act (ILA), which declared the removal of Saddam and his regime as an official U.S. foreign policy goal in October 1998. Scholars have tended to ignore or downplay the ILA because it was a non-binding resolution that did not lead to a meaningful change in actual policy.³ In a wider historical frame, however, it is a deeply important signpost in the evolution of ideas about to deal with Saddam. The ILA reflected a growing bipartisan consensus that containment could not be rehabilitated because the coalition would always prefer a weaker policy, Saddam would always evade or obstruct inspectors, and the sanctions would continue to collapse. The bill conveyed the belief that only regime change and democratization in Iraq could definitively solve this problem. This rare assertion of Congressional power to shift foreign policy priorities suggested the extent to which Clinton had lost control of the conversation about Iraq. It signaled a willingness to alienate coalition partners by declaring that the United States would not accept the normalization with Iraq under Saddam regardless of whether he complied with U.N. resolutions. Finally, the debate

³ For work that examines Iraq policy in the 1990's but glosses over the Iraq Liberation Act, see: James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004), 216-234; Robert Litwak, *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000) 135; Derek Chollet, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 199. For two prominent works that do not mention the ILA at all, see: Andrew Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2016); Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

over the Iraq Liberation Act showed just how few people in the political and intellectual discourse were still willing to defend containment.

In sum, the Iraq Liberation Act signified the entrenching of the regime change consensus in American political and intellectual life. It signaled the political victory of the inevitable decline critique to containment that stated that containment is not working and cannot work against a regime like Saddam's. These principles became a sort of "common sense" in U.S. thinking about Iraq, a set of assumptions that became increasingly unquestionable, thereby narrowing the range of ideas for dealing with Iraq. The frustrating experiences of 1997-1998 locked in this new conventional thinking. The outnumbered defenders of the conditionalist approach to containment were now limited mainly to ex-Bush administration officials, realist policy scholars, and military personnel. They tried to manage public expectations about what could be achieved in Iraq, emphasize the achievements of containment, and find ways to adjust the policy to make it more sustainable.

One reason why the pro-regime change argument was more effective in Clinton's second term was that its advocates proffered rollback as a concrete strategy for regime change. This plan envisioned using U.S. military aid, training, and air power to back opposition groups in an uprising against Saddam. While this alternative strategy helped the regime change argument gain political traction, especially among Republicans, it was also a dividing factor in the political regime change movement. Many Congressmen, intellectuals, and military personnel saw rollback as a risky, foolish idea that risked drawing the United States into direct fighting in Iraq. The debate over rollback thus showed that while the U.S. discourse on Iraq was coalescing around the regime change consensus, the question of how to achieve that end was still in dispute.

By the end of 1998, the Clinton administration agreed with its critics that Iraq policy could not go on as it had since the Gulf War. The frustrating confrontations and Saddam's seemingly endless intransigence deepened top Clinton's officials' sense that only regime change could solve this threat. Nonetheless, the basic containment paradigm still guided their handling of confrontations with Iraq in this period. They focused on maintaining inspections and sanctions, funneling food and medicine to the Iraqi people, and preserving the coalition. They continued to view containment and regime change as compatible, seeking ways to destabilize Saddam within the framework of multilateral sanctions and inspections. They resisted the Iraq Liberation Act and signed it reluctantly, vaguely endorsing its goals while doing the bare minimum to carry out this legislation. In the two years after Desert Fox, they worked to reform sanctions and get a new inspection program installed in Iraq after UNSCOM was thrown out for good in December of 1998. The result by 2000 was an anti-climactic impasse: a political discourse fixated on shifting from containment to regime change facing an administration that saw no responsible path to this end as it tried to keep containment alive.

The Inspections Crises and the Road to Operation Desert Fox, 1997-1998

The period from October 1997 to December 1998 witnessed an unprecedented string of confrontations between Iraq and the coalition. Iraq sought to impose restrictions on UNSCOM while asserting that it had completed disarmament and that the sanctions should be lifted. UNSCOM resisted this obstruction, and the United States repeatedly threatened to use force to compel Iraq to comply. Last second agreements or temporary retreats by Iraq headed off U.S. strikes in November 1997, February 1998, and November 1998, but Iraq quickly returned to non-cooperation after each reprieve. Clinton was torn between domestic political calls for toughness, the coalition's unwillingness to back up the inspections with force, and some U.N. members'

undermining of the inspections. This year of confrontations with Iraq culminated in U.S. and British air and missile strikes under Operation Desert Fox in December 1998 and the permanent ejection of UNSCOM and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from Iraq.

In the first 10 months of 1997, Clinton held that Iraq was still a minor threat, but they remained concerned about the growing challenge to containment. An intelligence assessment from early 1997 reflected this delicate stasis in saying “Although U.N. sanctions alone probably are not sufficient to bring down the regime, their maintenance is key to keeping pressure on Saddam and frustrating his ambitions for regional hegemony.”⁴ However, the international coalition, especially Middle Eastern nations, increasingly criticized the humanitarian effects of sanctions. One cable from State’s Near Eastern Affairs Office (NEA) stated: “We are deeply concerned that the Iraqis appear to be gaining ground in influencing international perceptions of the sanctions regime.”⁵ A Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessment judged that Iraq had not abandoned its “regional hegemonistic political aspirations” and that it “remains strongly committed to retaining and acquiring weapons of mass destruction and will try to rapidly rebuild these programs once U.N. sanctions are lifted and inspections are halted.”⁶

Weapons inspections continued their steady progress in 1997. UNSCOM director Rolf Ekeus reported advances on biological and chemical disarmament, although Iraqi obstruction persisted throughout 1997. In April 1997, Ekeus reported that after six years of inspections “not much is unknown about Iraq’s retained proscribed weapons capabilities,” although “what is still

⁴ CIA Report, “Iraq: Regime Prospects for 1997,” December 31, 1996, in Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Postwar Findings About Iraq’s WMD Programs and Links to Terrorism and How They Compare With Prewar Assessments*, 109th Cong., 2nd sess., September 8, 2006, S. Report 109-331, 384.

⁵ Cable, State Department Near East Office to Various Embassies, March 29, 1997, Digital National Security Agency, Targeting Iraq, Part 1 Collection, 3.

⁶ Defense Intelligence Agency Assessment, “Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs,” October 1997, Digital National Security Agency, Targeting Iraq, Part 1 Collection, 1.

not accounted for cannot be neglected.”⁷ In June, he reported: “We have documentary evidence about orders from the leadership to preserve a strategic capability” on WMD.⁸ Gaps remained regarding chemical weapons like VX, biological weapons and precursors, and ballistic missiles.⁹

The core problem was that in 1991 Iraq had unilaterally destroyed a great quantity of ballistic missiles, chemical and biological weapons and materials, and a variety of components and equipment. Iraqi officials wanted the inspectors to accept their assertions that these weapons were gone, but the inspectors demanded documentary and physical evidence that they had been destroyed because unaccounted weapons and materials could still be intact.¹⁰ For example, in the summer of 1998, UNSCOM found evidence of Iraqi development of the chemical weapon VX. They knew Iraq had imported 600,000 kilograms of VX precursor and had weaponized some of it, but Iraq never turned over the materials nor provided evidence of their destruction. Inspectors called this gap in the record the “material balance.”¹¹

In July 1997, Richard Butler, an Australian arms control expert, replaced Ekeus as head of UNSCOM. Butler soon enhanced UNSCOM’s emphasis on using aerial surveillance, listening devices, and surprise inspections to expose Iraq’s ongoing concealment activities.¹² He hoped

⁷ United Nations Special Commission, “3rd Report Under UNSCR 1051,” April 11, 1997, accessed February 25, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20050313225009/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/UNSCOM/1051/sres97-301.html>.

⁸ Barbara Crossette, “Iraqis Still Defying Arms Ban, Departing U.N. Official Says,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1997, A1.

⁹ United Nations Special Commission, “3rd Report Under UNSCR 1051,” April 11, 1997.

¹⁰ See the timeline of UNSCOM inspections in: United Nations Special Commission, “Ambassador Richard Butler’s Presentation to the U.N. Security Council,” June 3, 1998, Accessed March 19, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20050314073650/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/UNSCOM/s-1998-529.htm>

¹¹ Jean Krasno and James Sutterlin, *The United Nations and Iraq: Defanging the Viper* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 68; United Nations Special Commission, “6th Report Under UNSCR 1051,” October 6, 1998, accessed February 25, 2018, http://web.archive.org/web/20060222203010/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/Index_UNSCOM.html

that these “counter-concealment operations” would expose the systematic Iraqi program to hide information and materials and harass the inspectors. He claimed that the revelations about Iraqi concealment and obstruction activities from the Hussein Kamel affair in 1995 made this more “forensic” approach necessary.¹³ Such evidence, Butler thought, would show skeptical Security Council members that Iraq was far from complying, thereby sustaining the international will to maintain sanctions.¹⁴ Verification of Iraqi compliance, he argued, was only possible if the Iraqi concealment strategy could be exposed to the point that the Iraqi agreed to stop.¹⁵ In contrast to UNSCOM’s struggles, the IAEA had achieved significant progress on nuclear disarmament. The IAEA concluded in October 1997 that nuclear inspections had “reached a point of diminishing returns” as there were “no indications that there remains in Iraq any physical capability for the production of amounts of weapon-usable nuclear material of any practical significance.”¹⁶

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright gave a major speech at Georgetown University in March 1997 to issue a “wake-up call” to Saddam that the United States would still enforce the Security Council resolutions.¹⁷ She listed Iraq’s violations of these resolutions and noted how much weaker Iraq was because of sanctions and inspections. Reaffirming containment, she asserted: “As long as the apparatus of sanctions, enforcement, inspections, and monitoring are in

¹² Tim Trevan, *Saddam’s Secrets: The Hunt For Iraq’s Hidden Weapons* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 358-360; Krasno and Sutterlin, *The United Nations and Iraq*, 73-5.

¹³ United Nations Special Commission, “UNSCOM Final Compendium,” January 29, 1999, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20051124075332/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/UNSCOM/disarmament.htm>.

¹⁴ Charles Duelfer, *Hide and Seek: The Search for Truth in Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 139-140.

¹⁵ In Appendix 4 of this report, Butler recounts the extent of Iraqi concealment and obstruction efforts throughout the 1990s. United Nations Special Commission, “UNSCOM Final Compendium,” January 29, 1999.

¹⁶ International Atomic Energy Agency, “4th Consolidated Report Under UNSC 1051,” October 8, 1998, accessed February 25, 1998, <http://web.archive.org/web/20061215152301/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/IAEA/s-1997-779.htm>

¹⁷ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), 277.

place, Iraq will remain trapped within a strategic box.” She then restated the U.S. approach to lifting sanctions in stark terms: “We do not agree with nations that argue that if Iraq complies with its obligations concerning weapons of mass destruction, sanctions should be lifted. Our view, which is unshakeable, is that Iraq must prove its peaceful intentions” by complying with every U.N. resolution.¹⁸ The speech was less a policy shift than a reiteration of U.S. resolve to Saddam as well as international partners who wanted to end inspections and the oil embargo.

In late 1997 Iraqi officials escalated their campaign to cripple inspections by creating a crisis that would further isolate the United States within the coalition. They also hoped to gain relief from Richard Butler’s intensified counter-concealment inspections.¹⁹ In early October, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz blocked inspectors from visiting a list of “sensitive sites” he claimed were vital for Iraqi security services. In response, the United States and Great Britain led the passage of a Security Council resolution condemning these actions and suspending the next sanctions review as punishment. Clinton officials tried to get France, Russia, and China to agree to a travel ban on top Iraqi officials, but they would only agree to threaten a travel ban if UNSCOM judged that Iraq was not cooperating by April 1998.²⁰ These nations also did not

¹⁸ Madeleine Albright, “Speech on Iraq at Georgetown University,” (speech, Washington D.C., March 26, 1997), accessed March 29, 2018, <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2017/03/21/policy-speech-on-iraq-march-26-1997/>

¹⁹ Gregory Koblentz makes a strong case that the Iraqi government’s increased resistance to UNSCOM in 1997 and 1998 was significantly driven by its fear that the inspectors would relay information about the Iraqi security service to the United States, which would use it in covert or overt attacks on the Iraqi state. See: Gregory Koblentz, “Saddam versus the Inspectors: The Impact of Regime Security on the Verification of Iraq’s WMD Disarmament,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 3 (April 2018), 372-409. See also: Duelfer, *Hide and Seek*, 139.

²⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1134, October 23, 1997, unscr.org, accessed February 29, 2018, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1134>

agree to threaten Iraq with “serious consequences,” diplomatic code for military force.²¹ They also abstained on this resolution to avoid alienating Iraq, undermining its desired effect.²²

Aziz seized on this shaky response on October 29, 1997, by informing the Security Council that Iraq would only cooperate with UNSCOM if: “no individuals of American nationality shall participate in any activity of the Special Commission inside Iraq” and if all U.S. inspectors left Iraq within 24 hours.²³ Iraq also threatened to shoot down U.S. U-2 spy planes participating in inspections.²⁴ UNSCOM and Clinton saw these threats as an attempt to drive a wedge into the coalition and weaken the principle that Iraq had no say in the composition of the inspection teams.²⁵ Butler rejected the demand to exclude U.S. inspectors, and a few days later he sent teams with U.S. personnel on inspection missions. When Iraqi officials again prevented them from accessing suspected sites, Butler and the IAEA withdrew all inspectors in early November to ensure their safety.²⁶

The United States struggled to mobilize the coalition and compel Iraq to let inspectors back in with full rights. They strongly preferred a diplomatic solution, fearing that an air or missile strike would make the ejection of inspectors permanent.²⁷ Furthermore, Clinton officials

²¹ Martin Indyk, *Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 186.

²² Richard Butler, *The Greatest Threat: Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Growing Crisis of Global Security* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 91.

²³ Butler, *The Greatest Threat*, 91.

²⁴ Barbara Crossette, “Iraq Threatens to Shoot Down U.S. Spy Planes,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1997, A1.

²⁵ Butler, *The Greatest Threat*, 91.

²⁶ Butler, *The Greatest Threat*, 96-99, 102-103; Steven Lee Myers, “A Defiant Iraq Bars Entry to 3 U.N. Arms Inspectors,” *New York Times*, October 30, 1997, A3.

²⁷ Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002), 88-89; Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 277; Elaine Sciolino, “How Tough Questions and Shrewd Mediating Brought Iraqi Showdown to an End,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1997, A8.

believed that acting too unilaterally would only foment division in the coalition, which is what Saddam wanted.²⁸ The United States rallied France, Russia, and China to pass a Security Council resolution condemning Iraq, imposing a travel ban on top Iraqi officials, and warning of “serious consequences” if it failed to readmit the inspectors.²⁹ This stronger statement, combined with Russian diplomacy, convinced Iraq to let inspectors back in with full rights. In return, foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov told Iraq that Russia would push for “the speedy lifting of sanctions” while ensuring that future inspections respected “Iraq’s sovereignty and security.”³⁰

Although inspectors resumed work in December, this crisis disturbed the Clinton administration. They viewed such crises as part of the cost of containment, but they acknowledged that it had taken several Iraqi acts of defiance to spark a united Security Council response. Moreover, Russian officials openly communicated their desire to end inspections and lift sanctions without a full accounting of Iraqi WMD programs. Primakov, for instance, told Albright and Butler on separate occasions that the United States was exaggerating Iraqi non-compliance, and he urged the United States to be “more flexible, more understanding” about inspections.³¹ The inspectors also had to account for materials that Iraq might have moved during the one-month hiatus and restore surveillance equipment that Iraqi officials had disabled.³²

²⁸ Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. Says It Is Prepared to Use Force on Iraq,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1997, A6.

²⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1137, November 12, 1997, accessed February 29, 2018, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1137>.

³⁰ Duelfer, *Hide and Seek*, 128.

³¹ Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 277; Butler, *The Greatest Threat*, 105-106; Barbara Crossette, “Russians Press U.N. to Relax Iraq Sanctions,” *New York Times*, November 22, 1997, A1.

³² Barbara Crossette, “While Diplomats Talk, Iraq is Said to Hide Arms Evidence,” *New York Times*, November 6, 1997, A3.

When the inspectors returned to Baghdad in mid-December, Iraqi personnel again obstructed their work. On January 13, 1998, Aziz introduced a new set of restrictions for the inspectors, including “presidential and sovereign sites” that were “of significance in terms of the security of the State.” These sites related to the personal security of Saddam and his entourage, including private homes, office buildings, resorts, and intelligence facilities. The presidential sites were not merely buildings but entire compounds and the land around them. UNSCOM estimated that these areas encompassed 70 square kilometers and 1,500 structures, plenty of space to hide proscribed weapons. Aziz demanded that these sites “not be allowed to be inspected or overflowed under any circumstances” and reasserted that Iraq had given up all of its WMD programs.³³ In mid-January, Butler reported that Iraq had again ceased cooperating with UNSCOM by blocking inspection teams from visiting presidential sites. On January 22, Aziz ordered a total freeze on inspections, and UNSCOM and the IAEA left Iraq soon thereafter.³⁴

Clinton responded by rushing troops and two aircraft carriers to the region and threatening to use force, alone if necessary, to compel compliance.³⁵ The administration believed that the efficacy of the inspections as well as U.S. and U.N. credibility were at stake.³⁶ Clinton officials thus weighed the use of force much more seriously in this crisis than the fall 1997 showdown. Polls suggested that the U.S. public was willing to support the use of force if

³³ United Nations Special Commission, “Baghdad Mission Report,” December 17, 1997, accessed March 29, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20050314073646/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/UNSCOM/s-1997-987.htm>; Butler, *Greatest Threat*, 14-115, 130.

³⁴ United Nations Special Commission, “Baghdad Mission Report,” January 22, 1998, accessed March 29, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20050314073904/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/UNSCOM/s-1998-58.htm> Barbara Crossette, “Iraq Bars Arms Inspectors Again,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1998, A1; Barbara Crossette, “Iraq Orders Freeze on Arms Inspectors,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1998, A6.

³⁵ Tim Weiner, “Clinton’s Warning to Iraqis: Time for Diplomacy May End,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1998, A1.

³⁶ Steven Erlanger, “Countdown on Iraq: U.S. Weighs February Attack,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1998, A1.

coercive diplomacy failed, although strong majorities said it was necessary to have allied support.³⁷ The military developed multi-day bombing plans that targeted central pillars of the regime like Republican Guard units and communications infrastructure.³⁸

However, the administration lacked a clear sense of how long they would have to bomb Iraq and doubted that a limited offensive would force Saddam back into line.³⁹ One senior official stated: “We’d like to think we could start bombing and Saddam Hussein would throw his hands up and ask the United Nations inspectors back in, but no one believes it.”⁴⁰ At one Cabinet meeting, Albright asked if the United States should openly declare that the purpose of a military strike would be regime change, but Berger and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton opposed the idea, saying that the only sure means of regime change was a land invasion.⁴¹ The administration concluded that there was simply “no adequate substitute,” in Defense Secretary William Cohen’s words, for fully empowered inspections.⁴² They stressed that the policy was still containment and that the goal of any strike would be to diminish Iraqi WMD capabilities and ensure total access for inspectors.⁴³

³⁷ One CBS/New York Times Poll from February 1998 found that 69% of respondents would support bombing Iraq if it continued obstructing inspections. Another poll from the same source found that 72% of respondents wanted the United States to get the support of allies before bombing. See: *CBS/New York Times* Telephone Survey, February 9, 1998, Polling the Nations, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

³⁸ Tim Weiner, “U.S. Lists Options on Use of Force in Iraq Standoff,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1998, A1.

³⁹ Richard Newman, “Stalking Saddam,” *U.S. News and World Report*, February 23, 1998, 18; Thomas Lippman and Barton Gellman, “If U.S. Military Strike Doesn’t Sway Saddam, What’s Next?” *Washington Post*, January 29, 1998, A1.

⁴⁰ Steven Lee Myers, “Albright Says U.S. Could Act Alone Against Baghdad,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1998, A6.

⁴¹ Barton Gellman, “Raids May Strike at Power Structure,” *Washington Post*, February 17, 1998, A1.

⁴² Barton Gellman and Bradley Graham, “Cohen Says U.S. Would Not Seek To Topple Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 1998, A22.

During the winter of 1998, the United States and Great Britain again struggled to gain international support for tough diplomacy backed by the threat of force. French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac helpfully warned of “grave consequences” for Iraq if it did not readmit the inspectors.⁴⁴ In contrast, Russian and Chinese officials contradicted U.S. statements by saying that negotiations were just starting and calling for an end to sanctions and more respect for Iraqi sovereignty.⁴⁵ Arab allies like Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia took ambiguous positions on the use of force and told U.S. officials that limited attacks bolstered Saddam’s credentials at home.⁴⁶ The Saudi government even denied U.S. forces permission to launch planes from Saudi bases.⁴⁷ The lack of solid international support, coupled with domestic criticism, pushed the United States further in the direction of diplomacy over force.⁴⁸ Even though this situation frustrated the administration, Clinton believed it was worthwhile for the United States to accept some of the strictures of coalition diplomacy because the U.S. position as the sole superpower was a “luxury” that “won’t last forever.” This situation created a “moral responsibility to show restraint and seek

⁴³ Steven Erlanger, “Clinton and Blair Warn Iraq It Must Obey U.N. on Arms,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1998, A1; James Bennet, “Clinton Describes Goals for a Strike on Iraqi Arsenals,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1998, A1.

⁴⁴ Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 281; Craig Whitney, “Backing U.S., France Warns Iraqis to yield on Arms Inspections,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1998, A6.

⁴⁵ David Malone, *The International Struggle Over Iraq: Politics in the UN Security Council 1980-2005* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158; Steven Erlanger, “Washington and Moscow Show Split Over Iraq,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1998, A6.

⁴⁶ Douglas Jehl, “On the Record, Arab Leaders Oppose U.S. Attacks on Iraq,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1998, A6; Steven Erlanger, “Albright Receives Measured Support of Saudis on Iraq,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1998, A1.

⁴⁷ Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. Will Not Ask to Use Saudi Bases for a Raid on Iraq,” *New York Times*, February 9, 1998, A1.

⁴⁸ Steven Erlanger, “Clinton Says Iraq Is Promising Unconditional Access to Sites,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1998, A5.

partnerships and alliances” that would bolster collective security even as the rest of the world caught up to U.S. power.”⁴⁹

On February 17, 1998, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan announced that he would travel to Iraq to try to resolve the impasse. The Clinton administration backed the trip and said they would accept a deal if it imposed no limits on the inspectors’ access rights.⁵⁰ On February 23, Annan and Aziz announced a “memorandum of understanding” (MOU) that allowed the inspectors to return with full rights. The MOU, however, also imposed burdens on the inspectors. Inspections would now be accompanied by senior U.N. diplomats appointed by Annan. The MOU also included “special considerations” for eight presidential sites, calling on inspectors to “take into consideration any observations the Iraqi representative may wish to make regarding entry into a particular structure.” Lastly, the MOU specified that “UNSCOM undertakes to respect the legitimate concerns of Iraq relating to national security, sovereignty, and dignity.”⁵¹ Annan also called the inspectors “cowboys” after the MOU was signed and described as Saddam someone he “can do business with.”⁵²

The inspectors, especially Butler, accepted the MOU but objected to Annan acting as a mediator between Iraq and the inspectors, treating them as equally responsible for the crisis, rather than acting as an advocate for the inspectors’ mission and safety. Butler argued that this deal would politicize and weaken UNSCOM by giving Iraq further excuses to block

⁴⁹ William Clinton, interview by Jim Lehrer, *PBS News Hour*, January 21, 1998, accessed February 27, 2018, <http://presidency.proxied.lsit.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=56080&st=iraq&st1>

⁵⁰ Christopher Wren, “Annan to Go to Iraq to Seek a Solution to Arms Impasse,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1998, A8.

⁵¹ Kofi Annan, “Letter From the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council,” March 9, 1998, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unscom/s98-208.htm>

⁵² Butler, *The Greatest Threat*, 144.

inspections.⁵³ The Clinton administration agreed that Annan had gone too far in limiting the independence of the inspections, but they nonetheless accepted the pact to avoid military strikes and get inspectors back into Iraq.⁵⁴ They kept U.S. forces in the region and cautioned that if Saddam reneged again “everyone would understand that then the United States and hopefully all of allies would have the unilateral right to respond.”⁵⁵ Clinton wanted the deal tested as soon as possible to see if Iraq would comply, telling Tony Blair on February 23: “We have to test the agreement soon...show up at one of these sites and start looking around.”⁵⁶

During the inspections crises in late 1997 and early 1998, the administration stressed the WMD threat in new and frightening ways. In an interview with Jim Lehrer on January 21, Clinton said that the Iraqi threat was not just that they might fire WMD-armed ballistic missiles at nearby cities but that: “terrorists and drug runners and other bad actors...could just parade through Baghdad to pick up their stores if we don’t take the strongest possible action.”⁵⁷ In a speech on February 17, Clinton argued that if the coalition caved to Saddam’s demands: “He will conclude that the international community has lost its will. He will then conclude that he can go right on and do more to rebuild an arsenal of devastating destruction. And some day, some way, I guarantee you, he’ll use the arsenal.” Standing firm against Saddam would also deter other potential proliferators.⁵⁸ Back in November 1997, Clinton asked Americans to think of this crisis

⁵³ Butler, *The Greatest Threat*, 141-148; Krasno and Sutterlin, *The United Nations and Iraq*, 131-2.

⁵⁴ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 190.

⁵⁵ Quotation is from President Clinton in Erlanger, “Unconditional Access,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1998.

⁵⁶ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, William Clinton and Tony Blair, February 23, 1998, nationalarchives.gov, accessed March 25, 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/files/declassification/iscap/pdf/2013-090-doc39.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Clinton, interview by Jim Lehrer, *PBS News Hour*, January 21, 1998.

⁵⁸ William Clinton, “Text of Clinton Statement on Iraq,” February 17, 1998, [cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/02/17/transcripts/clinton.iraq/), accessed February 27, 2018, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/02/17/transcripts/clinton.iraq/>

not as a “replay” of the Gulf War but “in terms of the innocent Japanese people that died in the subway when the sarin gas was released,” referring to a 1995 terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway system that killed twelve people with sarin gas.⁵⁹

Clinton’s rhetoric raised the stakes of Iraq policy beyond the threat to U.S. regional interests to the danger of a volatile, vengeful dictator who must not be permitted to build WMD lest he use them or hand them to terrorists. He reframed Saddam as a threat to national security and the national interest, as the Tokyo reference suggested. This shift reflected the growing conviction among key members of the Clinton administration such as Albright and Cohen that the dangers of WMD proliferation, rogue states, and terrorism were merging into a new problem that made denying WMD to states like Iraq even more essential.⁶⁰ This new threat seemed to resonate with the public, with one poll from February 1998 showing that 60% of respondents believed if the United States attacked Saddam he would use biological or chemical weapons on U.S. targets and 75% expecting a terrorist attack directed by Iraq against Americans.⁶¹

From the signing of the MOU in February 1998 to the fall of 1998, the inspectors steadily uncovered more of Iraq’s WMD programs. The IAEA quickly resolved outstanding issues with Iraq and reported in April that “Iraq has satisfactorily completed its undertaking to produce a consolidated version of its full, final, and complete declaration of its clandestine nuclear program.”⁶² UNSCOM, however, had a great deal of rechecking to do because inspectors had

⁵⁹ John Lancaster and John Harris, “U.S. at a Crossroads on Iraq-and Its Choices Appear Bleak,” *Washington Post*, November 16, 1997, A1.

⁶⁰ Chollet, *America Between the Wars, 196-197*; Madeleine Albright, “The Testing of American Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1998): 50-64; William Cohen, “In the Age of Terror Weapons,” *Washington Post*, November 26, 1997, A19.

⁶¹ Evan Thomas, “Did Saddam Blink?,” *Newsweek*, March 2, 1998, 28.

⁶² International Atomic Energy Agency, “5th Consolidated Report Under UNSCR 1051,” April 9, 1998, Accessed March 19, 2018,

been unable to operate since October 1997.⁶³ Butler reported in June that Iraq was cooperating and that UNSCOM had established a viable monitoring system over key sites. However, there were still gaps in the material balance of biological and chemical weapons programs. Despite Iraqi, Russian, and Chinese pleas, UNSCOM would not confirm that Iraq had fully disarmed.⁶⁴

After the February crisis, the Clinton administration found no clear alternative to containment even as its key pillars wavered. The administration wanted a way out of the exhausting cycle of Iraqi provocation, U.S. response, and a last-second deal. Openly shifting to a regime change strategy, though, did not seem to be the solution. Saddam was not an immediate threat, and sanctions still prevented the his military's recovery.⁶⁵ Martin Indyk, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, reasoned that "there would be a cost to declaring such an objective because it could undermine the international support that we have for maintaining the sanctions regime." The use of excessive or unilateral force against Iraq, Indyk judged, would have the same effect, and U.S. policy needed to work within those restrictions.⁶⁶ The intelligence agencies judged that a coup remained unlikely because, as one July 1998 study stated: "Saddam's domestic position appears to be as strong as it has been at any point since the Gulf War."⁶⁷ An exasperated Clinton summarized the policy stalemate in September 1998,

<http://web.archive.org/web/20050313225012/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/IAEA/s-1998-312.htm>

⁶³ Duelfer, *Hide and Seek*, 146.

⁶⁴ United Nations Special Commission, "Ambassador Richard Butler's Presentation to the U.N. Security Council," June 3, 1998.

⁶⁵ Anthony Zinni, interview by Daniel Pipes and Patrick Clawson, *Middle East Quarterly*, June 17, 1998, accessed February 7, 2018, <https://www.meforum.org/articles/other/anthony-zinni-avoid-a-military-showdown-with-iraq>.

⁶⁶ Martin Indyk, Hearing of House Committee on International Relations, *Developments in the Middle East*, 105th Congress, 2nd sess., March 10, 1998, 16, 22.

⁶⁷ National Intelligence Council Briefing Paper, "Iraq: Prospects for Confrontation," July 17, 1998, Digital National Security Agency, Targeting Iraq, Part 1 Collection.

saying that Iraq was “the most difficult of problems because it is devoid of a sensible policy response.”⁶⁸ The administration nonetheless tried to modulate public expectations by saying that unless the United States was willing to ignore the Iraqi threat or invade, “Saddam will be with us for some time,” in Sandy Berger’s phrasing.⁶⁹

Iraq grew tired of UNSCOM’s refusal to verify disarmament, and in August 1998 Tariq Aziz told Butler that “he saw no utility in continuing working with the Commission on these issues.”⁷⁰ This confrontation coincided with al-Qaeda’s bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998. These attacks raised the Clinton’s administration’s awareness of al-Qaeda and its concerns about global terrorism in general. Clinton responded with missile strikes on suspected al-Qaeda targets in Sudan and Afghanistan later in August, calling the al-Qaeda: “most dangerous, non-state terrorist actor in the world today.”⁷¹

During the fall, Iraqi cooperation declined precipitously, culminating on October 31 when Iraq announced it was ending all cooperation with inspectors and demanded that they leave the country.⁷² The United States and Great Britain again moved forces to the region and called for Saddam to comply.⁷³ Clinton told Blair on November 3 that the coalition had to be willing to act quickly and decisively to preserve the inspections: “I really think that we have to take

⁶⁸ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 192-193.

⁶⁹ Samuel Berger, “Iraq: Securing America’s Interests,” *Washington Post*, March 1, 1998, C7.

⁷⁰ United Nations Special Commission, “Baghdad Mission Report,” August 5, 1998, Accessed March 18, 2018, http://web.archive.org/web/20060222203010/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/Index_UNSCOM.html

⁷¹ Julian Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 415-416; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York, Knopf, 2006), 272-286.

⁷² Barbara Crossette, “In a New Challenge to the U.N., Iraq Halts Arms Monitoring,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1998, A1.

⁷³ John Broder, “Clinton Is Sending Bombers and G.I.’s to the Persian Gulf,” *New York Times*, November 12, 1998, A1.

decisive action this time to respond to Saddam's challenge. It is clear to me that Saddam really wants to force the Council to lift sanctions without giving up his weapons of mass destruction and missile programs."⁷⁴ Sandy Berger likewise argued that weak or delayed action would "risk making the Council irrelevant and emboldening Saddam to further challenge the sanctions regime."⁷⁵ In addition, Iraq now found itself isolated at the United Nations, as the Arab states, France, and even Russia condemned its actions, although they did not back the threat of force.⁷⁶

Clinton launched U.S. warplanes against Iraqi government and military installations on November 15, 1998, in what was supposed to be an intensive three-day campaign. However, with U.S. and British planes literally en route to their targets, Iraq announced that they would readmit the inspectors unconditionally.⁷⁷ Cohen and Albright wanted Clinton to persist, but Berger and a call from Tony Blair persuaded Clinton that attacking would wreck the coalition and make the United States appear aggressive now that Iraq was conceding.⁷⁸ One senior official said of this dilemma: "You can't shoot a man who's waving a white flag."⁷⁹ Clinton reluctantly recalled the strikes, and the inspectors soon returned to Baghdad with a mandate to report on Iraqi cooperation in a month. By showing restraint, the administration believed they had paved

⁷⁴ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, William Clinton and Tony Blair, November 3, 1998, [nationalarchives.gov](https://www.archives.gov/files/declassification/iscap/pdf/2013-090-doc39.pdf), accessed March 25, 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/files/declassification/iscap/pdf/2013-090-doc39.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Memorandum, Samuel Berger and Leon Fuerth to William Cohen, November 3, 1998, Clinton Digital Library, Declassified Documents Concerning Iraq, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16192>.

⁷⁶ Steven Lee Myers, "U.S. Works To Win Allies' Support for Using Force Against Iraq," *New York Times*, November 5, 1998, A15.

⁷⁷ Carla Robbins and Thomas Ricks, "Iraq Backs Down, Averting U.S. Airstrikes," *Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 1998, A3; *Innocent Abroad*, 195.

⁷⁸ John Harris and Dana Priest, "Off-Again Airstrikes May Be On Again Soon, Officials Suspect," *Washington Post*, November 17, 1998, A35; Thomas Omestad, "The U.S. Strategy to Hammer Saddam," *U.S. News and World Report*, November 23, 1998, 18.

⁷⁹ Barton Gellman, "'Mr. President, We're Going Ahead,'" *Washington Post*, December 20, 1998, A1.

the diplomatic course for a military attack once Saddam reneged on inspections.⁸⁰ They agreed to “encourage UNSCOM and the IAEA to aggressively test Iraq’s unconditional commitment to full cooperation,” even though they expected him to renege on this pledge.⁸¹

Saddam rapidly fulfilled Clinton’s expectations when Iraqi officials blocked inspectors from viewing suspected sites December 9. Many of the sites the Iraqis did allow UNSCOM to visit had been sanitized since November, with equipment and materials moved from buildings once under U.N. monitoring. Butler reported to the Security Council on December 14 that Iraq was not complying and that he planned to remove the inspectors from Iraq.⁸²

Clinton believed he needed to respond instantly to prevent Saddam from again escaping punishment via last-second diplomacy. He and his Cabinet uniformly wanted an immediate and major air campaign against Saddam. Iraq had evaded retaliation too many times, and it appeared that it would never cooperate with UNSCOM and that France, Russia, and China would continue to hamstring serious inspections. Thus, the administration did not make the readmission of inspectors a goal for the upcoming operation.⁸³ Clinton spelled out his rationale for the attack to Saudi Crown Prince: “Baghdad has repeatedly violated that commitment and consistently refused to provide documents and information, barred access and harassed inspectors, lied

⁸⁰ Steven Erlanger, “Clinton Accepts Iraq’s Promise to Allow Weapons Inspectors,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1998, A1.

⁸¹ National Security Council, Summary of Conclusions for National Security Council Principals Committee Meeting on Iraq, November 15, 1998, Clinton Digital Library, Declassified Documents Concerning National Security Council, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16197>.

⁸² Butler, *The Greatest Threat*, 204-209.

⁸³ Sandy Berger, “Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Sandy Berger,” December 16, 1998, American Presidency Project, accessed February 27, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=48298&st=iraq&st1>; Steven Erlanger, “U.S. Set to Give Up Arms Inspections for Curbing Iraq,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1998, A1

repeatedly, and destroyed documents. I hope you will agree that we can't continue this cycle."⁸⁴ Aside from punishing Iraq for these violations, Clinton hoped: "to degrade [Saddam's] capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction and his ability to threaten his neighbors as much as possible."⁸⁵ They were not, as Cohen stated, "seeking to destabilize his regime" but to weaken him and uphold the credibility of the United States and the United Nations.⁸⁶

The ensuing Anglo-American air and missile campaign, titled Operation Desert Fox, lasted from December 16-19. It was the largest attack on Iraq since the Gulf War, including 415 cruise missiles and 650 air sorties. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) developed a target list of about 100 sites or facilities, only 12 of which were WMD-related.⁸⁷ Of these WMD sites, almost all targets related to ballistic missiles because the military planners believed these weapons were smaller and easier to store and because they wanted to avoid contaminating surrounding areas. Moreover, CENTCOM mostly omitted dual-use facilities potentially related to WMD because they were too easy to rebuild. Other targets included command centers, air defense installations, Saddam's palaces, and Republican Guard sites.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, William Clinton and Crown Prince Abdullah, December 15, 1998, Clinton Digital Library, Declassified Documents Concerning Iraq, accessed March 29, 2018, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16192>.

⁸⁵ Douglas Little, *Us Versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press), 113.

⁸⁶ Remarks by Madeleine Albright, December 17, 1998, OAID 1481, National Security Council, Samuel Berger Files, William Clinton Presidential Library, 1; Steven Lee Myers, "Pentagon is Sticking to Timetable and Targets," *New York Times*, December 19, 1998, A8.

⁸⁷ Mark Conversino, "Operation Desert Fox: Effectiveness with Unintended Effects," *Chronicles Online Journal, Air and Space Power Journal*, (July 2005), accessed May 15, 2018; Anthony Cordesman, "The Military Effectiveness of Desert Fox," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 19, 2000, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/military-effectiveness-desert-fox-warning-about-limits-revolution-military-affairs-and-9>.

⁸⁸ Conversino, "Operation Desert Fox,"; Steven Lee Myers, "U.S. and Britain End Raids on Iraq, Calling Mission a Success," *New York Times*, December 20, 1998, A1.

According to Pentagon assessments, the strikes hit 85% of the 100 targets on CENTCOM's list and diminished much of Saddam's missile development, Republican Guard, air defense, and communications facilities and equipment, much of which was hard to replace because of sanctions. The Pentagon estimated that Desert Fox set Iraqi missile development program back about two years.⁸⁹ The operation also rattled Saddam Hussein, who responded with a purge of the military and intelligence agencies.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, this operation did not fundamentally change Saddam's strategic intentions.⁹¹ For instance, the Iraq Survey Group found in 2004 that after Desert Fox and the withdrawal of UNSCOM, "the pace of ongoing missile programs accelerated" as Iraq poured resources into developing longer range missiles.⁹²

Operation Desert Fox drew broad support from an international coalition fed up with Saddam's intransigence, although Russia and China criticized the United States for "taking unprovoked military action," in Boris Yeltsin's words.⁹³ At home, Clinton feared that the world and the public would see the strikes as a distraction from the pending impeachment vote against him in the Senate. His missile strike against al-Qaeda targets in August had also coincided with Clinton's admission before a grand jury that he had had an inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky. Republicans like Trent Lott insinuated that Clinton was using foreign policy to mask this scandal.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, Clinton received high approval ratings for his handling of

⁸⁹ Cordesman, "Effectiveness of Desert Fox," 21-24; Anthony Zinni, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy on Iraq*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., January 28, 1999, 7-8.

⁹⁰ Pollack, *Threatening Storm*, 93; Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 19.

⁹¹ Anthony Cordesman emphasizes this point in "Effectiveness of Desert Fox," 4.

⁹² *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD*, September 30, 2004, vol. 2, cia.gov, https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/chap3.html

⁹³ Thomas Lippman and William Drozdiak, "America's Allies Give Support to Attack," *Washington Post*, December 18, 1998, A55.

Iraq policy, including Gallup poll that found 74% of respondents approved of the strikes.⁹⁵

Numerous polls also showed that between 60-70% of American believed that Clinton had launched Desert Fox for national security reasons rather than political ones.⁹⁶ Still, the American public generally did not believe the strikes would have a positive long-term effect on the Iraq problem, with 60% in one poll saying that the strikes were a “temporary solution.”⁹⁷

Clinton’s Iraq policy stood on uncertain ground at the end of 1998. The inspectors had departed Iraq and the coalition was more divided than ever. UNSCOM reported massive, unresolved gaps in the record on VX gas, biological and chemical precursors, unconventional missile warheads, various chemical agents, specialized aerosol generators, and Scud missiles. Iraq also retained expert teams of scientists that could quickly revive these programs, likely using dual-use facilities at which WMD development could be masked unless inspectors were on the ground.⁹⁸ The IAEA likewise had concerns about centrifuge and nuclear weapon designs and the Iraqi international procurement network for nuclear materials.⁹⁹ Without inspections, the

⁹⁴ Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 200.

⁹⁵ Gallup Telephone Survey, December 19, 1998, Polling the Nations, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>; A Pew Poll from December 21 reported 75% approval of the strikes: Pew Telephone Survey, December 21, 1998, Polling the Nations, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

⁹⁶ One Gallup poll phone from December 20 found that 66% of Americans believed Clinton launched the strikes “in the best interests of the nation” rather than “to divert public attention away from the impeachment proceedings.” A *New York Times/CBS News* poll from December 17 put this number at 61%. Republican voters were much more likely than the average voter to believe Clinton launched these strikes for political reasons. See: Gallup Telephone Survey, December 20, 1998, Polling the Nations, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>; *New York Times/CBS News* Telephone Survey, December 17, 1998, Polling the Nations, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

⁹⁷ Newsweek Telephone Survey, December 19, 1998, Polling the Nations, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://poll.orpub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search.php?action>.

⁹⁸ United Nations Special Commission, “UNSCOM Final Compendium,” January 29, 1999, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20051124075332/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/UNSCOM/disarmament.htm>

administration believed, Saddam would surely start rebuilding his arsenal, and as sanctions weakened he would have more resources to do so. Moving forward, the Clinton administration would either have to develop a different version of containment or, as their increasingly powerful critics argued, shift to an open and concerted regime change strategy.

The Political Revolt Against Containment and the Making of the Iraq Liberation Act

Throughout the inspection crises of 1997-1998, the Clinton administration defined its objectives within the containment paradigm: preserve sanctions and inspections, maintain the coalition, and be ready to strike Iraq if it violates the Security Council resolutions or threatens its neighbors. This policy and its defense in earlier years often drew much criticism, as shown in the previous chapters. During the inspection crises from October 1997 to February 1998, however, three separate political strands coalesced into a coordinated movement large enough to rally Congressional and media support to discredit containment and pass the Iraq Liberation Act. These three strands were neoconservative intellectuals, Iraqi exiles in the INC, and a core of devoted Congressional staffers. The argument of this regime change movement was largely the same as in past years: the inevitable decline case that containment was not working and could not work against this type of regime. By 1998, however, events and trends had shifted to give their argument greater force. These changes included the confrontations with Iraq, the growing international isolation of the United States, and expanding apprehension in the United States about the threat of ballistic missiles and unconventional weapons wielded by rogue states.

Skeptics of containment viewed the inspections crises from October 1997 to February 1998 as evidence of the policy's imminent collapse. Neoconservative writer David Wurmser complained that the United States had surrendered Iraq policy to "an amorphous, rudderless

⁹⁹ The International Atomic Energy Agency, "7th Consolidated Report Under UNSCR 1051, April 7, 1999, Accessed March 19, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20050222025252/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/iaea/s-1999-393.htm>

international community” that was protecting Saddam from retaliation and driving U.N. policy to the lowest common denominator.¹⁰⁰ Even containment’s defenders mocked the imposition of a travel ban as punishment for Iraq’s non-compliance in November 1997. The *Washington Post* editors, for example, wrote: “The world community, outraged, summons all of its courage and indignation and responds with...a travel ban on some Iraqi officials. No more shopping at Harrod’s for...Tariq Aziz, that’ll show ‘em.”¹⁰¹ Critics of containment also feared that as Saddam defied the United Nations and secured power at home, many countries would treat him as a permanent fixture and try to curry favor with him. Neoconservative commentators William Kristol and Robert Kagan described this inevitable demise as such: “Over time, containment of Saddam becomes ‘détente,’ and eventually détente becomes appeasement.”¹⁰²

This intractable cycle of crises intensified the sense that only Saddam’s removal would stop this draining dance. Paul Wolfowitz, for instance, argued in January 1998: “As long as he’s around he’s going to be back doing this, and we’re going to have to be back doing it over and over again. I think we have to develop a new political strategy that’s aimed at really liberating Iraq from this tyrannical monster.”¹⁰³ Senator John McCain (R-AZ) put the point more starkly: “The nature of the regime of Saddam Hussein is impervious to any peaceful effort at resolution

¹⁰⁰ David Wurmser, “Iraq Needs a Revolution,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 12, 1997, A22.

¹⁰¹ Editorial, “The U.N. Flinch,” *Washington Post*, November 13, 1997, A22. See also: Charles Krauthammer, “Munich on the Tigris,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 1997, A21; A.M. Rosenthal, “Time for Repairs,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1997, A25; John McCain, *Cong. Rec.*, 105th Cong., 1st sess., November 5, 1997, 11786.

¹⁰² William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “A ‘Great Victory’ for Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 26, 1998, A20; Paul Wolfowitz, “Rebuilding the Anti-Saddam Coalition,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 1997, A22; Editorial, “No Substitute for Victory,” *Weekly Standard*, February 16, 1998, 9.

¹⁰³ Transcript, William Clinton interview with Jim Lehrer, January 30, 1998, OAID 3108, National Security Council Office of Press and Communications, Matthew Gobush Files, William Clinton Presidential Library, 1; See also: Editorial, “Fair Strike,” *New Republic*, February 16, 1998, 218-219; Editorial, “Tightening the Vise on Iraq,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1998, A22.

of the ongoing conflict.”¹⁰⁴ Kofi Annan’s MOU with Iraq further fueled the sense that the mendacity of the United Nations and France, Russia, and China was crippling Iraq policy. For example, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS) told Clinton that Annan’s “appeasement” signaled the “beginning of the unraveling of the inspection process” by granting Saddam the “right to determine the scope of the inspections and the makeup of inspection teams.”¹⁰⁵

In this context, a political effort coalesced to shift U.S. policy from containment to regime change, building on Iraqi exile groups like the INC, a small group of Congressional staffers, and neoconservatives. Ahmed Chalabi’s INC changed its strategy after being run out of Northern Iraq by Saddam’s forces in 1996. From 1997 to 1998, Chalabi focused on convincing Congress and intellectual leaders to support regime change and back the INC.¹⁰⁶ He built a small core of supporters, including Perle, Wurmser, Wolfowitz, and former Congressman Stephen Solarz (D-NY), who helped make political connections and raise funds. They set out to, in Perle’s words, create “a climate of opinion and a set of perceptions about Iraq” that would mobilize Congress and the public.¹⁰⁷ Chalabi and the INC provided a Westernized, politically savvy opposition leader who could be backed as an alternative to containment and possibly to Saddam himself. Meyrav Wurmser, David Wurmser’s wife and a director of a conservative think tank on the Middle East, described Chalabi’s significance: “Ahmad came, and all of a sudden,

¹⁰⁴ John McCain, *Cong. Rec.*, February 9, 1998, S473, 105-2.

¹⁰⁵ Press Release, “Trent Lott Responds to Annan/Hussein Deal,” February 25, 1998, OAID 1736, National Security Council Office of Legislative Affairs, Mara Rudman Files, Iraq (2), William Clinton Presidential Library, 1. For further criticism of Clinton regarding the Annan deal, see: William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “Bombing Iraq Isn’t Enough,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1998, A17; A.M. Rosenthal, “Annan’s Bad Gamble,” *New York Times*, February 27, 1998, A25.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Bonin, *Arrows of the Night: Ahmad Chalabi’s Long Journey to Triumph in Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 118.

¹⁰⁷ Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 125-126.

we had an angel...Here's proof: Arabs can be Democrats.”¹⁰⁸ As INC official Nabeel Musawi told ABC News: “We want real change, we want democratic change, we want elections, we want parliaments, we want to live the way you do.”¹⁰⁹

The second key source of this the political campaign against containment was a group of Congressional staffers for influential legislators. The main players were Stephen Rademaker, chief counsel to the House International Relations Committee, Danielle Pletka and Randy Scheunemann, foreign policy advisors to Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Trent Lott, respectively, and Chris Straub, an aide to Robert Kerrey (D-NE). They had long been dissatisfied with containment, and Clinton's weak response to the inspections crises of 1997 and 1998 tipped them into action. Scheunemann later recalled that after the Annan deal with Iraq in February 1998, “We Republicans...savaged Annan because it was clear...that Iraq was only going to do the minimum amount necessary, and that Clinton was looking for a way out.” As Clinton drifted into a weaker policy, it became critical, Scheunemann argued, to get an “on the record statement” of regime change.¹¹⁰ Many in this group knew and were impressed by Chalabi. In fact, Rademaker first drafted what became the Iraq Liberation Act on February 19, 1998 after meeting with Chalabi in Congress, although they decided to wait to introduce the bill.¹¹¹ This group proved crucial for connecting the INC to powerful legislators who became vocal opponents of containment and eventually ushered the ILA through Congress.

¹⁰⁸ Aram Roston, *The Man Who Pushed America to War: The Extraordinary Life, Adventures, and Obsessions of Ahmad Chalabi* (New York: Nation Books, 2008), 137.

¹⁰⁹ *ABC News Special Report*, “Unfinished Business: The CIA and Saddam Hussein,” directed by Peter Jennings, ABC News, 1997, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZHAI-eq2I>.

¹¹⁰ Randy Scheunemann, phone interview by author, March 31, 2018.

¹¹¹ Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 150.

Neoconservative intellectuals and activists formed the third main group in the political campaign against containment. Neoconservatives had long criticized containment, but in 1997 and 1998 they organized far more effectively to influence the public debate and lobby Congress. In June 1997, William Kristol and Robert Kagan formed the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) with the goal of promoting an activist foreign policy against what they saw as Clinton's weak multilateralism. Their founding statement of principles included high defense spending, global U.S. unipolarity, a more confrontational approach to geopolitical rivals, and the promotion of democracy and free markets.¹¹² Prominent signers of PNAC's founding statement included Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Scooter Libby. PNAC rooted its worldview in the assumption that the main "present danger" facing the United States was not any specific threat but the risk that the United States would abandon its position of leadership in the liberal international system:

The United States, the world's dominant power on whom the maintenance of international peace and the support of liberal democratic principles depends, will shrink its responsibilities and-in a fit of absentmindedness, or parsimony, or indifference-allow the international order that it created and sustains to collapse.¹¹³

PNAC was part of a web of neoconservative and conservative institutions that organized opposition to Clinton's foreign policy and the containment of Iraq. These groups included the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the Heritage Foundation, and the short-lived Committee for

¹¹² "Project for a New American Century Statement of Principles," in *The Iraq Papers*, ed. John Ehrenberg, J. Patrice McSherry, Jose Sanchez, and Caroleen Sayej (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19-20. For scholarship on neoconservative thought and activism in the late 1990's, see: Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 74-111; Chollet, *America Between the Wars*, 171-177.

¹¹³ Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "Introduction: National Interest and Global Responsibility," in *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, ed. Robert Kagan and William Kristol (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 4.

Peace and Security in the Gulf (CPSG), founded by Stephen Solarz and Richard Perle.¹¹⁴ These organizations made connections to the INC and lobbied the Republican-controlled Congress to take tougher action on Iraq.

During January and February 1998, PNAC and the CPSG wrote public letters to Clinton that laid out the inevitable decline case for replacing containment with regime change. The CPSG letter argued: “It is clear that this danger cannot be eliminated as long as our objective is simply ‘containment’” because “as the crises of recent weeks have demonstrated, these static policies are bound to erode, opening the way to Saddam’s eventual return to a position of power...in the region.”¹¹⁵ Both letters argued that allowing Saddam to possess WMD was unacceptable because he had used them before, he could employ them as a shield to enable aggressive actions, and his very possession of WMD would destabilize the region by encouraging other states to seek WMD. Because containment hinged on unreliable allies and Saddam’s own cooperation, the policy was “dangerously inadequate.”¹¹⁶ In line with the regime change consensus, the CPSG letter argued that “the problem is not only the specifics of Saddam’s actions, but the continued existence of the regime itself.”¹¹⁷ The PNAC letter drew many of the same signatories as the group’s founding statement, including Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, while the CPSG letter drew supporters like Richard Armitage, Douglas Feith, Bernard Lewis, and Martin Peretz.

¹¹⁴ “Overthrow Hussein, U.S. Group Advises,” February 20, 1998, [cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9802/20/iraq.war.presser/), accessed May 5, 2018, <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9802/20/iraq.war.presser/>

¹¹⁵ Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf, “Open Letter to the President,” February 19, 1998, [iraqwatch.org](http://www.iraqwatch.org/perspectives/rumsfeld-openletter.htm), <http://www.iraqwatch.org/perspectives/rumsfeld-openletter.htm>

¹¹⁶ Project for a New American Century, “Letter to Bill Clinton,” [informationclearinghouse.org](http://www.informationclearinghouse.org), January 26, 1998, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5527.htm>.

¹¹⁷ Project for a New American Century, “Letter to Bill Clinton,” January 26, 1998.

One key innovation in the inevitable decline case in this period was that containment and regime change had become incompatible strategies. Most of containment's critics had supported Bush and Clinton's covert regime change efforts and their attempts to maintain sanctions, inspections, and NFZs. By 1998, however, the chances of a coup were near zero and coalition partners were abandoning a tough line on Iraq. With inspections and sanctions jeopardized, the United States had an uncertain window of time to defeat Saddam before he gained WMD. Perle, for example, wrote: "If we do not develop a strategy for removing Saddam now, we may be unable to do so later. Once he is in possession of weapons of mass destruction, our options will have narrowed considerably."¹¹⁸ Containment, with its emphasis on restraint and multilateralism, inhibited Clinton from taking the bold action needed to deal with the threat before it escalated. These critics also suspected that the Clinton administration was moving toward a posture of deterrence and limited containment that would accept Saddam developing some WMD and give up on overthrowing him. Congressman Benjamin Gilman (R-NY) called this ostensible shift "a silent U-turn" toward "bowing to the wishes of the French, the Russians, and the Chinese, who want to help Iraq lower the bar on UNSCOM inspections."¹¹⁹

Regime change advocates believed they needed to arrest this drift, which meant openly declaring a regime change policy and backing the opposition with military training even if that alienated the coalition partners. In fact, regime change boosters believed that many U.S. partners did not support a tough policy on Iraq because they thought Clinton lacked the will to see it

¹¹⁸ Richard Perle, "Iraq: Saddam Unbound," in *Present Dangers*, ed. Kagan and Kristol, 106. For a similar version of this argument, see: Project for a New American Century, "Letter to Newt Gingrich and Trent Lott," May 29, 1998, iraqwatch.org, accessed March 6, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20031011070800/http://newamericancentury.org:80/iraqletter1998.htm>. This letter was signed by Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Robert Kagan, William Kristol, Richard Perle, and John Bolton, among others.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin Gilman, House Committee on International Relations, *Disarming Iraq: The Status of Weapons Inspections*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., September 15, 1998, 2.

through. Adopting a clear regime change policy and executing it boldly would rally the world behind the United States, as Wolfowitz argued: “A willingness to act unilaterally can be the most effective way of securing effective collective action.”¹²⁰ Without such leadership, as another PNAC letter to Congressional leaders argued, “those nations living under the threat of Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction can be expected to adopt policies of accommodation.”¹²¹

The interlocking threat of rogue states with WMD and ballistic missiles further intensified the urgency of regime change, especially among conservatives and neoconservatives. Missile defense activists lobbied Clinton to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, a 1972 pact between the United States and the Soviet Union that limited the number of defensive anti-ballistic missiles each state could deploy. They argued that this treaty was a Cold War relic that inhibited the United States from protecting U.S. territory and bases from rogue states. They contended that these actors might not be deterrable and they would use those weapons to project power in strategic regions.¹²² House Majority Leader Newt Gingrich (R-GA), for instance, argued to Clinton: “Our nation’s policy of relying solely on offensive weapons to deter a nuclear missile attack from the Soviet Union has been overtaken by events. The Soviet Union no longer exists and our multiple adversaries...no longer play by the familiar Cold War rules.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Wolfowitz, “Anti-Saddam Coalition,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 1997.

¹²¹ Project for a New American Century, “Letter to Newt Gingrich and Trent Lott,” May 29, 1998.

¹²² Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America’s Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 256-257; Frederick Kaplan, *Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 78, 98-102.

¹²³ Newt Gingrich, Open Letter to Bill Clinton, January 20, 1998, Center for Security Policy, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/1998/02/06/clinton-on-iraq-wrong-question-wrong-answer-its-not-the-weapons-its-the-regime-stupid-2/>. For other critics of containment who linked the ballistic missile threat to Iraq, see Project for a New American Century, “Letter to Bill Clinton,” January 26, 1998.

In 1997, the Senate commissioned Donald Rumsfeld to lead a study of the ballistic missile threat. His team included Paul Wolfowitz and former CIA director R. James Woolsey. The report identified Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as active seekers of ballistic missiles who were within 5 years (10 for Iraq) of acquiring the ability to strike the United States. In a job at the intelligence community, it concluded: “The threat to the U.S. posed by these emerging capabilities is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than has been reported...by the Intelligence Community.” The report warned that as these states developed stronger denial and deception techniques, the United States might have little warning before these missiles were deployed.¹²⁴ On this interlocking threat, Clinton’s containment policy suffered from a deficit between its rhetoric and its policy. As Senator John Kerry argued,

There is a disconnect between the depth of the threat Saddam Hussein presents to the world and what we are at the moment talking about doing. If he is as significant a threat as you heard him characterized by the president...then we have to be prepared to go the full distance, which is to do everything possible to disrupt his regime and to encourage the forces of democracy.¹²⁵

Furthermore, regime change advocates rooted their case in a specific understanding of the role of containment in the U.S. victory in the Cold War. Joshua Muravchik, a neoconservative working at AEI, wrote that contrary to the standard narrative, containment did not defeat the Soviets. In reality, communism was on the offensive in the 1970s until: “Ronald Reagan succeeded in reversing this momentum by adopting a policy of ‘containment-plus,’ the core of which was aid to anti-Communist insurgencies.¹²⁶ Wolfowitz broadened this point: “The

¹²⁴ “Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States,” July 15, 1998, Federation of American Scientists, Accessed January 5, 2018, <https://fas.org/irp/threat/bm-threat.htm>.

¹²⁵ John Kerry quoted in: Frank Gaffney, “This is the Time to Bash-or at Least Repudiate-the U.N.,” February 26, 1998, Center for Security Policy, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/?s=bash+the+U.N.>

¹²⁶ What to Do About Saddam Hussein by Joshua Muravchik, AEI.com, June 1998, 40.

communists, then, were defeated through our strong support of democracy, and by providing those willing to fight for their rights the means to win their freedom.”¹²⁷ In this narrative, communism was destroyed “from outside the system” through Reagan’s intensification of the Cold War in areas like Latin America and Afghanistan. As crucial aspects of the Cold War triumph, regime change advocates also cited Reagan’s active human rights and democracy promotion, massive arms spending, moral rhetoric, support for anti-Communist insurgencies, as well as his refusal to treat the USSR as a permanent fixture in international politics.¹²⁸

Regime change boosters thus likened the containment of Iraq to détente in the Cold War. Many neoconservatives saw détente as an amoral reconciliation with a hostile, evil power that abused U.S. trust to catch up militarily and spread its global reach. As with Iraq in the 1990s, neoconservatives during the 1970s struggled against what they saw as the unprincipled realism of Kissinger, who sought to maintain a balance of power with the USSR while downplaying ideology. They also criticized the ostensibly feckless McGovernite liberals who opposed a strong military and an assertive foreign policy.¹²⁹ Many of major critics of the containment of Iraq had fought against détente as Congressional aides in the 1970s, including Perle, Wolfowitz, and Feith, who all worked for the anti-détente Senator Henry Jackson (D-WA).¹³⁰ The lesson of the

¹²⁷ Paul Wolfowitz, House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., February 25, 1998, 39.

¹²⁸ Quote is from: David Wurmser, *Tyranny’s Ally: America’s Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1999), 63. For more on the neoconservative narrative of the Cold War, see: FA: Remembering the Future, Paul Wolfowitz, Spring 2000, No. 59, 35-45; Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America’s Destiny*, (Washington, D.C., AEI Press, 1991), 1-12; Michael Ledeen, *Freedom Betrayed: How America Led a Global Democratic Revolution, Won the Cold War, and Walked Away* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1996), 34-59.

¹²⁹ For background on neoconservatives and détente, see: John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 97-136; Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 99-106, 113-126; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 55-58.

¹³⁰ George Packer, *The Assassins’ Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 21-27.

Cold War for Iraq was that the Baathists, like the Soviets, could not be moderated via indirect pressures and therefore needed to be removed with U.S. military and moral power.¹³¹

A significant contingent of liberals and Democrats also turned against containment in the late 1990s. Powerful strains of liberal thought in this period focused on humanitarian intervention and R2P, or the right to protect.¹³² This doctrine held that a state's right to sovereignty depended on how it treated its people, and if it committed or failed to stop genocide and other humanitarian disasters, external powers had the right to intervene.¹³³ Liberals such as Senators Robert Kerrey and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) were drawn to regime change by the goal of spreading democracy and protecting human rights, reflecting the broader liberal turn to humanitarian interventionism embodied by the emergence of R2P. For example, Kerrey argued in strongly moralistic terms that: "The existence of such a government is a daily affront to every freedom loving person, to everyone who is revolted by the degradation of our fellow human beings. I refuse to accept it."¹³⁴ Another reason many liberals backed regime change was the belief that Saddam's brazen defiance of the Security Council undermined the credibility of the

¹³¹ Wurmser, *Tyranny's Ally*, 63-65.

¹³² For background on humanitarian interventionism in the 1990s and some of its moral and legal defenses, see: Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 503-516; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 378-405; Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 101-108; Michael Ignatieff, "Intervention and State Failure," in *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention*, ed. Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 229-245.

¹³³ One key document of humanitarian interventionist thought in the 1990's was Kofi Annan's speech on September 20, 1999 in which he argued for a new understanding of sovereignty: Kofi Annan, "Secretary-General Presents His Annual Report to the General Assembly," September 20, 1999, un.org, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990920.sgsm7136.html> See also: Mazower, *Governing the World*, 380.

¹³⁴ Robert Kerrey, *Cong. Rec.*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., September 29, 1998, 1124.

United Nations, an institution they hoped would help foster a more peaceful and democratic global order.¹³⁵

Regime change advocates of all political stripes sought to seize the moral high ground by stressing the centrality of democracy and human rights to their strategy. Containment at best could bring about a coup and a new dictator, they claimed, but only the uprooting of the Baathist system and its replacement with a democracy could ensure the rights of the Iraqi people and remove the security threat. David Wurmser argued that the root of violence and tyranny in the Middle East was “the grip of centralized, totalitarian power and despotism.”¹³⁶ A democratic Iraq, Kerrey argued, could “transform the Middle East” into a land of “security, prosperity, and creative diversity” by showing other Arab peoples that they did not have to tolerate despotism.¹³⁷ “The remaking of the Iraqi state,” claimed Middle Eastern scholar Fouad Ajami, was a matter of the U.S. national interest.¹³⁸

Regime change advocates frequently accused defenders of containment of believing that Arabs were unfit for democracy and undesiring of human rights.¹³⁹ Ahmed Chalabi claimed that containment’s defenders held the “essentially racist view” that Arabs were “people who were

¹³⁵ Robert Kerrey, *Cong. Rec.*, 105th Cong., 1st sess., November 8, 1998, 12103. See also: Richard Cohen, “The Limits of ‘Whack-a-Mole’” *Washington Post*, February 24, 1998, A21.

¹³⁶ Wurmser, *Tyranny’s Ally*, 41.

¹³⁷ Robert Kerrey, *Cong. Rec.*, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., March 2, 2000, 2053.

¹³⁸ Fouad Ajami, “The Reckoning,” *The New Republic*, February 23, 1998, 21. For a scholarly treatment of U.S. discourses on Middle Eastern potential for democracy, development, and human rights, see Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 215-267.

¹³⁹ James Woolsey, House Committee on Armed Services, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., March 10, 1999, 5; Wurmser, *Tyranny’s Ally*, 44.

querulous and cannot reasonably govern themselves...that they deserve what they get.”¹⁴⁰ This universalist argument had broad appeal in a post-Cold War era that had just witnessed waves of democratization in Europe, Latin America, and East Asia. The INC, moreover, bolstered this argument by portraying Iraqi society as bursting with democratic and economic potential. For instance, Chalabi told a neoconservative think tank in a 1997 speech: “Iraq is blessed with a talented and industrious population...it may fairly be described as the western world’s gateway to the non-Arab Muslim East.”¹⁴¹ INC leaders were living advertisements for this promise with their Western degrees, attire, and human rights language. They and their neoconservative allies developed a narrative of Iraqi history in which Iraq had once been guided by a civic-minded elite under the Hashemite monarchy and that ethnic conflict had not arisen until the Baathist era. They stressed that Iraq had a large population of well-educated, middle-class professionals who did not support Saddam and could be the core of a vibrant democracy and capitalist economy once the Baathists were eliminated.¹⁴²

Congressional Republicans, with the aid of hawkish Democrats, maintained the heat on Clinton’s Iraq policy throughout 1998. They wrote dozens of letters and held hearings on Iraq, most of which allowed prominent critics like Wolfowitz and Perle space to broadcast their arguments. In the fall of 1998, as Saddam renewed his open rebellion against the containment, the regime change movement rallied to pass the ILA. The bill passed 360-38 in the House on

¹⁴⁰ Ahmed Chalabi, interview, *PBS Frontline*, 2000, accessed March 23, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saddam/interviews/chalabi.html>. See also: Jim Hoagland, “‘Pretend Iraq Policy,’” *Washington Post*, July 2, 2000, B7.

¹⁴¹ Ahmed Chalabi, “Creating a Post-Saddam Iraq,” speech to the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, June 1997, jinsa.org, accessed September 14, 2018, <http://www.jinsa.org/jinsa-reports/creating-post-saddam-iraq>.

¹⁴² For examples of this narrative of Iraqi history, see: Ahmed Chalabi, “Democracy is ‘Realism’ for Iraq,” *The Defense Democrat: A Newsletter of Foreign Affairs and National Defense*, April 1991, 1 ; Ahmed Chalabi, “Iraq: Past as Prologue?” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1991, 20-29; Wurmser, *Tyranny’s Ally*, 128-129. For a scholarly counterpoint to this narrative, see: Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

October 5 and unanimously in the Senate on October 7. Its sponsors in the House were Benjamin Gilman and Christopher Cox (R-CA), while in the Senate its sponsors were Trent Lott, Robert Kerrey, Joseph Lieberman, John McCain, and several other Republicans.¹⁴³

The ILA's text reflected most of the main points of the case for regime change. It faulted Saddam for crimes against humanity, foreign aggression, and violations of his responsibilities under the U.N. resolutions. It declared an open regime change policy with a democratic Iraq as its goal: "It should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime." The ILA required that the President designate Iraqi opposition groups that would be eligible to receive aid as long as they represented a "broad spectrum" of Iraqi ethnic groups and committed to human rights, democracy, Iraq's territorial integrity, and peaceful relations with neighbors. It then authorized but did not require him to provide up to \$97 million per year in broadcasting assistance, humanitarian aid, the use of military equipment, and military training. The act also urged the president to establish an international criminal tribunal for the Baathist leadership.¹⁴⁴

Stephen Rademaker later described the purpose of the ILA as "to declare a policy, and then it was to authorize, not require, a policy approach for the president that was basically the application of the Reagan Doctrine to Iraq."¹⁴⁵ Rademaker further argued that the ILA did not call: "for the U.S. to directly intervene in the of overthrow Saddam Hussein...It was not an

¹⁴³ *The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998*, Public Law 338, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., (October 31, 1998), congress.gov, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/4655>. For more on the passage of the ILA, see Roston, *Man Who Pushed*, 154-156; Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 157-160.

¹⁴⁴ *The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998*, (October 31, 1998).

¹⁴⁵ Kenneth Pollack, phone interview by author, November 6, 2017.

AUMF [authorization to use military force].”¹⁴⁶ For that reason, the law included a caveat about the involvement of U.S. military forces in bringing about regime change: “Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize or otherwise speak to the use of United States Armed Forces...in carrying out this Act.”¹⁴⁷ Randy Scheunemann later said that this rider was included to ensure “it was clear that we weren’t trying to create a back door to U.S. military intervention,” which would have been far more controversial.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the ILA is best understood as an attempt to entrench certain principles about Iraq, such as the inadequacy of containment and the need for democracy, and to push Clinton toward a tougher approach. Its main sponsor in the House, Benjamin Gilman, described it as a way to “break this logjam” of repeated confrontations with no clear end point while establishing the principle that “Saddam is the problem, and there will be no permanent solution as long as his regime remains.”¹⁴⁹

While Clinton did sign the ILA on October 31, 1998, he and most members of his administration opposed the open declaration of a regime change policy. Elizabeth Jones, the NEA’s Deputy Assistant Secretary at the time, recalled that the State Department:

We did everything could to prevent that bill from being passed because we could not identify a way to assure that the people to whom that money was meant to go were legitimate and that the money would be properly used because the person who had talked the Congress into setting money aside for the Iraq Liberation Act was Chalabi, who we all thought to be a charlatan.¹⁵⁰

Jones claims that her office unsuccessfully argued to the NSC that Clinton should veto the bill but convinced Clinton that the United States should not hand cash to the INC but pay for its

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Rademaker, phone interview by author, January 12, 2018.

¹⁴⁷ *The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998*, (October 31, 1998), section 8.

¹⁴⁸ Randy Scheunemann, phone interview by author, March 31, 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Benjamin Gilman, *Cong. Rec.*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., October 5, 1998, 9586.

¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth Jones, phone interview by author, February 6, 2018.

legitimate, independently verified expenses.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, administration officials met privately with Congressional leaders to argue that openly declaring a regime change policy would make maintaining sanctions and inspections even harder because countries like France and Russia already believed the United States was acting too severely toward Iraq. The CIA and the Defense Department also objected to the ILA because they saw no feasible way of achieving regime change.¹⁵² Clinton issued a statement upon signing the ILA that endorsed its general principles but stressed that it was a non-binding resolution. He also distanced himself from regime change advocates' call for massive aid to the INC, saying "U.S. support must be attuned to what the opposition can effectively make use of as it develops over time."¹⁵³

The conditionalist approach to containment also went through important changes during the late 1990s. This school of thought had often criticized Bush and Clinton for the way that they pursued containment, but they agreed with the premises and broad structure of the policy. As the inevitable decline critics made their push for regime change in 1998, conditional thinkers increasingly became containment's defenders in the public square. Like Clinton, they highlighted the successes of inspections and sanctions in destroying the majority of Saddam's WMD and preventing Iraq's military recovery.¹⁵⁴ They believed that these tools would only remain viable if

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth Jones, phone interview by author, February 6, 2018.

¹⁵² Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 192; Walter Pincus, "Bill Tries to Shift U.S. Policy on Iraq," *Washington Post*, October 1, 1998, A30; Vernon Loeb, "Congress Stokes Visions of War to Oust Saddam," *Washington Post*, October 20, 1998, A28; Martin Kettle, "Pentagon Balks at 'Idiotic' Law Urging Bay of Pigs-Type Invasion of Iraq," *The Guardian*, October 21, 1998, 16.

¹⁵³ William Clinton, "Statement on Signing the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998," October 31, 1998, American Presidency Project, Accessed February 27, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=55205&st=iraq&st1=>

¹⁵⁴ Michael Eisenstadt, House Committee on National Security, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., September 16, 1998, 45; Phebe Marr, "Why Saddam Craves a Crisis," *New York Times*, November 23, 1997, C19; Richard Murphy, "Calling Baghdad's Bluff," *Washington Post*, January 26, 1998, A23.

the United States kept the international community on board and avoided unilateral moves.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, they saw the Iraqi opposition as divided, ineffective, and lacking in influence in Iraq, which made them too risky to back in a real attempt at toppling Saddam.¹⁵⁶ In addition, they argued that, in Richard Haass' terms, the removal of Saddam would not be the "panacea that many people suggest. The problems of Iraq go beyond Saddam Hussein."¹⁵⁷ Years of deprivation, trauma from decades of authoritarianism, crumbling infrastructure, and growing ethno-sectarian conflict would persist, conditionalists argued, even if Saddam could be removed. They concluded that the risks of overthrowing Saddam and inheriting these problems outweighed the considerable yet known costs of containment.¹⁵⁸

Members of the conditionalist school, of course, knew they had to answer the charge that while Saddam may be somewhat restrained now, inevitably containment would collapse and unleash him. To counter this argument, they held that the United States should moderate its expectations about what could be achieved vis a vis Iraq. The United States needed a policy that could protect U.S. interests and security without requiring the risky and difficult task of toppling Saddam. Containment, Haass argued, fit this bill: "If all this leads to a change in Iraq's

¹⁵⁵ Michael Mandelbaum and Richard Haass, *Building For Security and Peace in the Middle East: An American Agenda*, Report of the Presidential Study Group (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy Press, 1997), 17; Haass, House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 13.

¹⁵⁶ Cordesman, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown?* 105th. Cong., 2nd sess., March 2, 1998, 116; Haass, House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 14.

¹⁵⁷ Haass, House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 14.

¹⁵⁸ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown?* 115; Michael O'Hanlon, "The Butcher's Bill for Invading Iraq," *Washington Post*, March 19, 1998, A20; Editorial, "Unseating Saddam Hussein," *New York Times*, November 19, 1998, A34.

leadership, so much the better. But the advantage of containment over the alternatives is that it protects our core interests even if Saddam manages to hang on.”¹⁵⁹

Sticking with containment, moreover, meant that the United States might have to accept Saddam having some WMD capability. “Even the most unfettered and effective UNSCOM/IAEA effort cannot prevent Iraq from conducting important covert efforts and from retaining and/or developing some ‘break out’ capabilities,” argued defense analyst Anthony Cordesman.¹⁶⁰ A key problem was that Iraq’s modern pharmaceutical and chemical infrastructure could be shifted to weapons production relatively easily and covertly, and the United Nations could not prevent Iraq from developing any capacity in these areas. Saddam was aggressive and brutal, but the historical record showed: “Saddam is unlikely to attack any country we are clearly committed to defend,” which “probably means he can be deterred,” as Michael O’Hanlon argued.¹⁶¹ For the conditionalist school, the best path was to accept some risk, restrain Iraq on more serious technologies like nuclear weapons and ICBMs, and take a clear deterrent stance against the deployment or use of WMD.

Defenders of containment offered a number of ways that the policy might be adjusted to new conditions rather than abandoned. Kenneth Pollack, a scholar of Middle Eastern politics who was hired by the NSC in 1999, argued that the very toughness of containment had sparked France, Russia, China, and many Arab states to oppose the policy. Pollack contended: “If we are going to keep containment this strong and this comprehensive, we will have to...make very

¹⁵⁹ Haass, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown*, 38. See a similar statement on containment by General Anthony Zinni in: Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., September 19, 2000, 64.

¹⁶⁰ Cordesman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown*, 120; Richard Haass, “Containing Iraq Without War,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 1998, A23.

¹⁶¹ Michael O’Hanlon, “Saddam is Here to Stay,” *Washington Times*, February 1, 1999, A19.

significant sacrifices on other issues to hold it together.” The United States, Pollack argued, could shift to a policy of “narrow containment” that could get the coalition’s cooperation on inspections and military sanctions while conceding on non-military investment and trade and the flight bans on Iraqi citizens.¹⁶² If the inspectors could verify full Iraqi compliance on WMD, the United States should permit unlimited oil exports while maintaining U.N. control over the funds generated by those sales.¹⁶³ Moreover, if the United States has to bomb Iraq, it should put no time limit on the campaign, forcing Iraqi generals, in Haass’ words, “to calculate that he better take the risk of taking on his own regime.”¹⁶⁴ Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski likewise suggested adjustments like easing of sanctions on non-military goods, repairing relations with Iran to maintain Iraq’s isolation, and greater humanitarian aid.¹⁶⁵

Conditionalist thinkers based their case on a view of the Cold War that stressed the role of containment’s firmness, flexibility, and restraint in the U.S. victory. If the United States could contain the massive, nuclear-armed Soviets for 45 years, they could certainly do so with the vastly weaker Iraqis. Over time, they argued, containment exacerbated fissures and flaws within the Communist bloc that eventually sparked the system’s collapse. Haass, for example, identified one lesson of the Cold War as: “Kennan’s original formulation teaches us something else. A

¹⁶² Kenneth Pollack, Joint Hearing of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, *Iraq: Are Sanctions Collapsing?* 105th Cong., 2nd sess., May 21, 1998, 41-43.

¹⁶³ Richard Haass, “Iraq: What Next? Containing Saddam is the Most Likely U.S. Policy,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, March 1, 1998; Michael O’Hanlon, “Better than Air Strikes,” *Washington Times*, November 16, 1998, A19.

¹⁶⁴ Frontline, Spying on Saddam, Richard Haass Interview, PBS, 1999, Accessed March 23, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/unscom/interviews/haass.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Brent Scowcroft, Richard Murphy, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Differentiated Containment: U.S. Policy Toward Iran and Iraq* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1997), 7-8, 13, 23.

successful containment policy can set in motion forces that lead to the demise of the regime.”¹⁶⁶

Brent Scowcroft and James Baker recalled, moreover, that during the 1970s neoconservatives, like contemporary Iraq hawks, fretted that the Soviet Union would soon overtake the United States when it was actually was suffering crippling internal weaknesses.¹⁶⁷

This point about the Cold War hints at a persistent problem facing the conditionalist school in the late 1990s. How would Saddam Hussein be defeated? How and when would containment end? Conditionalist thinkers mainly offered the same answer as they had since the Gulf War: box Saddam in and create pressures that might lead the Iraqi elite to move against him.¹⁶⁸ As Saddam recovered from the Gulf War and eroded his economic and diplomatic isolation, however, this outcome seemed less and less plausible, especially with no viable domestic opposition in Iraq. The essential problem with the conditionalist approach to containment was that its advocates increasingly operated within the regime change consensus. Just like the majority of policy-makers, politicians, and intellectuals, they generally believed that the only way out with Saddam was his removal from power. Henry Kissinger, for example, had long promoted a tough containment policy, but he concluded in November 1998: “The ultimate issue in the Persian Gulf is not inspections but the government in Baghdad,” which needed to be overthrown.¹⁶⁹ The best that containment’s defenders could do in the public discourse was argue

¹⁶⁶ Haass, House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 16. See also: Michael O’Hanlon, “U.N. Struck a Good Deal for Peace with Iraq,” *Newsday*, February 25, 1998; James Baker, “Getting Ready for ‘Next Time’ in Iraq,” *New York Times*, February 27, 1998, A25.

¹⁶⁷ Baker, “Getting Ready,” *New York Times*, February 27, 1998; Brent Scowcroft, “Taking Exception: The Power of Containment,” *Washington Post*, March 1, 1998, A22.

¹⁶⁸ Haass, House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 16; Cordesman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown?* 120; see Scowcroft commentary in: Warren Strobel, “America’s Plan to Get Saddam,” *U.S. News and World Report*, November 30, 1998, 34.

¹⁶⁹ Henry Kissinger, “Bring Saddam Down,” *Washington Post*, November 29, 1998, C7. For other statements validating the regime change consensus by defenders of containment, see: Scowcroft, Murphy, and Brzezinski, *Differentiated Containment*, 7, 22; Editorial, “A Necessary Response,” *Washington Post*, December 17, 1998, A26.

that containment was acceptable for the foreseeable future and that no responsible means of regime change existed.

One additional reason that the conditionalist approach to containment garnered less support in the late 1990s was that one of its main tools, sanctions, drew increasing criticism from the humanitarian school of thought. This group had argued since the Gulf War that sanctions were causing a health crisis in Iraq and that the United States should focus on alleviating this disaster. In the late 1990s, this movement gained momentum, particularly when Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, successive U.N. Humanitarian Coordinators for Iraq, resigned in protest in 1998 and 2000. Halliday and von Sponeck objected in particular to the Anglo-American blocking of important health and infrastructure-related goods and materials for import into Iraq, which they viewed as caution bordering on cruelty.¹⁷⁰ Oil-for-food led to a significant economic recovery in Iraq, including the doubling of the GDP from 1997-2000, the stabilization of food prices, and significant increases in daily calorie intake for the average Iraqi.¹⁷¹ These gains, however, were unequally distributed and the health crisis was not fully resolved.¹⁷² UNICEF reported in 1999 that maternal and child mortality remained high, with an average rate of 131 deaths per 1000 live births from 1994-1999.¹⁷³ Economic recovery remained a dream for the

¹⁷⁰ Ewen MacAskill, "Second Official Quits U.N. Team," February 15, 2000, *The Guardian*, accessed May 5, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/feb/16/iraq.unitednations>

¹⁷¹ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 120-123.

¹⁷² Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 283.

¹⁷³ "Iraq Surveys Show 'Humanitarian Emergency,'" August 12, 1999, [unicef.org, https://www.unicef.org/newsline/99pr29.htm](https://www.unicef.org/newsline/99pr29.htm); Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 36-37.

majority of Iraqis who suffered from high inflation, the collapse of government services, and the absence of decent jobs.¹⁷⁴

The Clinton administration received dozens of letters from Arab-American, medical, religious, and charity groups calling for the lifting of sanctions.¹⁷⁵ Although many politicians avoided criticizing sanctions for fear of looking soft on Iraq, more liberal Democrats declared that the sanctions should be eased because they allowed Saddam “to exploit the suffering of his people to his political advantage.”¹⁷⁶ They held numerous Congressional hearings in the late 1990s to give anti-sanctions activist a public platform. Some legislators from farm states, including Chuck Hagel (R-NE) who wanted to re-open the Iraqi market to exports also started to criticize the sanctions.¹⁷⁷ Many critics pointed out that the sanctions were strengthening Saddam at home because he could use the rationing system to increase his control over civilian life and shift blame for domestic problems to outsiders.¹⁷⁸ These critics argued that oil-for-food was inadequate because even though it enabled some relief, the United States still blocked equipment and materials needed to restore Iraq’s electric, sanitary, and medical infrastructures out of fear that those goods would might have WMD-related uses. They generally pressed for “de-linking,”

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Explanatory Memorandum Regarding the Comprehensive Embargo on Iraq,” January 14, 2000, hrw.org, accessed March 5, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/print/226817>; “When Sanctions Don’t Work,” *The Economist*, April 8, 2000, 25.

¹⁷⁵ Letters, Archdiocese of Boston to William Clinton, February 12, 1998; National Arab American Medical Association to William Clinton, February 17, 1998; Quakers General Conference to William Clinton, March 3, 1998; OAID 21687, White House Office of Records and Management, Crisis With Iraq, William Clinton Presidential Library.

¹⁷⁶ One letter to Clinton protesting the sanctions was signed by Nancy Pelosi, John Conyers, David Bonior, and Maxine Waters, among others. See: Letter, John Conyers et. al. to William Clinton, October 6, 1998, OAID 2070, National Security Council Records, William Clinton Presidential Library, 1-2.

¹⁷⁷ Gordon, *Invisible War*, 161-162.

¹⁷⁸ Nimah Mazaheri, “Iraq and the Domestic Political Effects of Economic Sanctions,” *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 2 (Spring 2010), 253-259.

or the lifting of sanctions that hurt the civilian population and the maintenance of military and WMD-related restrictions.¹⁷⁹

The Clinton administration responded with a public relations campaign to defend sanctions and oil-for-food as crucial policy tools while pinning the blame for Iraq's health crisis on the Baathists. A State/CIA report made public in 1998 charged Iraq with inflating mortality statistics and showed that Saddam had constructed eight new palace complexes since 1991 at a cost of \$2 billion. Saddam had spent another \$2 billion between 1992 and 1997 draining swamps in Southern Iraq to destroy what had become a sanctuary for Shia insurgents. The Iraqi elite was also smuggling in luxury cars, yachts, and top-shelf liquor. In a country suffering from a potable water crisis, this report observed that one of Saddam's palaces had artificial lakes, moats, and a 15-foot tall indoor waterfall.¹⁸⁰ The administration further noted that Iraq by 1999 was exporting oil at a pre-Gulf War rates through oil-for-food but was not purchasing and distributing adequate resources to its people. It noted that in Northern Iraq, where U.N. and Kurdish agencies facilitated distribution, mortality rates had plummeted whereas they remained high in the Baathist-controlled center and south.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Joy Gordon, "Sanctions as Siege Warfare," *The Nation*, March 22, 1999, 18-22; Hans von Sponeck, "Iraq: International Sanctions and What Next," *Middle East Policy* 7, no. 4 (October 2000): 149-155; Meghan O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions: Statecraft and State Sponsors of Terrorism* (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 147-148.

¹⁸⁰ State Department Report, "Saddam Hussein's Iraq," September 1999, Digital National Security Agency, Targeting Iraq, Part 1 Collection, 6-7.

¹⁸¹ The severity and causes of the Iraqi health crisis following the Gulf remain highly contested issues. Although all experts agree that mortality and public health worsened in this period, some demographers and public health experts have criticized UNICEF's studies for using inappropriate statistical methods and relying too much on data provided by the Iraqi government. For a recent study that makes this case, see: Tim Dyson and Valeria Cetorelli, "Changing Views on Child Mortality and Economic Sanctions in Iraq: A History of Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics," *British Medical Journal of Global Health* 2, no. 2 (July 2017): 1-4. This article also discusses three major household surveys of birth histories in Iraq since 2003 that have found much lower child mortality rates for the 1990-2003 period than UNICEF's studies had indicated. There also remains considerable debate about how to assign responsibility to the sanctions in comparison to other causes, such as bomb damage from the Gulf War or the Baathist regime's failure to rebuild infrastructure and provide health care in certain regions. For contemporaneous research on public health in Iraq, see: Amatzia Baram, "The Effect of Iraqi Sanctions: Statistical Pitfalls and

In addition, U.S. officials cited U.N. reports that showed that Iraq had kept \$200m worth of much-needed medicine in warehouses and had tried to re-export food and medicine for the state's gain.¹⁸² The administration concluded: "Ultimately, Baghdad's deliberate policy choices are responsible for any increase in mortality rates."¹⁸³ In general, most figures in the Iraq debate agreed that the Iraq government was responsible for this crisis. Nevertheless, by the late 1990s the sanctions policy, like containment as a whole, was increasingly squeezed between inevitable decline critics who saw it as ineffective and humanitarian critics who saw it as immoral. The conditionalist approach was losing supporters to both of these groups, leaving few in the public square who still argued that containment could be successfully adapted to new circumstances.

The Rollback Alternative to Containment

Regime change supporters had suggested since the Gulf War that the United States should help Iraqi opposition groups foment an uprising against Saddam's regime. This idea did not become a coherent strategy until the late 1990s when the INC and its neoconservative allies developed the rollback plan as a means of achieving regime change. Rollback became a central part of the campaign against containment because it provided an alternative strategy that promised, at low risk to the United States, Saddam's downfall and a democratic Iraq. It countered Clinton's argument that there was no intermediate strategy between containing Saddam and a complete invasion of the country. Critics of rollback, however, believed it would lead to a bloodbath in Iraq and the direct involvement of U.S. military forces.

Responsibility," *Middle East Journal* 54, no. 2 (Spring, 2000): 194-223; Mohamed M. Ali and Iqbal H. Shah, "Sanctions and Childhood Mortality in Iraq," *The Lancet* 355, no. 9218 (2000), 1851-1857.

¹⁸² State Department Report, "Saddam Hussein's Iraq," September, 1999, 7; Sandy Berger, "Saddam is the Root of All Iraq's Problems," *Financial Times*, May 4, 2000, A21.

¹⁸³ CIA/State Department Report, "Facts on Iraq's Humanitarian Situation," July 17, 1998, OAID 21687, White House Office of Records and Management, William Clinton Presidential Library, 2.

The concept of rollback as a strategy originated in the perception during the Cold War that containment was a passive strategy that did not put sufficient pressure on Communist governments. The term comes from the early Cold War, when starting in 1948 the CIA sought to undermine Communist control of Eastern bloc countries by supporting “politico-psychological relations,” sabotage, and the creation of cadres of resistance fighters in Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁴ This policy became popular among Republicans who wanted a tougher approach to the Cold War than containment. Future secretary of state John Foster Dulles endorsed the idea during the 1952 campaign as a strategy of “liberation” of the “captive peoples” of Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁵ Still, by the time Dwight Eisenhower took office in 1953, rollback had produced little more than the deaths of hundreds of exiles who had been smuggled into the Eastern Bloc. Eisenhower and Dulles quickly soured on this version of rollback and ceased operations by 1954.¹⁸⁶

Rollback was revived in the 1980s under the Reagan Doctrine, which pledged support to anti-communist insurgencies in places like Afghanistan and Nicaragua to challenge Soviet influence in the developing world and to destabilize governments allied with the Soviets.¹⁸⁷ In keeping with their narrative of the Cold War, categorical critics of containment believed these

¹⁸⁴ Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 7-8; Laszlo Borhi, “Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction? U.S. Policy and Eastern Europe in the 1950's,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 3, (Fall, 1999), 78-89. For one conservative intellectual who wrote an extensive case for rollback over containment during the early Cold War, see: James Burnham, *Containment or Liberation?* (New York: The John Day Company, 1953).

¹⁸⁵ Christopher Tudda, “Reenacting the Story of Tantalus: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Failed Rhetoric of Liberation,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 9.

¹⁸⁶ Tudda, “Story of Tantalus,” 16; Grose, *Operation Rollback*, 200-207, 216.

¹⁸⁷ Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 102, 113; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 373.

insurgencies had contributed to Soviet retrenchment in the mid-late 1980s.¹⁸⁸ Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), for instance, claimed in regard to the Cold War: “The Communists, then, were defeated through our strong support of democracy, and by providing those willing to fight for their rights the means to win their freedom.”¹⁸⁹ They wanted to reapply the concept to Iraq, and when the INC started working on rollback in the early 1990s, they drew on the help of former military and intelligence personnel who had been involved with the Reagan Doctrine.¹⁹⁰

The rollback plan for Iraq would start with the United States recognizing the INC as the legitimate provisional government of Iraq. The next step was to create opposition bases in areas of northern and southern Iraq protected by the NFZ’s. The United States would lift sanctions in these areas and unfreeze Iraqi assets to help the opposition to build support and military strength. The United States would then provide money, military training, supplies, and weaponry, including anti-air and anti-tank weapons. U.S. military forces would defend these “safe havens” from Saddam as the opposition developed. The INC, in turn, would foster a broader resistance movement in Iraq, uniting the Kurdish parties of the north and Shia groups in the south who would provide most of the manpower for the fight against Saddam. The INC hoped to gather around 10,000 light infantry soldiers as the “nucleus” of this offensive as well as several elite units that would counter Iraqi tanks and special forces.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ For examples of this type of thinking about the Cold War, see: Zalmay Khalilzad, “It’s Not Too Late to Topple Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 25, 1998, A22; Joshua Muravchik, “Apply the Reagan Doctrine to Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 1999.

¹⁸⁹ Rohrabacher, House Committee, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 39.

¹⁹⁰ Roston, *Man Who Pushed*, 126-130. Two key advisers to the INC on rollback were Wayne Downing, the former commander of Joint Special Operations Command, and Dewey Clarridge, a former CIA operations officer who had worked on U.S. support for the Contra insurgency in Nicaragua and was later indicted in the Iran-Contra scandal.

¹⁹¹ W. Patrick Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid,” *Middle East Policy* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 43-44; Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 514.

Once the opposition had gained enough strength, they would take the offensive against the Baathist regime. Under what they called the “Afghan approach,” the INC envisioned insurgent attacks on military outposts and the steady expansion of enclaves of opposition control. This process, they argued, would draw defectors, delegitimize the Iraqi government, and possibly spark a coup or urban rebellion against Saddam. At some point, rollback supporters claimed the regime would collapse, although the specific mechanism for this outcome was often unclear.¹⁹²

One key assumption underlying this strategy was that Saddam’s regime held on to power through sheer terror alone and that morale in the army was abysmal. The plan also assumed that the Iraqi population’s seething hatred for the Saddam needed only direction and protection to overthrow the regime.¹⁹³ Another variant of rollback envisioned a massive U.S. air offensive against the Iraqi military, security services, and communications infrastructure that would crippled the state and allow the insurgency to sweep toward the capital. Eliot Cohen, a prominent defender of this air-power approach, argued that the Gulf War air campaign had shown how vulnerable the Iraqi state was when its ability to communicate with its security forces was severed. With the more precise weaponry developed since the Gulf War, he argued, rollback was even more feasible by late 1990’s.¹⁹⁴

Rollback’s most enthusiastic supporters in U.S. politics were neoconservatives and Republican Congressmen. The 1998 CPSG letter to Clinton endorsed rollback, calling for safe

¹⁹² For descriptions of the Afghan approach to rollback, see: Daniel Byman and Patrick Clawson, ed., *Iraq Strategy Review: Options for U.S. Policy* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999), 59-88; Editorial, “How to Attack Iraq,” *The Weekly Standard*, November 17, 1998.

¹⁹³ Wolfowitz, Senate Committee, *Can Saddam Be Overthrown*, 8-10; Wolfowitz, House Committee, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 9, 26; Max Singer, “Saddam Must Go,” *The Weekly Standard*, February 16, 1998.

¹⁹⁴ Cohen was the lead director of the Gulf War Air Power survey in the mid-1990’s and a signer of the PNAC letter to Clinton in February 1998. His experiences in this study contributed to his optimism about air power crippling the Baathist state. House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Options in Confronting Iraq*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., Feb. 25, 1998, 20-23; Eliot Cohen, “Plan of Attack,” *New Republic*, February 23, 1998, 21-23.

havens inside Iraq, military aid to the opposition, “a systematic air campaign” against the Iraqi Republican Guard, and the positioning of U.S. ground forces to be ready to “protect and assist the anti-Saddam forces” as a “last resort.”¹⁹⁵ This letter was one of dozens of articles, speeches, and Congressional hearings in which regime change advocates pushed rollback as a viable alternative to containment.¹⁹⁶ The INC and many of its U.S. supporters made grandiose promises about rollback. For example, Ahmed Chalabi told a Senate hearing in March 1998:

Give the Iraqi National Congress a base, protected from Saddam’s tanks, give us the temporary support we need to feed and house and care for the liberated population, and we will give you a free Iraq, an Iraq free of weapons of mass destruction, and a free market Iraq. Best of all the INC will do all this for free. The U.S. commitment to the security of the gulf is sufficient. The maintenance of the no-fly-zones and the air interdiction of Saddam’s armor by U.S. forces assumed in the INC plan is virtually in place.¹⁹⁷

Chalabi added that this plan would take “only a matter of months” and that Iraqi oil wealth would pay for reconstruction.¹⁹⁸

Despite these promises, rollback came under heavy criticism from supporters of the conditionalist approach to containment. These critics identified massive military problems with the strategy, including the difficulty of providing permanent air cover for small, weak ground forces and the challenge of providing close air support as opposition forces tried to seize cities.

¹⁹⁵ Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf, Open Letter to the President,” February 19, 1998; See also statement by Chalabi, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown?* March 2, 1998, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Paul Wolfowitz, House Committee on National Security, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, September 16, 1998, 75-76; Robert Kagan, “A Way to Oust Saddam,” *The Weekly Standard*, September 28, 1998, 14; Joshua Muravchik, “What To Do About Saddam Hussein,” *Commentary*, June 1, 1998; Trent Lott, *Cong. Rec.*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., October 7, 1998, 11811.

¹⁹⁷ Chalabi, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown?* March 2, 1998, 8. See similarly optimistic statement by Richard Perle, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Liberation of Iraq: A Progress Report*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., June 28, 2000, 10.

¹⁹⁸ Perle, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Liberation of Iraq: A Progress Report*, June 28, 2000, 17.

The flat, open desert of southern Iraq was terrible terrain for starting an insurgency, and it favored the movement of Saddam's tanks.¹⁹⁹ Rollbacks' detractors also feared that if the plan went poorly, the United States would have to choose between entering a wider war against Saddam and allowing the opposition to be crushed. U.S. CENTCOM Commander Anthony Zinni called this scenario the "Bay of Goats," invoking an Iraqi version of the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco. He argued that rollback could lead to heavy U.S. losses, ethnic civil war or fragmentation, and U.S. occupation of parts or all of Iraq.²⁰⁰ A classified war game commissioned by Zinni in 1999, entitled "Desert Crossing," concluded that even if Saddam was overthrown, the aftermath would probably be chaotic and bloody as various factions competed for power and carried out vendettas. The United States, this study stressed, would be better off distancing itself from this situation.²⁰¹ Lastly, rollback's opponents conceded that the regular Iraqi army might be weak, but they viewed the Republican Guard and other elite units as competent and motivated to fight for Saddam.²⁰²

Critics also noted important political flaws in the rollback strategy. Richard Haass argued that the Sunni population, especially the elite, dreaded what might happen if Saddam fell to a mostly Shia and Kurdish rebellion. This segment of the population, he claimed, would probably

¹⁹⁹ Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack, and Gideon Rose: "The Rollback Fantasy", *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 1 (January/February 1999): 27-32. See also Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *Confronting Iraq: U.S. Policy and the Use of Force Since the Gulf War* (Arlington, VA: RAND Publishing, 2000), 62.

²⁰⁰ Quote is from Lang, "Drinking the Kool-Aid," 24; See also Anthony Zinni, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, January 28, 1999, 28.

²⁰¹ Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 7-8.

²⁰² Byman et al, "The Rollback Fantasy," 27. Rollback's critics were prescient in their predictions about what would happen in Iraq after the collapse of the Baathist regime, especially in terms of ethno-sectarian conflict, see: interference in Iraqi affairs of regional actors like Iran, and the collapse of state services and infrastructure. For excellent accounts of the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion, see: Ricks, *Fiasco*; David Phillips, *Losing Iraq: Inside the Postwar Reconstruction Fiasco* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

rally to Saddam against an insurgency or at best stay on the sidelines like they did in the post-Desert Storm uprisings.²⁰³ Kenneth Pollack, who co-authored an influential *Foreign Affairs* article in 1999 against rollback, predicted that this strategy would lead to a “bloodbath” and that “it would be criminal for the U.S. to go ahead and back these people.”²⁰⁴ Furthermore, critics noted that rollback would need the equivalent of a Pakistan for the Afghan insurgency: a compliant ally bordering the target that could funnel supplies and personnel to the opposition.²⁰⁵ Rollback would need Turkey to play this role in the north, but they would oppose any scheme that might strengthen Kurdish separatism on their border. Moreover, key states like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies would probably oppose a strategy designed to establish a Shia-dominated government in Iraq that might align with Iran.²⁰⁶ Lastly, rollback’s critics, especially the Clinton administration, believed that this strategy would seriously damage the international coalition behind containment, undermining sanctions and inspections.²⁰⁷

Numerous politicians and intellectuals, especially Democrats and liberals, who backed the ILA and the regime change consensus did not endorse rollback for many of these reasons. Legislators like Robert Kerrey, Charles Robb (D-VA), and Lee Hamilton (D-IN), for example, viewed rollback as unrealistic and risky.²⁰⁸ In sum, while the U.S. political world was ever more

²⁰³ Senate Committee, *Can Saddam be Overthrown*, 32.

²⁰⁴ Martin Kettle, “Pentagon Balks at ‘Idiotic’ Law Urging Bay of Pigs-Type Invasion of Iraq,” *The Guardian*, 16.

²⁰⁵ Byman et al, “The Rollback Fantasy,” 30-32; Milt Berden, “Lessons for Afghanistan: Why Covert Action in Iraq Probably Wouldn’t Work,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1998, A17.

²⁰⁶ U.S. Central Command, *Desert Crossing Seminar: After Action Report*, June 28-30, National Security Archives, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB207/>, 6; Byman et. al., “Rollback Fantasy,” 30-32.

²⁰⁷ U.S Central Command, *Desert Crossing*, 21; Daniel Byman, “Proceed with Caution: U.S. Support for the Iraqi Opposition,” *The Washington Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Summer, 1999): 24; Clawson, *Iraq Strategy Review*, 97-98.

²⁰⁸ Representative Lee Hamilton, U.S. House, *Cong. Rec.*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess.: 9489. Senator Robert Kerrey of Nebraska, U.S. Senate, *Cong. Rec.*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., February 25, 1999, Vol. 145, pt. 30: 1994. Robb:

convinced that only Saddam's removal could end the threat from Iraq, the rollback debate showed the persistence of deep divisions on how to achieve that goal and how much to risk in the process. Rollback also marked the outside edge of what regime change proponents could call for in strategic terms. Even the plan's most vehement supporters labored to show that it would be low-risk and low-cost to the United States. The idea of openly advocating the use of ground troops to achieve regime change was still a red line on both sides of the debate.²⁰⁹

The Anti-Climax: Iraq Policy after Desert Fox, 1999-2000

After reaching a fever pitch in 1998, the debate over Iraq policy entered an anti-climactic stage for Clinton's last two years in office. With the ejection of inspectors in December 1998, containment needed adjustments to remain viable. The Clinton administration considered shifting to a more active regime change position after the exhausting year of confrontations with Iraq. Nevertheless, they found no reasonable, cost-effective way of reaching this goal. They ended up sticking with containment, calibrating the policy to new realities, and doing just enough for regime change to fend off domestic critics.

Before Desert Fox in late 1998, the administration concluded that they must break the cycle of confrontations with Saddam. The old approach was not "sustainable in the long run," Sandy Berger argued in December 1998, because "the longer the standoff, continues, the harder it will be to maintain international support."²¹⁰ The administration therefore adopted the position

Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown?* 105th. Cong., 2nd sess., March 2, 1998, 8.

²⁰⁹ Both of the following exceptions to this tendency recommended the use of ground troops as part of a regime change strategy, not just as a last resort to save the opposition from destruction. See: Kristol and Kagan, "Bombing Iraq," *New York Times*, January 30, 1998; Kim Holmes and James Phillips, "The Anatomy of Clinton's Failure in Iraq," February 27, 1998, Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 1161, accessed October 18, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20150814143442/http://www.iraqwatch.org/perspectives/heritage-clinton-failure-2-27-98.htm>

²¹⁰ Chollet, *America Between the Wars*, 202.

that they would not push to get inspectors back into Iraq unless there was high assurance of Iraqi cooperation and robust international backing. For example, Clinton told Blair at the end of Desert Fox that the United States would only support readmission after “concrete, affirmative, and demonstrable action by Iraq showing that it will provide full cooperation.”²¹¹ Until a strong inspection regime could be reinstated, the United States would pursue a policy based on three “red lines” that would trigger the use of force. The first line was threatening or attacking his neighbors. The second was attacking the Kurdish zone in Northern Iraq. The third line would be triggered if the United States found clear evidence of Iraq reconstituting or deploying WMD.²¹²

The year of confrontations with Iraq enhanced the administration’s hardening belief that only Saddam’s removal would end the threat and motivated them to explore new ways of achieving this end. Berger’s NSC staff and Martin Indyk’s Near East Office reviewed Iraq policy in early 1999 with the hope of finding better ways to pressure Iraq, but they found massive obstacles to a tougher strategy. The CIA did not want to try bold operations in Iraq after the fiascoes of the mid-1990s, and the military viewed invasion as the only way to defeat Saddam. Moreover, no one in the administration trusted the Iraqi opposition enough to make them the centerpiece of their strategy.²¹³ When the Kosovo crisis erupted in March 1999, the Clinton administration turned their attention to this conflict, which eventually led to a three-month bombing campaign against Serbia. By the time they returned to Iraq later in the year, the

²¹¹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, William Clinton and Tony Blair, December 19, 1998, Clinton Digital Library, Declassified Documents Concerning Tony Blair, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/48779>

²¹² Erlanger, “U.S. Set to Give Up Arms Inspections,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1998; Thomas Lippman, “Two Options for Iraq in U.S. Policy,” *Washington Post*, December 24, 1998, A14; Alfred Prados and Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq-U.S. Confrontation*, November 17, 2000, (CRS Issue Brief) (Washington D.C., Congressional Research Service, 2000), 3.

²¹³ Pollack, *Threatening Storm*, 96; Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, 202.

administration was not keen on another risky foreign policy adventure, especially as Clinton made the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) the focus of his remaining months in office.²¹⁴ Furthermore, many in the administration believed that the Iraqi threat was not serious enough to merit an effort at regime change. Intelligence reports stated that Iraqi conventional military strength had actually deteriorated since 1994. One report predicted that Iraq's military capabilities would continue "a slow and steady decline as long as both economic sanctions and the arms embargo are maintained." It also judged that "smuggling and other efforts to circumvent the embargo will be inadequate to halt the trend."²¹⁵

As for WMD, the intelligence agencies assessed that Saddam's intentions about building WMD had not changed, but he was still nearly a decade from having a nuclear weapon and a viable missile delivery system.²¹⁶ One 1999 National Intelligence Council (NIC) report judged that with foreign assistance he could have an ICBM capacity within 15 years, but this report also viewed China, North Korea, and Iran as more immediate ballistic missile threats.²¹⁷ Intelligence reports in the late 1990s did suggest that Iraq was "revitalizing its BW program" and maintaining a breakout capacity for chemical weapons, although these reports could not assess whether it had

²¹⁴ Pollack, *Threatening Storm*, 98-99.

²¹⁵ National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Estimate 94-19, "Iraqi Military Capabilities Through 2003," April 1999, Digital National Security Agency, Targeting Iraq, Part 1 Collection, 1, 8-9; CIA Report, "Stability of the Iraq Regime: Significant Vulnerabilities Offset by Repression," April 2002, in Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Postwar Findings About Iraq's WMD Programs and Links to Terrorism and How They Compare With Prewar Assessments*, 109th Cong., 2nd sess., September 8, 2006, S. Report 109-331, 389

²¹⁶ CIA Report, "Iraq Prospects for Confrontation," July 17, 1998, in Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Postwar Findings About Iraq's WMD Programs* September 8, 2006, 385.

²¹⁷ National Intelligence Council, "Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015," September 1999, dni.gov, accessed October 17, 2017, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/missilethreat_2001.pdf, 1.

actually produced biological or chemical weapons.²¹⁸ In the administration's view, Saddam's overall weakness left little reason to make regime change an urgent priority.²¹⁹

Some Clinton officials described the post-Desert Fox strategy as "containment-plus," with the plus being enhanced covert efforts to topple Saddam.²²⁰ What actual policy changes emerged from this new label are hard to define, as many Clinton officials have admitted.²²¹ The administration continued to defend containment from 1999 to 2000 even as they offered rhetorical homages to regime change. Walter Slocombe, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, claimed in March 1999: "What we are working to do is to help create the political and military conditions that will permit a successful change of the regime."²²² While the administration played up the novelty of this approach for political reasons, the idea of establishing conditions that might lead to Saddam's ouster through the actions of Iraqis had been central to Bush and Clinton's Iraq policies since the Gulf War. They mostly emphasized, as Albright did in early 2000, that containment was managing the problem well enough: "I think we have been successful in keeping him in his box in terms of the threat to the region."²²³

²¹⁸ Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Postwar Findings About Iraq's WMD Programs*, September 8, 2006, 82-83, 115-121.

²¹⁹ National Intelligence Estimate 94-19, "Iraqi Military Capabilities Through 2003," April 1999, 24.

²²⁰ Cable, U.S. Embassy in Riyadh to Secretary of State, June 26, 1999, Digital National Security Agency, Targeting Iraq, Part 1 Collection, 1; Jane Perlez, "Albright Introduces a New Phrase to Promote Hussein's Ouster," *New York Times*, January 29, 1999, A3.

²²¹ Chollet, *America Between the Wars*, 202; Lance Gay, "White House Has Second Thoughts on Toppling Saddam," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 22, 1999, A4.

²²² Steven Lee Myers and Tim Weiner, "Weeks of Bombing Leave Iraq's Power Structure Unshaken," *New York Times*, March 7, 1999, A6. See also: Romanowski Testimony: *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, Hearing of House Committee on International Relations, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., March 23, 2000. 51-2.

²²³ Meet the Press Excerpted Transcript, January 2, 2000, in *The Iraq Papers*, ed. Ehrenberg et. Al., 38-39.

One significant escalation in U.S. Iraq policy following Desert Fox was the intensification of the air war in the NFZs in Northern and Southern Iraq. In January 1999, Iraqi forces increased anti-air attacks and other provocations against U.S. and British forces. The United States and Great Britain responded by expanding the rules of engagement to allow planes to strike any air defense or related communications site, not just “the particular source of the violation or the source of the threat.”²²⁴ Coalition air forces were given wider latitude to respond aggressively to Iraq provocations such as anti-aircraft fire or radar lock-ons.²²⁵ The deployments required to maintain this “forgotten war,” as journalist Thomas Ricks called it, cost over \$1 billion per year, involving 200 aircraft, 19 warships, and 22,000 military personnel.²²⁶ The administration viewed this campaign as a way to keep Saddam weak and off-balance, but they adamantly disassociated it from regime change. As State Department spokesman Richard Boucher stated in 2000: “There is no relationship between enforcement of the no-fly-zones and the United States’ regime change policy for Iraq.”²²⁷ One major reason they did not want to further escalate the air war was the fear of a U.S. pilot being shot down and captured by Iraq. Saddam was offering \$14,000 per person to any unit that captured a U.S. pilot, whom he would use to extort concessions from the United States.²²⁸

²²⁴ Quotation is from Sandy Burger in: Elizabeth Becker, “U.S. Pilots Over Iraq Given Wider Leeway to Fight Back,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1999, A2.

²²⁵ John Tirpak, “Legacy of the Air Blockades,” *Air Force Magazine*, February 2003, 52; Stephen Glain and Thomas Ricks, “Air Attacks Against Iraq are Inconclusive,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 1999, A23.

²²⁶ Quotation is from: Thomas Ricks, “Containing Iraq: A Forgotten War,” *Washington Post*, October 25, 2000, A1. See also: Ricks, *Fiasco*, 15; Steven Lee Myers, “In Intense But Little Noticed Fight, Allies Have Bombed Iraq All Year,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1999, A1.

²²⁷ Richard Boucher, “Press Briefing,” June 16, 2000, State Department, accessed October 18, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20150814142212/http://www.iraqwatch.org/government/US/State/state-boucher-6-16-00.htm>

²²⁸ Katzman and Prados, *Iraq-U.S. Confrontation*, 3.

The Clinton administration also believed that rollback was an unrealistic plan.²²⁹ The sight of General Zinni criticizing rollback was widely interpreted as a sign of the administration's negative view of the strategy.²³⁰ As for the ILA, Pollack recalls that the administration: "did comply with the letter of the Iraq Liberation Act, but in spirit we ignored it."²³¹ In keeping with the ILA's requirements, the State Department did designate nine opposition groups, including the INC, as eligible to receive U.S. military aid. They also appointed diplomat Frank Ricciardone as an official liaison to the opposition.²³² Clinton officials argued that they might someday provide military aid to the opposition, but first they would focus on building the INC's capacity to effectively use aid and lead the fractious opposition.²³³ The United States did provide legal and managerial training, aid for the INC's work on Baathist crimes, computers and other office supplies, and diplomatic efforts to heal rifts among the opposition groups.²³⁴ The INC ultimately received about \$2 million worth of aid of this nature but no weapons or military equipment and minimal military training.²³⁵

The State Department and the CIA in particular were wary of offering money or military aid to the opposition. Elizabeth Jones, whose office at the State Department was responsible for

²²⁹ Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 145.

²³⁰ Anthony Zinni, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy on Iraq*, January 28, 1999, 14, 28. For one rollback booster who saw Zinni and Pollack's prominence as evidence of the Clinton administration distaste for regime change, see: Lawrence Kaplan, "Rollback," *New Republic*, October 30, 2000, 28-30.

²³¹ Pollack, interview by author, November 6, 2017.

²³² Vernon Loeb, "Anti-Saddam Group Named for U.S. Aid," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1999, A8.

²³³ See testimony of Martin Indyk, House Committee on International Relations, *Developments in the Middle East*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., June 8, 1999, 5-7.

²³⁴ State Department Near Eastern Affairs Office, "Report on Support for Democratic Opposition of Iraq," 1999, OAID 2549, National Security Council Office of Multilateral and Humanitarian Affairs, William Clinton Presidential Library, 1-3.

²³⁵ Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 168.

handling INC requests for funding, recalls that they staunchly refused to hand the INC cash and demanded of Chalabi: “If you can show us the soldiers you are training, we will pay them, not you.” Jones had worked with the Afghan mujahedin the 1980s, and she said that the INC never came up with a “muj equivalent” beyond about 25 men who showed up to be trained at a Polish base.²³⁶ The INC held a conference for the disparate opposition groups in October 1999, but it collapsed in internecine squabbling. By 2000 the opposition was in disarray and the administration had lost interest in organizing the opposition.²³⁷

One persistent challenge for U.S. policy following Desert Fox was the continuing erosion of sanctions. Illicit trade between Iraq and its neighbors surged during and after 1999, including the opening of an oil pipeline between Iraq and Syria, which provided the Iraqi government with another \$1-2 billion in 2000.²³⁸ Iraq tried to widen the split in the coalition by selectively signing oil-for-food contracts with countries who called for the end of sanctions. France, Russia, and China, for instance, received a third of all oil-for-food contracts.²³⁹ The State Department estimated that the Iraqi government took in at least \$1 billion per year in revenue from smuggling, kickbacks, and other sources. However, they stressed that before sanctions were imposed in 1990 Iraq received an average of around \$10 billion per year from the oil trade.²⁴⁰ All

²³⁶ Elizabeth Jones, phone interview by author, February 6, 2018.

²³⁷ Barbara Crossette, “French Flight Tests Ban Against Iraq,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2000, A7.

²³⁸ Pollack, *Threatening Storm*, 101, 214.

²³⁹ Judith Miller, “CIA Is Said to Find Iraq Gives Contracts to Nations that Want to End Economic Sanctions,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2000, A14. The extent of Iraq’s illicit profiting from oil-for-food did not become known until the scandal broke after the 2003 invasion. A 2005 U.N. report on the corruption of this program concluded that the Iraqi government earned a total of \$1.8 billion from kickbacks, surcharges, bribes, and other tactics related to oil-for-food. See: Paul Volcker, Independent Inquiry into the United Nations Oil-for-Food Programme, Report on Program Manipulation, October 27, 2005, accessed October 17, 2017, http://web.archive.org/web/20150814143613/http://www.iraqwatch.org/un/IIC/un_iic_final_report_27Oct2005.pdf, 1-9.

major U.S. partners still accepted the withholding of revenues from Iraqi oil exports, which had been Saddam's primary source of funds.

In contrast to the inevitable decline critics' desire to scrap multilateral restraints and embrace regime change, the Clinton administration continued to treat containment and regime change as compatible goals. Thus, keeping the international coalition on board with sanctions and the re-insertion of inspectors was a crucial goal after Desert Fox. In contrast to their rhetoric in domestic politics, in international diplomacy the administration conveyed flexibility on sanctions. Clinton told Blair, for instance, in October 1999: "Now I am prepared to say that if he meets his disarmament obligations and puts a system in place where he's complying, I would be prepared to suspend sanctions and liberalize the oil-for-food program." Clinton then said that in order to lift the oil export ban he would need a tough inspections and monitoring regime because: "our guys here in Congress, even the Democrats, are attacking me because I haven't done enough to get rid of him. I think they will eat me alive if I agree to lift sanctions while he has his weapons program going on."²⁴¹ The administration also wanted to reduce import restrictions on Iraq for non-military or dual-use items in order to, in Elizabeth Jones' words, "get rid of the argument that the U.S. was responsible for the deprivation in Iraq."²⁴²

The centerpiece of Clinton's post-Desert Fox diplomacy was the push to pass a Security Council resolution to create a new inspection agency and specify what Iraq had to do to earn sanctions relief. The drafting process for this resolution dragged out during 1999. France, Russia,

²⁴⁰ Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 169; Colum Lynch, "U.S. Says Sanctions on Iraq Not Crumbling," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2000, A16.

²⁴¹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, William Clinton and Tony Blair, October 13, 1999, Clinton Digital Library, Declassified Documents Concerning Tony Blair, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/48779>, 22, 25.

²⁴² Elizabeth Jones, phone interview by author, February 6, 2018.

and China believed that Saddam had virtually no proscribed weapons left and proposed that the oil export ban be lifted once Iraq simply accepted inspectors into their territory. These nations also proposed an inspection regime with far less independence than UNSCOM.²⁴³ The United States originally wanted to reinsert UNSCOM and demanded that sanctions only be eased if the inspectors verified full Iraqi compliance.²⁴⁴ This impasse was broken in the spring of 1999 when Great Britain and the Netherlands proposed that UNSCOM be completely replaced by a new agency. They also proposed that instead of lifting sanctions, the Security Council should abolish the cap on oil-for-food sales, hopefully allowing Iraq to import more food and medicine.²⁴⁵

Further disputes at the United Nations delayed the passage of Security Council Resolution 1284 until December 17, 1999. This resolution removed the ceiling on oil-for-food sales and relaxed some import controls on medical, agricultural, and educational supplies for Iraq. It also created the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), a new inspections agency empowered to verify Iraq compliance on WMD. If UNMOVIC verified compliance, the Security Council would then vote to suspend sanctions. This suspension would have to be renewed every 120 days, giving the United Nations a chance to punish Iraq if it reneged.²⁴⁶ U.S. hopes that this resolution would symbolize a new unity in the international coalition were dashed when France decided to abstain at the last minute after learning that Russia and China planned to abstain as well. France feared that voting for this

²⁴³ Frederic Bozo, *A History of the Iraq Crisis: France, The United States, and Iraq, 1991-2003* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2016), 57; Craig Whitney, "Allies Are Cool to French Plan to Monitor Iraq," *New York Times*, January 10, 1999, A10.

²⁴⁴ Paul Lewis, "Russia Proposes New System For Monitoring Iraqi Arms," *New York Times*, January 16, 1999, A6.

²⁴⁵ Paul Lewis, "U.N. Is Asked to Enlarge Iraq Inquiry," *New York Times*, April 16, 1999, A3.

²⁴⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1284, December 17, 1999, un.org, accessed April 15, 2018, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unscom/Keyresolutions/sres99-1284.htm>

resolution would put them at a disadvantage in making economic deals with Iraq.²⁴⁷ The United States was further chagrined when France, Russia, and China vetoed Kofi Annan's appointment of former UNSCOM chief Rolf Ekeus to lead UNMOVIC because he had a reputation for being too tough.²⁴⁸ Instead, Annan proposed IAEA director Hans Blix, whom the United States thought might be too lenient but voted for anyways to make sure UNMOVIC could function at all.²⁴⁹

The aftermath of Resolution 1284's passage was its own anti-climax because Iraq refused to accept the new inspection regime and the United States did not press it to do so. The result was policy drift and the continued atrophy of Iraq's constraints. France, Russia, and China did their best throughout 2000 to weaken UNMOVIC, mandating that all UNMOVIC members be U.N. employees, which barred a number of non-U.N. experts with extensive experience.²⁵⁰ The United States continued to permit the loosening of restrictions on exports into Iraq, including \$1.2 billion in oil industry equipment needed to revive Iraqi oil production.²⁵¹ In the fall of 2000, France, Russia, and several other countries permitted civilian flights into Iraq, claiming that the air embargo was not meant to apply to civilians. Iraq's economic re-integration continued, with one trade fair in November 2000 attracting 20 foreign economics ministers and over a thousand

²⁴⁷ Pollack, *Threatening Storm*, 100-101.

²⁴⁸ Barbara Crossette, "Annan Faces Growing Split Over Arms Inspector for Iraq," *New York Times*, January 19, 2000, A10. For more on the Russian-Iraqi relationship in the late 1990's, see: Alexei Vassilev, "Russia and Iraq," *Middle East Policy* 7, no. 4 (October, 2000): 127-129.

²⁴⁹ Barbara Crossette: "U.N. Names Ex-head of Atomic Energy Agency to Lead Monitoring," *New York Times*, January 27, 2000, A8.

²⁵⁰ Barbara Crossette, "Security Council Approves New Arms Inspection Agency for Iraq," *New York Times*, April 14, 2000, A12.

²⁵¹ Barbara Crossette, "Security Council Votes to Let Iraq Buy Oil Gear," *New York Times*, April 1, 2000, A5.

firms.²⁵² Although it did not control these revenues, licit Iraqi oil sales reached \$16 billion in 2000, four times more than 1997.²⁵³

Boosters of regime change and rollback excoriated Clinton's post-Desert Fox policy as a failure to follow through on the ILA. Trent Lott and a number of prominent legislators wrote to Clinton repeatedly to protest the "continued drift" and "reduced priority" of Iraq policy since Desert Fox. Lott further argued: "In providing authority for a military drawdown, it was our intention to train and equip a force dedicated to bringing democracy to Iraq."²⁵⁴ Clinton had not taken concrete steps toward this goal, and regime change advocates mocked the provision of furniture, computers, and office supplies to the INC as evidence of an unserious policy.²⁵⁵ These critics also disliked Clinton's support of Security Council Resolution 1284, which they saw as rewarding Iraq and demonstrating yet again Clinton's caving to the lowest common denominator of the United Nations. They argued that the continual reforming of the sanctions simply watered them down and prevented them from imposing real restraints on the Iraqi regime.²⁵⁶ By the time the presidential election started to heat up in the summer of 2000, most critics of containment concluded that Clinton, in Senator Sam Brownback's (R-KS) words, "had absolutely no intent of implementing the provisions" of the ILA.²⁵⁷ They reserved their hopes for a serious regime change strategy for the next administration.

²⁵² Crossette, "French Flight," *New York Times*, September 23, 2000;

²⁵³ "Saddam Chips His Way to Freedom," *The Economist*, November 25, 2000, 95.

²⁵⁴ This letter was also signed by Joseph Lieberman, Jesse Helms, Robert Kerrey, Richard Shelby, Sam Brownback, Benjamin Gilman, and Howard Berman. See: Letter, Trent Lott et. al. to William Clinton, August 11, 1999, National Security Council Records, Legislative Affairs, William Clinton Presidential Library, 1-2.

²⁵⁵ Perle, "Saddam Unbound," in *Present Dangers*, ed. Kagan and Kristol, 100.

²⁵⁶ Jim Hoagland, "Wishing Iraq Away," *Washington Post*, January 13, 2000, A21; Editorial, "Iraq's Devoted Allies," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2000, A22; Editorial, "Outside the Box," *Wall Street Journal*, December 5, 2000, A26; Gordon, *Invisible War*, 158-160.

Conclusion: Containment as of November 2000

With the loss of the inspectors and the erosion of sanctions, the United States after Desert Fox faced a choice between modulating containment to fit new conditions or intensifying the effort for regime change. The Clinton administration essentially chose to modulate while, in an updated version of the Clinton fudge, it told domestic audiences that no normalization with Iraq would occur while Saddam remained in power. The inevitable decline critics of containment wanted a new and intensified focus on regime change, even at the expense of the pillars of containment, which they saw as confining and ineffective. These critics failed to change the actual policy, but they made massive gains in the political and public debate as events vis-à-vis Iraq played into their hands. The successive inspections crises from 1997-1998 bolstered their case that containment not working and could not work in terms of changing Saddam's behavior or regime. This shift helped entrench the regime change consensus in U.S. politics, even among defenders of containment. Increasingly, the conditionalist case had shifted to moderating goals, downplaying the threat, adjusting the tools, and hoping for something to happen that would solve the Saddam problem. This argument depended heavily on a security atmosphere in which Saddam's threat was still largely in the future and in which the U.S. people felt secure from a certain type of threat: rogue states that sought WMD and ballistic missiles, cultivated ties to terrorism, and viewed the United States as a major strategic enemy.

Furthermore, in Clinton's second term containment's defenders were wedged between an increasingly powerful inevitable decline case against containment and the humanitarian critics who wanted to undo sanctions. As a result, the conditionalist school was reduced to an ever-

²⁵⁷ Sam Brownback, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Liberation of Iraq: A Progress Report*, June 28, 2000, 1. For similar criticism, see: Frank Murkowski, "Our Toothless Policy on Iraq," *Washington Post*, January 25, 1999, A21; Jim Hoagland, "Virtual Policy," *Washington Post*, March 7, 1999, B7; Richard Perle, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*, 77-78; Kerrey, *Cong. Rec.*, March 2, 2000, 2053.

shrinking range in U.S. political and intellectual life, consisting mainly of realists, some liberal internationalists, and members of the State, Defense, and intelligence establishments. They had to be willing to argue for a restrained, tough, and flexible policy that risked both Saddam's return to regional power and humanitarian damage to the Iraqi people. They had to defend a policy that pleased no one and solved few problems; indeed, containment hardly claimed it could solve problems like Saddam. For Richard Haass, this point inhered in containment, which "is not meant to be a solution. It is a mechanism for management."²⁵⁸ This pinching of the conditionalist approach left the policy exceedingly vulnerable in the public square.

Even so, in the midst of a tense Senate committee meeting in 1998, Senator Charles Robb grilled Ahmed Chalabi on rollback and ultimately found the strategy unrealistic. He concluded "The Iraqi people would be far better off in a post-Saddam environment than they are today. I do not think anyone would question that. The means to accomplish that objective are disputed."²⁵⁹ This statement captures the state of policy and public debate on Iraq at the end of Clinton's presidency. Containment was still the policy, but the hope that its pressures would cause Saddam's ouster, much less a change in his strategic intentions, had never been more discredited. Nevertheless, the crucial questions of how important Saddam's ouster was to U.S. national interests and security, how to best achieve that goal, and how much to sacrifice for that end remained uncertain.

²⁵⁸ Richard Haass, "U.S. Objectives in Iraq: Rollback vs. Containment," March 6, 1998, Washington Institute for Near East Policy Forum with Richard Haass and William Kristol, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/u.s.-objectives-in-iraq-rollback-vs.-containment>

²⁵⁹ Charles Robb, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Iraq: Can Saddam Be Overthrown?* 18.

CHAPTER 5: NOT WHETHER, BUT HOW AND WHEN: THE IRAQ DEBATE FROM 9/11 TO THE INVASION

Introduction

The September 11th attacks transformed both the deadlocked Iraq debate and the broader U.S. perception of the international security environment. They created a deep sense of vulnerability to mass-casualty, Islamist terrorism, intensified public fear and anger, and widened the range of acceptable actions for assuring U.S. security. Preventing another attack became an overwhelming priority for the George W. Bush administration and the nation. The imperative to “do something” was immense, and the leadership that held itself responsible for the security of the nation felt this urgency most profoundly.

That this “something” would become an invasion of Iraq, however, was by no means inevitable or obvious. U.S. and allied intelligence agencies did not link Iraq to 9/11 or establish a sudden Iraqi effort to reconstitute its weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Nor was there significant public or international outcry for targeting Iraq. Despite these realities, Vice President Richard Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and other neoconservatives in the executive branch reoriented the response to 9/11 away from the direct culprits and toward confrontation with Iraq. 9/11 served as both opening and impetus for this group to finally discredit containment and argue for an invasion of Iraq.

The core of the administration’s argument for regime change was that removing Saddam in the short term had become necessary for preserving U.S. security and preventing future terrorist attacks. Intelligence about Iraq and other rogue states had to be reevaluated, they argued,

in the light of U.S. exposure to mass-casualty terrorism. The administration claimed that Saddam might hand WMD to terrorist groups like al-Qaeda to use against the United States or its allies. Building on the inevitable decline argument from the 1990s, they claimed that containment inherently could not address this “nexus” threat because Saddam could strike the United States by proxy and mask his responsibility. Thus, the Bush administration claimed a unilateral right to use preventive force against states like Iraq that posed this threat. Within this mindset, containment was dangerously inadequate because this nexus enabled Saddam to strike the United States by proxy and mask his responsibility, thus avoiding retaliation. This argument became known as the “Bush Doctrine.”¹ In order to make this nexus a credible plank of its case for war, the Bush administration had to believe and publicly show that Iraq had or was developing these weapons and that it would use them against the United States, either directly or through a terrorist third party. In making this argument, the administration systemically manipulated the intelligence process, treating ambiguous intelligence as clear proof of Saddam’s guilt and presenting exaggerated and selectively chosen evidence to the public.

Thus far, this story will appear familiar to scholars of modern U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, the literature on the causal road from 9/11 to the Iraq War focuses on the importance of 9/11 in creating an atmosphere of fear and emphasizes the role of neoconservatives in reorienting U.S. policy and manipulating intelligence.² Still, after bringing about this reorientation, the neoconservatives still had to build a successful public and international case for invasion. As the Bush administration argued for regime change in the spring and summer of 2002, they not only

¹ The “Bush Doctrine” has largely been named as such by scholars and other commentators. This chapter will show how it emerged from a set of ideas about the use of U.S. power and the nature of the post-9/11 international system.

² For prominent examples, see: George Packer, *The Assassins’ Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005); Lloyd Gardner, *The Long Road to Baghdad: A History of U.S. Foreign Policy from the 1970s to the Present* (New York: New Press, 2008); James Bamford, *A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America’s Intelligence Agencies* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

had to show the public and the broader political establishment that the nexus threat was real but that the main alternatives, especially containment, could not guarantee U.S. security.

Existing work on the causes of the Iraq War stresses neoconservative thought and rarely examines the broader political and intellectual structures of debate. In 2002 and early 2003, the administration faced resistance to this case from numerous sources, including Democrats, some Republicans, Middle East policy experts, liberal intellectuals, major allies like Great Britain and France, and former policy-makers from both parties. Colin Powell and other officials at State represented this skepticism inside the administration. This broad group believed that the intelligence on Iraq's WMD and links to al-Qaeda were less clear than the hawks asserted and that the administration did not take the challenges of occupying Iraq seriously. Most of all, they believed that before Bush rushed the country into war he needed to present the evidence against Saddam, earn Congressional approval and greater international support, and pass a resolution at the United Nations that would help build a broader coalition and exhaust peaceful means of disarmament.

However, a closer look at the skeptics' arguments demonstrates that they shared most of the major assumptions about Iraq held by the hawks. These assumptions were as follows: Iraq would remain a threat until Saddam was removed; the ultimate cause of Iraq's aggression and brutality was the totalitarian Baathist regime; Saddam would never cease pursuing WMD; inspections and sanctions could not fully disarm him or change his strategic intentions; and only democratization could definitively solve the Iraq problem. These perceived lessons of containment in the 1990s delimited the terms of the Iraq debate from 9/11 to March 2003 and primed a wide swathe of Americans to believe Bush's worst-case portrayal of the threat. The

climate of fear following 9/11 and the administration's sunny predictions about the course of the war itself further bolstered the perception that war was necessary.³

This chapter's central point is that because the pre-war conversation about Iraq mostly operated within these assumptions rather than challenging them, these ostensible skeptics of the war failed to develop a robust alternative to the Bush position despite winning tactical and procedural victories in the lead-up to the war. Most skeptics followed what Congressman Brad Sherman (D-CA) called the Powell-Blair approach, which focused on influencing how and when the administration confronted Iraq but ceded to the administration the point that regime change was ultimately necessary, ethical, and prudent.⁴ They thereby broke with the conditionalist approach to containment, whose advocates had argued in the 1990s that containment could satisfy U.S. security needs vis-à-vis Iraq as long as it was enforced strictly and adjusted to new circumstances.

Self-identified skeptics, especially Powell and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, slowed down the push to war in September 2002 by persuading Bush to seek a U.N. Security Council resolution that demanded the return of inspections to Iraq and threatened Iraq with "serious consequences" if it did not comply.⁵ They won another tactical victory in compelling Bush to seek a new Congressional authorization for war with Iraq, which passed in October. These tactical victories were less about rebuilding containment than they were about making sure Bush

³ Journalist Thomas Ricks stresses the point that the administration "tended to look at the worst-case scenarios for weapons of mass destruction" while "emphasizing the best-case scenarios that assumed the Iraqis would generally greet the U.S. presence warmly and that a successor Iraqi government could be established quickly, permitting the swift homeward movement of most U.S. troops." See: Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 58-59.

⁴ Brad Sherman, House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 2-3, 2002, 44.

⁵ "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441," November 8, 2002, in *The Iraq Papers*, ed. John Ehrenberg, J. Patrice McSherry, Jose Sanchez, and Caroleen Sayej (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 97.

pursued regime change “the right way.” In achieving these tactical gains, however, they granted their support to an administration that saw peaceful means of disarming Iraq as almost certainly doomed.

The entrenchment of the regime change consensus in U.S. thinking was such that even these skeptics shared the core assumption that for the United States to achieve security and protect its interests vis-à-vis Iraq, Saddam must be removed. They did not believe this as fervently or uncritically as the Bush administration. However, they too believed inspections would probably falter and that any renewal of containment would relapse into the stasis of the 1990s while failing to address the root of the problem: the regime. Former National Security Advisor Sandy Berger summarized the Powell-Blair approach in saying: “Saddam was, is, and continues to be a menace to his people, to the region, and to us. He cannot be accommodated. Our goal should be regime change. The question is not whether, but how and when.”⁶

Two groups dissented from the regime change consensus and proposed clear alternatives to war. The first was the political left, which portrayed the Iraq War as imperialistic and capitalistic and called vaguely for normalization of relations with Iraq. The second was an ever-diminishing set of Democrats, liberals, and realist scholars who disputed the factual basis of the nexus concept and believed, in keeping with the conditionalist approach, that containment had and could continue to manage the Iraqi threat. This was a minority view in the United States, but France, Russia, and China and other nations endorsed it as they opposed the march to war. This dynamic shows how comparatively narrow the spectrum of thought on Iraq in the United States had become by 2001. Unlike the Powell-Blair approach, these camps contested the Bush

⁶ Sandy Berger, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *What's Next in the War on Terrorism*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., February 7, 2002, 9.

administration on the ground of whether the United States should go to war with Iraq, not just how and when.

Bush's Case for War, Fall 2001-Fall 2002

The Bush administration's top foreign policy officials held competing ideas about how to deal with Iraq, but Bush did not force a major change in Iraq policy and neither side gained the upper hand in the nine months before 9/11. Bush entered office with little foreign policy experience or knowledge. During the campaign, he had argued that the United States should play an active role in the world but that it should avoid using the military in nation-building exercises that were not essential to the national interest. He claimed that he would refocus U.S. foreign policy on great power challengers and prevent multilateral institutions like the United Nations from shackling U.S. power. He promised to be tougher on Iraq than Clinton, but he did not recommend any major breaks from Clinton's policy.⁷ Cheney and Rumsfeld agreed with this basic framework, but they entered office with far more hawkish views on Iraq and a deeper commitment to an assertive, unilateral foreign policy.⁸ They also filled their staffs with neoconservatives who had supported regime change throughout the 1990s, including Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith.

In contrast to Cheney and Rumsfeld, Powell and his Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, prioritized alliances and institutions and showed more skepticism about the use of

⁷ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2005), 37-40; James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004), 256-258.

⁸ Rumsfeld, for instance, signed the 1998 Project for a New American Century letter to President Clinton advocating regime change in Iraq. See: Project for a New American Century, "Letter to Bill Clinton," [informationclearinghouse.org](http://www.informationclearinghouse.org), January 26, 1998, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5527.html>; Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); 9.

force.⁹ Powell hired defenders of containment like Richard Haass, who became Director of Policy Planning at State. Powell and Haass viewed Saddam as a “mid-level threat,” and they held that reviving sanctions and inspections would keep Saddam bottled up.¹⁰ At his 2001 nomination hearing before the Senate, Powell described Iraq as “fundamentally a broken, weak country, one-third the military force it had some ten years ago.”¹¹ National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice likewise recommended a moderate approach, arguing in 2000 that Iraq could be effectively deterred by the threat of “national obliteration” even if it built a WMD arsenal.¹²

Upon taking office, the Bush administration initially sought to revive international sanctions on Iraq.¹³ The administration believed that the United Nations would not support a tough inspections regime, which left reviving sanctions as the main way to keep Saddam constrained.¹⁴ Intelligence reports in early 2001 warned that cheating on the embargo was rampant and that Iraq was also expanding diplomatic ties.¹⁵ Powell aimed to shore up this leaking system through his “smart sanctions” plan. He wanted to refocus sanctions on preventing the entry of military and possible dual-use goods and on maintaining U.N. control of Iraqi

⁹ Daalder and Lindsay, *Bush Revolution*, 56.

¹⁰ Quote is from Richard Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 180.

¹¹ Colin Powell, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Nomination of Colin Powell to be Secretary of State*, 107th Cong., 1st sess., January 17, 2001, 63.

¹² Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 1 (January 2000), 61.

¹³ Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers, “Bush Administration Warns Iraq on Weapons Programs,” *New York Times*, January 23, 2001, A1; How It Came to War, Nicholas Lemann, March 31, 2003, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/03/31/how-it-came-to-war>

¹⁴ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 174-175.

¹⁵ CIA Report, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, “Iraq: Restoring Diplomatic Representation in Baghdad, February 6, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 3; Cable, Unknown Source to Colin Powell, “The Possibility and Implications of Iraq Breaking Out of International Sanctions, February 6, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1-3.

revenues from Oil-For-Food sales.¹⁶ In turn, the United Nations would permit more normal travel and commerce with Iraq. Powell reasoned that if sanctions could be tapered, containment would be strengthened and Saddam could no longer credibly blame the sanctions for the Iraqi health crisis.¹⁷ Powell further hoped that this deal would discourage sanctions-busting by allowing foreign countries to trade with Iraq while preventing Saddam from importing military or WMD-related items and from accessing the proceeds of trade.¹⁸

To Powell's chagrin, he failed to garner sufficient support at the United Nations in the summer of 2001 to reform sanctions. Russia and France posed the main obstacles because they received billions in Oil-for-Food trade with Iraq and wanted to suspend sanctions as soon as inspectors were let back into Iraq - a position the United States rejected.¹⁹ Iraq's neighbors also benefitted from cheap, illicit Iraqi oil and feared the public reaction if they granted support to renewed sanctions.²⁰ Under the threat of a Russian veto, Powell abandoned the effort to reform sanctions, returning the coalition to the stalemate that had reigned since inspectors left Iraq in 1998.²¹

The administration's hawks, meanwhile, did little to shift Iraq policy in these first nine months. Douglas Feith's office drafted "A Strategy to Liberate Iraq" in the spring which called

¹⁶ Read Ahead Document, "NSC Principals Meeting-Iraq," February 20, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1.

¹⁷ Jane Perlez, "Powell Proposes Easing Sanctions on Iraqi Civilians," *New York Times*, February 27, 2001; Ricks, *Fiasco*, 28.

¹⁸ Karen DeYoung, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 313-314.

¹⁹ Meghan O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions: Statecraft and State Sponsors of Terrorism* (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 134-136; Jane Perlez, "Plan to Modify U.N. Sanctions Against Iraq Bogs Down," *New York Times*, June 30, 2001, A3.

²⁰ Neil King, "New Iraq Sanctions Are Short on Support," *Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 2001, A15.

²¹ Barbara Crossette, "Effort to Recast Iraq Oil Sanctions Is Halted For Now," *New York Times*, July 3, 2001, A1.

for a serious effort at rollback under INC leadership. Arguing that containment was doomed to “inevitably weaken over time,” they called for the U.S. air power to protect a growing insurgency against Saddam.²² Just as in the late 1990s debates, rollback represented the outer limits of what policymakers could call for as a means of regime change. Wolfowitz also pushed for rollback and argued that Iraqi-sponsored terrorism was an immediate threat, but Powell and the CIA countered these ideas.²³ Other crises and priorities held the administration’s attention, including the Hainan Island incident and Rumsfeld’s campaigns for military modernization and ballistic missile defense.²⁴ Regime change advocates in political circles lamented Bush’s Iraq policy as a betrayal of the Iraq Liberation Act.²⁵ Bush ordered an interagency review of Iraq policy, which was ongoing on 9/11.²⁶ Rumsfeld fittingly summarized the Iraq policy drift in a note to Powell on September 5, 2001: “We simply must get a policy for Iraq settled fast.”²⁷

The September 11th terrorist attacks dramatically raised the nation’s sense of vulnerability and created a massive impetus to strike back at the perpetrators and prevent further attacks. It is worth considering how top policy-makers experienced these attacks in order to see why they pressed for a strong response. An anguished sense of guilt and responsibility set in after the

²² Memorandum, Special Assistant to the Secretary for Policy to Office of Undersecretary of Defense, “Iraq Strategy Paper: A Strategy to Liberate Iraq,” April 23, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1-9.

²³ DeYoung, *Soldier*, 348; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 22-23.

²⁴ Fred Kaplan, *Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2008), 98-111; Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 8-9.

²⁵ Memorandum, Tom Donnelly of Project for a New American Century to Opinion Leaders, “Liberate Iraq,” July 6, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1; Reuel Marc Gerech, May 14, 2001, 23; Ahmed Chalabi, “We Can Topple Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 2001, A22.

²⁶ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 27; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 14.

²⁷ Memorandum, Donald Rumsfeld to Colin Powell, CC Richard Cheney and Condoleezza Rice, “Iraq,” September 5, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1.

attacks, as Rice affirmed: “I could not have forgiven myself had there been another attack.”²⁸

They felt that their jobs had suddenly transformed and that other responsibilities had melted away. As they watched civilians jumping from skyscrapers, they felt deep grief and anger, as did the rest of country.²⁹ Bush reportedly told Rumsfeld on 9/11: “I don’t care what the international lawyers say, we are going to kick some ass.”³⁰ Bush adopted a morally unambiguous view of terrorism, once calling al-Qaeda “flat evil. That’s all they can think about, is evil.”³¹

With the intelligence agencies now on high alert, the administration was bombarded with reports of possible follow-up attacks, including attempts to decapitate the government. As CIA Director George Tenet remembered, “It seemed inconceivable to us that Bin Laden had not already positioned people to conduct second, and possibly third and fourth waves of attacks.”³² The Secret Service even rushed the President and Laura Bush from their beds to a bunker on the night of 9/11 because an F-16 fighter had activated the wrong transponder code, making it look like a hijacked plane.³³ In October, anthrax attacks from an unknown source killed five people, adding to the climate of terror and reinforcing the fear that future terrorist attacks might use WMD. Though 9/11 led to a surge of popular support for the President, the administration judged that a second massive attack would doom Bush in political terms.³⁴

²⁸ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 121.

²⁹ Melvyn Leffler, “The Foreign Policies of the George W. Bush Administration: Memoirs, History, Legacy,” *Diplomatic History* 37, no. 2 (April, 2013), 194.

³⁰ Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 24; Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America’s Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 15.

³¹ Peter Baker, *Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013), 158.

³² Leffler, “Foreign Policies,” 195.

³³ Baker, *Days of Fire*, 131.

The administration initially held that the reaction to 9/11 should center on al-Qaeda and its main sponsor, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. However, firsthand testimony and some documentary evidence shows that Iraq hawks argued that Iraq may have been involved in 9/11 attacks and that it should be a major target in the U.S. response. Some scholars have accused these hawks of using 9/11 as a pretext to reorient U.S. policy toward their pre-existing fixation on Iraq regardless of the evidence.³⁵ A more balanced view suggests that 9/11 added greater urgency for action against what they already viewed as a serious threat by lowering their willingness to tolerate this threat and changing their view of the entire international security environment.

Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz led the effort to immediately focus on Iraq in the response to 9/11. Rumsfeld's notes from 9/11 read: "Best info fast. Judge whether good enough [to] hit SH [Saddam Hussein] at same time-not only UBL."³⁶ Wolfowitz wrote to Rumsfeld after the attacks: "If there is even a 10% chance that Saddam Hussein was behind Tuesday's horrors, a maximum priority has to be put on eliminating that threat."³⁷ On multiple occasions in the week after 9/11, they suggested to Bush that Saddam may have been involved in 9/11. Even if he was not, they claimed that toppling Saddam would deter other rogue states with WMD.³⁸ Hugh Shelton, the

³⁴ Leffler, "Foreign Policies," 194.

³⁵ For examples, see: Paul Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, 9/11, and Misguided Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 15-17; Andrew Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2016), 225, 249; Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, 269; Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 290-293.

³⁶ Julian Borger, "Blogger Bares Rumsfeld's Post-9/11 Orders," February 26, 2006, theguardian.com, accessed October 18, 2018
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/24/freedomofinformation.september11>

³⁷ David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict With Iran* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 425. See also: Memorandum, Paul Wolfowitz to Donald Rumsfeld, "War on Terror-Coordination with Joint Staff," September 17, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recalled: “Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz started pushing really hard on September 12, ’01 to attack Iraq. They even asked Shelton to raise Iraq as a possible target at the next Cabinet meeting.”³⁹ Other neoconservatives in the administration, especially Douglas Feith, frequently advocated for striking Iraq immediately after 9/11.⁴⁰ Bush appears to have been somewhat persuaded by this early push, as he asked counterterrorism expert Richard Clarke on September 12 to: “See if Saddam did this. See if he’s linked in any way.”⁴¹ He also told Tony Blair on September 13: “There might be a connection between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden.”⁴² Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill recalled that just a few days after 9/11: “Getting Hussein was now the administration’s focus, that much was already clear.”⁴³

While the early advocates of an attack on Iraq were a minority in the Bush administration, their views were echoed by powerful advocates of regime change in political and intellectual circles. On September 20, PNAC published an open letter to the President that read: “even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power.”⁴⁴ On December 6, Bush received a letter from nine prominent legislators, including

³⁸ DeYoung, *Soldier*, 352; Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O’Neill* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 184-187; Douglas Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008) 49-51.

³⁹ Hugh Shelton, interview by Russell Riley, May 29, 2007, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Miller, Center, 94. See corroborating testimonies by; Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 30-33; Haass, *War of Necessity*, 192; Baker, *Days of Fire*, 140.

⁴⁰ Feith, *War and Decision*, 52; Crist, *Twilight War*, 425; Glenn Kessler, “U.S. Decision on Iraq Has Puzzling Past,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 2003, A1.

⁴¹ Clarke, *Against all Enemies*, 32.

⁴² Douglas Little, *Us Versus Them: The United States, Radical Islam, and the Rise of the Green Threat* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 156.

⁴³ Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty*, 75.

Trent Lott, Joseph Liebermann, and John McCain. They similarly argued: “the nexus of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction makes the removal of Saddam key to success in the overall war on terrorism.” They reassured Bush that “there will be bipartisan political support for the president when he moves on to the next crucial phase of the war.”⁴⁵ There was also broad public suspicion of Saddam even before the administration began its public push for war, demonstrated by one poll from January 2002 that found that 76% of respondents believed that Saddam supported al-Qaeda and 72% who said it was very or somewhat likely that he was “personally involved in the September 11 attacks.”⁴⁶ Still, no wave of public or international calls for Saddam’s removal emerged after 9/11, making the neoconservatives’ role in putting Iraq on the agenda essential for understanding the road to invasion.

This early push to focus on Iraq failed to convince the rest of the Cabinet. Powell and Shelton opposed this move, arguing that Iraq was not connected to these attacks and that any shift to Iraq would undermine the international coalition for the fight against al Qaeda.⁴⁷ Cheney agreed and argued that any move against Iraq should be postponed.⁴⁸ Despite his query to Clarke, Bush saw al-Qaeda as the perpetrators and the proper first targets of the War on Terror.

⁴⁴ Letter, Project for a New American Century to George Bush, September 20, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1-2. Signers included William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Eliot Cohen, Francis Fukuyama, Charles Krauthammer, Richard Perle, and Stephen Solarz. For others who called for an early focus on Iraq after 9/11, see: Editorial, “War Aims,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2001; William Safire, “The Ultimate Enemy,” *New York Times*, September 24, 2001, A31; Elaine Sciolino and Patrick Tyler, “Some Pentagon Officials and Advisers Seek to Oust Iraq’s Leader in War’s Next Phase,” *New York Times*, October 12, 2001, B6; R. James Woolsey, “The Iraq Connection,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2001, A26; Kanan Makiya, “Help the Iraqis Take Their Country Back,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2001, A19.

⁴⁵ Memorandum, William Kristol to Opinion Leaders, December 6, 2001, IraqWatch.org, Accessed March 6, 2018. <http://web.archive.org/web/200312230955103/http://www.newamericancentury.org/congress-120601.htm>.

⁴⁶ Baker, *Days of Fire*, 190.

⁴⁷ Miller Center Interview with Hugh Shelton, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, May 29, 2007, Interview by Russell Riley, 94; Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, 268.

⁴⁸ Bob Woodward and Dan Balz, “At Camp David, Advise and Dissent,” *Washington Post*, January 31, 2002, A1.

He asked Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld to hold off on Iraq, although he told several people that he would soon return to Iraq.⁴⁹ In the fall of 2001, Bush launched a war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, which he conceived as the first phase of a broader War on Terrorism that would tackle the actors and structural forces that sustained global terrorism.⁵⁰

In the months after 9/11 Bush and his administration formed a new conception of how to combat mass terrorism that set the groundwork for a revived focus on Iraq. More passive, long-term strategies of containment and deterrence appeared woefully inadequate against terrorists that hurtled themselves into buildings and aimed to maximize devastation.⁵¹ The administration, however, did not think that focusing just on terrorist groups would eliminate the threat. Terrorists did not operate in a vacuum, they reasoned, but in the territories of state sponsors. To truly eradicate this menace, as Rumsfeld argued, the United States would have to “support the creation of an international political environment hostile to terrorism to dissuade individuals, non-state actors, and states from entering into or initiating support for terrorism.”⁵²

The only contingency that could make a follow-up attack worse, Bush officials reasoned, was if al-Qaeda gained access to WMD. The anthrax attacks in October enhanced the fear that a rogue actor like Iraq might give biological or other unconventional weapons to terrorists.⁵³ Thus,

⁴⁹ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 335; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 26; Baker, *Days of Fire*, 150.

⁵⁰ *9/11 Commission Report*, 334; Leffler, “Foreign Policies,” 198.

⁵¹ Richard Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), 388; For a deeper historical analysis of how Americans have understood and pursued national security, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵² Memorandum, Donald Rumsfeld to Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretaries of the Military Departments, Combatants Commanders, Assistant Secretaries, “Strategic Guidance for the Campaign Against Terrorism,” October 3, 2001, US Intelligence in the Middle East Database, accessed April 13, 2018, <http://primarysources.brillonline.com/reader/open?rotate=1&searchTerms=iraq&starEnabled=1&shareLink, 6>.

⁵³ Kessler, “Puzzling Past,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 2003; George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 229.

the second phase of the War on Terror must focus not just on terrorist groups but the states that support them.⁵⁴ While top officials disagreed about targeting Iraq early on, they concurred that tackling state sponsors of terrorism was necessary for preventing future attacks.⁵⁵ In a press conference on September 13, Wolfowitz signaled this shift in saying “it’s not just simply a matter of capturing people and holding them accountable, but removing the sanctuaries, removing the support systems, ending states who sponsor terrorism.”⁵⁶

The formation of this state sponsor paradigm for the War on Terror served as the basis for the Bush administration’s shift back toward Iraq in late 2001 and early 2002. The administration formulated a case for war with Iraq that hinged on what they called the “nexus” between rogue states, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorists. Rice illustrated the core threat of this nexus in saying: “Terrorists allied with tyrants can acquire technologies allowing them to murder on an ever more massive scale. Each threat magnifies the danger of the other.”⁵⁷ While al-Qaeda, the administration argued, would certainly use WMD on U.S. targets, they probably lacked the capacity to produce them. Moreover, rogue states by themselves could not strike the United States or act aggressively in their neighborhoods because of the certainty of massive retaliation.

However, if a rogue state handed WMD to terrorists, each side would eliminate the other’s weaknesses and help the other achieve their goals. Terrorists would acquire the means to

⁵⁴ Rice, *Higher Honor*, 148; For other early supporters of a state sponsor paradigm for the War on Terror, see: Jim Hoagland, “Hidden Hand of Horror,” *Washington Post*, September 12, 2001, A31; Charles Krauthammer, “To War, Not to Court,” *Washington Post*, September 12, 2001, A29. The Right War, October 1, 2001, Kristol and Kagan, 9. WS.

⁵⁵ Bush, *Decision Points*, 137.

⁵⁶ Julian Borger, “Washington’s Hawk Trains Sights on Iraq,” September 25, 2001, theguardian.com, accessed January 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/26/iraq.afghanistan>.

⁵⁷ Condoleezza Rice, “Wriston Lecture,” October 1, 2002, American Presidency Project, accessed July 23, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=79793&st=iraq&st1=>; George Bush, “State of the Union Address,” January 29, 2002, in *The Iraq Papers*, ed. John Ehrenberg, J. Patrice McSherry, Jose Sanchez, and Caroleen Sayej (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60.

inflict mass casualties while rogue states could inflict damage on their foes without leaving clear evidence of their culpability.⁵⁸ The administration argued that through this behavior rogue states forfeited their sovereignty, justifying military action to remove the threat.⁵⁹ Moreover, the administration argued that the margin of error with biological weapons was particularly low because a small, easily transportable vial of anthrax or smallpox could kill thousands. Even if the odds were low that rogue states and terrorist groups would collaborate in these ways, key administration figures like Cheney believed that after 9/11 the United States had to assume that such contingencies were real rather than leave the country exposed to another massive attack.⁶⁰

The Bush administration identified Iraq as the most dangerous state actor within this category of threat. Cheney later claimed “When we looked around the world in those first months after 9/11, there was no place more likely to be a nexus between terrorism and WMD capability than Saddam’s Iraq.”⁶¹ However, this shift rested on a deeper foundation of ideas and assumptions about Iraq held by key policy-makers before 9/11. Despite the more advanced nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea, there had been no equivalent for these states of the political movement that led to the Iraq Liberation Act, nor had United States recently fought a war with these states. Moreover, as Feith argued, the administration felt that all possible means

⁵⁸ George W. Bush, “Graduation Speech at West Point,” June 1, 2002, in *The Iraq Papers*, ed. John Ehrenberg, J. Patrice McSherry, Jose Sanchez, and Caroleen Sayej (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66; Bush, *Decision Points*, 229.

⁵⁹ Feith, *War and Decision*, 296.

⁶⁰ Journalist Ron Suskind calls this standard the “One Percent Doctrine,” as in even if there was only a 1% chance of Iraq handing WMD to terrorists, the United States had to treat that as a near certainty because of the catastrophic consequences of overlooking such a threat. See: Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine*, 62. For other assertions of the possibility of rogue states like Iraq handing WMD to terrorist groups, especially biological weapons, see: “Transcript: Confronting the Iraqi Threat ‘Is Crucial to Winning War on Terror,’” *New York Times*, October 8, 2002, A12; “Transcript: President’s State of the Union Message to Congress and the Nation,” *New York Times*, January 29, 2003, A12.

⁶¹ Cheney, *In My Time*, 369.

of ending the Iraqi threat had been “tried comprehensively, and without success, for a decade,” whereas the United States had not applied similar pressures to Iran and North Korea.”⁶²

Bush explained why Iraq in particular needed to be targeted in October 2002: “By its past and present actions, by its technological capabilities, by the merciless nature of its regime, Iraq is unique,” citing in particular the fact that Iraq had used chemical weapons in the 1980s and invaded two of his neighbors.⁶³ The assertion that Iraq was a more advanced threat than Iran or North Korea flew in the face of the greater progress of these nations on WMD and ballistic missiles. However, the “lessons” about the containment policy had become entrenched in U.S. thinking about Iraq in ways that had not occurred with these states, which had received far less political attention throughout the decade. Iraq came to be broadly seen as uniquely uncontainable because of its totalitarian ideology, its unalterable desire to acquire WMD and dominate the region, and the particularly intransigent personality of its dictator. Key players in the pre-9/11 movement against containment, especially Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, advanced these ideas within the administration and maintained a drumbeat against Iraq after 9/11.⁶⁴

When exactly Iraq returned to the forefront of the Bush administration’s focus is not entirely clear because of the limits on available sources and the apparent lack of an organized decision-making process in the administration.⁶⁵ In November 2001, Bush asked Rumsfeld to start developing war plans for Iraq, and in February he asked CENTCOM Commander Tommy

⁶² Feith, *War and Decision*, 233.

⁶³ Bush, “Confronting Iraq Threat,” *New York Times*, October 8, 2002. See also: George W. Bush, “Speech to the U.N. General Assembly,” September 12, 2002 in *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Micah Sifry and Christopher Cerf (New York: Touchstone Books, 2003), 314; Feith, *War and Decision*, 181.

⁶⁴ Crist, *Twilight War*, 427; DeYoung, *Soldier*, 375.

⁶⁵ Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 15.

Franks to start moving forces from Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf.⁶⁶ The United States already had extensive military infrastructure in the region to facilitate an invasion as well as planes flying constantly over northern and southern Iraq.⁶⁷ CENTCOM also had a preexisting war plan for Iraq, titled OPLAN 1003-98 that called for upwards of 500,000 troops to be used in an invasion, although Rumsfeld fought to reduce that number.⁶⁸

In public, Bush demanded that inspectors be allowed back into Iraq in November and then identified Iraq as part of the “Axis of Evil” in January 2002.⁶⁹ He also told an interviewer “I’ve made up my mind that Saddam needs to go” in April 2002.⁷⁰ By June, when Richard Haass approached Rice to express his concerns about a possible war, Rice replied: “You can save your breath, Richard. The president has already made up his mind on Iraq.”⁷¹ Most accounts suggest that by the spring of 2002 the administration had determined to press for a confrontation with Iraq, and by the early summer of 2002 they were publicly arguing for regime change.⁷²

This case for war depended on the idea that most likely alternative policies, containment and deterrence, could not handle the nexus category of threat. Deterrence, they argued, relied on the enemy’s rationality, desire to survive, and the certainty that any attack on the United States

⁶⁶ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 30; For more on war planning, see Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 75-118; Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 425.

⁶⁷ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 43-46.

⁶⁸ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 4-5.

⁶⁹ Daalder and Lindsay, *Bush Revolution*, 131.

⁷⁰ Kessler, “Puzzling Past,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 2003. In March 2002, for instance, Bush told Rice “Fuck Saddam. We’re taking him out.” For the increasing focus on Saddam in the winter of 2002-2003, see: Suskind, *One Percent Doctrine*, 70-75; Packer, *Assassins’ Gate*, 45.

⁷¹ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 214.

⁷² The June 1, 2002, West Point speech is often considered the start of the Bush administration’s public campaign for regime change in Iraq.

would prompt massive retaliation. The United States succeeded in deterring Soviet use of WMD during the Cold War because the Soviets possessed these traits.⁷³ Terrorist groups like al-Qaeda lacked both the desire to survive and territory or infrastructure to retaliate against. Bush officials also questioned Saddam's rationality; at the minimum he was a reckless gambler cut off from reality, and at the maximum he was irrational. As Wolfowitz argued, "the containment case assumes that we understand the way his mind works and that he will always avoid actions that would endanger his survival, even though there is an enormous body of evidence that we do not understand the way his mind works."⁷⁴

Bush officials believed, moreover, that terrorists and tyrants were provoked by weakness, and that the faltering U.S. response to attacks since the 1980's had convinced al-Qaeda and Saddam that, in Scooter Libby's words: "The Americans don't have the stomach to defend themselves...They are morally weak."⁷⁵ Containment would only reinforce that perception of docility and encourage more attacks. According to political scientist Aaron Friedberg, who worked on Cheney's foreign policy staff, Rumsfeld, Cheney, and others believed that the United States needed to take actions that would have a "demonstration effect" on other rogue actors that would "reestablish deterrence" and "make clear the costs to those who might have been

⁷³ Condoleezza Rice and George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002, in *The Iraq Papers*, ed. John Ehrenberg, J. Patrice McSherrey, Jose Sanchez, and Caroleen Sayej (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 83; Gaddis, *Surprise, Security*, 70.

⁷⁴ Paul Wolfowitz, "Remarks by Paul Wolfowitz," October 16, 2002, IraqWatch.org, October 16, 2002, accessed July 10, 2018. See also: Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol, *The War Over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2003), 82-83.

⁷⁵ Nicholas Lemann, "The Next World Order," *The New Yorker*, April 1, 2002, 77. For arguments that parallel Libby's claim, see: Reuel Marc Gerecht, "Crushing al Qaeda is Only a Start," *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2001, A18; Max Boot, "The End of Appeasement," *The Weekly Standard*, February 10, 2003, 21; Bernard Lewis, "Did You Say 'American Imperialism?'" *The National Review*, December 17, 2001, 27; Norman Podhoretz, "How to Win World War IV," *Commentary Magazine*, February 7, 2002, 20.

supporting...those who were contemplating those acts.”⁷⁶ Containment was far too passive a strategy for an administration whose risk tolerance had been drastically lowered by 9/11.⁷⁷

Bush spelled out his argument that containment was steadily collapsing, that it had failed to compel Saddam to comply with the United Nations, and that it could not prevent Saddam from building WMD or covertly handing them to terrorists. Bush made this speech at a West Point address in June 2002:

Deterrence-the promise of massive retaliation against nations-means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.⁷⁸

Even if Saddam did not hand WMD to terrorists, he could still use them to bully his neighbors and deter a U.S. response.⁷⁹ Bush thus saw the containment of Iraq as both a broken policy and something that even if revived could not fulfill perceived U.S. security needs following 9/11.

The administration also argued that in this environment the United States might need to launch “preemptive” attacks on WMD-armed state sponsors of terrorism. According to philosophical and legal tradition, preemption is justified when an enemy’s attack is imminent, revealed by active preparation, likely to be destructive, and unstoppable by non-violent means.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Barton Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 230.

⁷⁷ A good discussion of lowered risk tolerance can be found in: Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 158-159.

⁷⁸ Bush, “Speech at West Point,” June 1, 2002, 65-66. See also: “In Cheney’s Words: The Administration’s Case for Removing Saddam Hussein,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2002, A8; Bradley Graham, “Containment Has Not Eased the Iraqi Threat,” *Washington Post*, August 10, 2002, A5.

⁷⁹ Bush and Rice, “2002 National Security Strategy,” 82; Feith, *War and Decision*, 215; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 27.

⁸⁰ Most international legal experts accept that Article 51 of the U.N. Charter permits a state to strike first if a threat is manifestly imminent. Karl Zemanek, “Armed Attack,” October 2013, opil.ouplaw.com, accessed November 2, 2018, <http://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e241>. For a discussion of

A preventive war, in contrast, seeks to destroy a possible threat and/or prevent a shift in the balance of power between two states.⁸¹ While “imminence” is hard to prove, legitimate preemptive wars are generally accepted in international politics while preventive wars are considered unlawful aggression.

The Bush administration, however, argued that the nexus threat demanded a rethinking of the concept of imminence. In past cases of preemption like the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the threatened state could see the enemy’s conventional military preparations and hear their bellicose rhetoric. Terrorists, in contrast, planned secretly and used “weapons that can be easily concealed, delivered covertly, and used without warning.”⁸² Clear, “smoking gun” evidence of collusion between rogue states and terrorists might come only in the form of a “mushroom cloud” from an attack, as the administration often repeated.⁸³ The United States could not consistently preempt attacks it did not see coming, which means it had to stop state sponsors of terror from developing or possessing those weapons.⁸⁴ This was effectively a doctrine of preventive war that the administration justified based on the need to “adapt the concept of ‘imminent threat’ to contemporary realities” and the enormous consequences of missing just one attack.⁸⁵ As

“anticipatory self-defense” within the philosophical just war tradition, see: Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 81-85.

⁸¹ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 76-77; Lawrence Freedman, “Prevention, Not Preemption,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (March, 2003), 106.

⁸² Rice and Bush, “2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” 83. See also: Rice, “Wriston Lecture,” October 1, 2002; Bush, “President’s State of the Union,” *New York Times*, January 29, 2003.

⁸³ Todd Purdum, “Bush Officials Say the Time Has Come for Action on Iraq,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2002, A1.

⁸⁴ G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Imperial Ambition,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 5 (Sep.-Oct., 2002), 52; Freedman, “Preemption,” 108.

⁸⁵ Quote is from Rice, *Higher Honor*, 154; See also Gaddis, *Surprise, Security*, 85-87.

Rumsfeld put it: “Any who insist on perfect evidence are back in the 20th century and still thinking in pre-September 11 terms.”⁸⁶

This reorientation toward Iraq also relied in large part on errors in the intelligence community’s assessments of Iraq’s WMD programs. The 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) assessed that Saddam possessed chemical and biological weapons as well as ballistic missiles beyond what the United Nations permitted.⁸⁷ The intelligence community also judged that Saddam was pursuing nuclear weapons, although he was 5-7 years from possessing such a weapon.⁸⁸ Most independent analysts and U.S. allies, including countries that were skeptical of the invasion, also thought that Iraq was developing WMD and ballistic missiles.⁸⁹ These assessments were shown to be almost entirely inaccurate after the war.⁹⁰ Several Congressional

⁸⁶ Donald Rumsfeld, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy on Iraq*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., September 19, 2002, 22; For more discussion of the Bush administration’s argument for preventive war, see: Robert Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 3 (Fall, 2003), 365-388; James Steinberg, “Preventive Force in US National Security Strategy,” *Survival* 47, no. 4, (Winter 2005-2006), 55-72.

⁸⁷ National Intelligence Estimate, “Iraq’s Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction,” October 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 5-6.

⁸⁸ National Intelligence Council Report, “Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs,” July 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 7.

⁸⁹ The Iraq Inquiry, also known as the Chilcott Report, extensively documents British mistakes regarding WMD-related intelligence on Iraq. See: House of Commons, “Report of the Iraq Inquiry,” July 6, 2016, Vol. 4, accessed September 25, 2018, <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123122743/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-report/>. For more on how other nations also erred in their estimates of the Iraqi WMD program, see: Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 130-132. One analyst in the United States who accurately assessed that Saddam had no active WMD programs was Scott Ritter, who had worked as an inspector for UNSCOM in the late 1990s. In an interview with CNN in July 2002, he claimed: “No one has substantiated the allegations that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction or is attempting to gain weapons of mass destruction.” He also published a book in 1999 calling for the United States to normalize relations with Iraq by offering the complete lifting of economic sanctions if Saddam readmitted and cooperated with inspectors. On Ritter, see: Scott Ritter, interview by Fionnuala Sweeney, July 17, 2002, Cnn.com, accessed January 26, 2019 <http://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/meast/07/17/saddam.ritter.cnn/>; Scott Ritter, *Endgame: Solving the Iraq Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

⁹⁰ The following report is known as the Duelfer Report, named for Charles Duelfer, the director of this study: Department of Central Intelligence, Iraq Survey Group, *Key Findings*, September 30, 2004, cia.gov, accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/, 1-5; See also: Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Postwar Findings About Iraq’s WMD Programs and Links to Terrorism and How They Compare With Prewar Assessments*, 109th Cong., 2nd sess., September 8, 2006, S. Report 109-331, 14-16.

reports have shown the flaws in the intelligence community's analysis, which included inadequately explaining ambiguities to policymakers, relying too much on outdated or poorly vetted information, and relying on old assumptions to fill these gaps. Furthermore, many analysts recalled that the United States had severely underestimated the scope of the Iraqi WMD program before the Gulf War, and they wanted avoid that mistake in 2002-2003.⁹¹

These postwar reports largely excused Bush administration officials from their manipulation and misrepresentation of intelligence about Iraq's WMD and terrorist ties.⁹² This manipulation took several forms. For one, key Bush officials created alternative channels of intelligence gathering and analysis outside the normal intelligence agencies, which Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz believed had systematically underestimated the Iraqi threat since the Gulf War. Channels such as Douglas Feith's Policy Counter Terrorism Evaluation Group (PCTEG) and the Office of Special Plans (OSP) were created to, among other things, amass intelligence that linked Iraq to al-Qaeda and disseminate it throughout the executive branch.⁹³

PCTEG and the OSP were staffed by neoconservatives with little intelligence experience but a clear political agenda. One staffer, David Wurmser, had written a book in the late 1990s

⁹¹ Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq*, July 7, 2004, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., especially 16, 24; The following report is known as the Robb Silberman Report, named for its co-chairmen, Senator Charles Robb and Federal Judge Laurence Silberman. This commission was created by an executive order in 2004 following the failure to find significant WMD programs in Iraq: Report to the President, *The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*, March 31, 2005, fas.org, accessed July 17, 2018, https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/wmd_report.pdf, 157-191; Gordon and Trainor, 132-133.

⁹² The Robb-Silberman Report, for instance, "found no indication that the Intelligence Community distorted evidence regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction." See: Report to the President, *Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States*, March 31, 2005, 1. Bush officials also made this assertion. See Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 432; Feith, *War and Decision*, 269.

⁹³ Bryan Burrough, Evgenia Peretz, David Rose, and David Wise, "The Path to War," *Vanity Fair*, December 19, 2008, Accessed September 25, 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2004/05/path-to-war200405> Jeffrey Goldberg, "A Little Learning," *The New Yorker*, May 9, 2005, 55. For an example of a PCTEG briefing that promoted misleading and exaggerated material about Iraq's links to al-Qaeda to high level officials, see: Briefing, Department of Defense, "Assessing the Relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda," September 16, 2002, U.S. Intelligence in the Middle East, accessed September 25, 2002.

calling for regime change in Iraq.⁹⁴ These offices filtered poorly vetted information from exile groups like the INC into the upper echelons of the administration.⁹⁵ They also provided “red team” or “B-team” analyses that criticized the intelligence agencies for not drawing more strident conclusions about Iraq.⁹⁶ Furthermore, numerous analysts have reported significant if not blatant pressure from Cheney, Rumsfeld, and others. This included repeated requests to look into pieces of evidence that would corroborate the case for war, unprecedented visits from Cheney and other top officials to individual analysts, and the creation of a pressurized atmosphere in which analysts knew what the policy-makers wanted and feared contradicting them.⁹⁷

In public, Bush officials frequently inflated the Iraqi threat beyond what the intelligence justified. They often presented a data point as unambiguous evidence of Iraq’s production of WMD even though different intelligence agencies disagreed about that data. For example, the Department of Energy, the State Department’s intelligence service, and the IAEA all argued that specialized aluminum tubes that Iraq had tried to import were probably designed for

⁹⁴ David Wurmser, *Tyranny’s Ally: America’s Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1999).

⁹⁵ The INC was responsible, for example, for promoting several unreliable sources, including “Curveball,” to U.S. and other intelligence services in support of the claims that Iraq had mobile biological weapons production facilities. See: Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 190-203; Seymour Hersh, “The Stovepipe,” *The New Yorker*, October 27, 2003, 78-83; Jane Mayer, “The Manipulator,” *The New Yorker*, June 7, 2004, 60-65.

⁹⁶ The phrases “red-team” and “B-team” come from a memorandum from Rumsfeld to Feith in July 2002 that asked Feith to “do a ‘red team’ or ‘B team’ analysis of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction.” One PCTEG presentation to Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz advised: “The CIA’s report should be read for content only, and CIA’s interpretation ought to be ignored.” For a high-level request for a “red team” report, see: Memorandum, Donald Rumsfeld to Douglas Feith, “Iraq’s WMD,” July 19, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1. For the PCTEG memo, see: Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq*, July 7, 2004, 308. For more on PCTEG and the OSP, see: Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 46-48.

⁹⁷ CIA Report, Kerr Group, *Intelligence and Analysis on Iraq: Issues for the Intelligence Community*, July 29, 2004, National Security Archive, Accessed March 29, 2018, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/news/20051013/kerr_report.pdf, 1. This report is known as the Kerr Report. It was commissioned by the CIA. See also: Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 32, 155; Tyler Drumheller, *On the Brink: An Insider’s Account of How the White House Compromised American Intelligence* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 43, 86; Hersh, “Stovepiping,” 84.

conventional rockets rather than nuclear weapons production.⁹⁸ The agencies that did believe the tubes were for nuclear enrichment worded their analysis in probabilistic terms.⁹⁹ Yet, Bush officials claimed to know with “absolute certainty,” in Cheney’s words, that the tubes were for a nuclear program.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, administration statements about the Iraq-al-Qaeda link contrasted sharply with the intelligence community’s highly parsed assessments. For example, the CIA judged that Iraq had “sporadic, wary contacts with al-Qaida since the mid-1990s” and possibly a sort of non-aggression pact rather than an operational relationship.¹⁰¹ Bush, however, claimed: “Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of al Qaeda.”¹⁰² The effect of this threat inflation was to reframe the prewar debate from how to deal with a future threat to

⁹⁸ For DOE and INR reports that convey skepticism about Iraq trying to import aluminum tubes for nuclear weapons development, see: Department of Energy Report, “Iraq: High Strength Aluminum Tube Procurement,” April 11, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1-2; Memorandum, Thomas Fingar and Robert Einhorn to Colin Powell, May 16, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1; Memorandum, Carl Ford to Colin Powell, “Iraq’s Quest for Aluminum Tubes,” October 9, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 2, 7.

⁹⁹ For intelligence reports assessing that Iraq’s importing of aluminum tubes were probably for nuclear weapons development, see: Military Intelligence Digest Supplement, Department of Defense, “Iraq: Producing Possible Nuclear-Related Gas Centrifuge Equipment,” November 30, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1-2; CIA Report, Office Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, “Iraq: Expanding WMD Capabilities Pose Growing Threat,” August 1, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 142. A Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report issued in 2008 judged that the administration consistently “did not convey the substantial disagreements that existed in the intelligence community.” See: Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Whether Public Statements Regarding Iraq by U.S. Government Officials Were Substantiated by Intelligence Information*, 110th Cong., 1st sess., June 5, 2008, 15. For other instances of Bush officials making unsubstantiated or exaggerated statements about Iraq’s WMD program, see: “In Cheney’s Words,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2002; Donald Rumsfeld, interview by Tom Clancy, October 24, 2002, IraqWatch.org, accessed July 9, 2018; Bush, “Speech to the U.N. General Assembly,” September 12, 2002, 314.

¹⁰¹ CIA Report, “Iraq and al-Qa’ida: Interpreting a Murky Relationship,” June 21, 2002, U.S. Intelligence in the Middle East Database, accessed September 25, 2002, 3; National Intelligence Estimate, “Iraq’s Continuing Programs,” October 2002, 67-68.

¹⁰² George W. Bush, “2003 State of the Union Address,” January 28, 2003, C-Span.org, Accessed October 29, 2018, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?174799-2/2003-state-union-address>. Cheney repeated these claims in private meetings as well, including House Majority Leader Dick Armey. See: Gellman, *Angler*, 217.

how to stop an imminent threat. As Francis Fukuyama has argued, this shift “raised the stakes” of the confrontation with Iraq and lowered the threshold for intervention.”¹⁰³

Lastly, Bush officials frequently used information in the public case for war that the intelligence agencies had flagged as false or unreliable. For example, they often touted Iraq’s attempt to acquire “yellowcake” uranium ore from Niger as evidence on a current nuclear weapons program. The CIA, however, had repeatedly judged that this did not happen, removed the reference from other public statements, and stated that Iraq already had yellowcake that was in sealed containers subject to IAEA inspection.¹⁰⁴ This manipulation of intelligence suggests that top Bush officials were so convinced that Saddam had major WMD programs and links to al-Qaeda that they made the policy decision to topple Saddam and then sought evidence to support that decision. Numerous observers have reported this dynamic, including an aide to British Foreign Secretary David Manning who wrote in July 2002: “Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD...But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.”¹⁰⁵

One major problem the administration faced in making the nexus-based argument was that the intelligence community generally did not believe that Saddam would actually give

¹⁰³ Francis Fukuyama supported the Iraq War but then turned on it and the neoconservative movement shortly after it started. He also said that without this threat inflation the debate would “have been about the merits of waging a preventive war to prevent a rogue but ultimately deterrable state from getting nuclear weapons.” See: Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 88-90.

¹⁰⁴ Bush, “2003 State of the Union.” For CIA’s assessment of the veracity of the Niger story, see: CIA Report, “Iraq-Niger,” February 14, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1; Bamford, *Pretext for War*, 302-307.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew Rycroft, “Iraq: Prime Minister’s Meeting, 23 July,” July 23, 2002, in Danner, *The Downing Street Memo*, 89. In another case, a Cheney aide asked INC leader Ahmed Chalabi in October 2001: “The administration is looking for people who know about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. Can you introduce us to any?” See: Bonin, *Arrows of the Night*, 193. For other policymakers and intelligence analysts in government at the time who support this interpretation, see: see Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*; Clarke, *Against All Enemies*; Haass, *War of Necessity*; Drumheller, *On the Brink*.

WMD to terrorists. They judged that Saddam wanted WMD for deterrent purposes and probably would not hand them to terrorists unless attacked by the United States.¹⁰⁶ The evidence for an operational relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda was sparse, relying on circumstantial and poorly sourced information.¹⁰⁷ Administration hawks, however, addressed this problem by appealing to the longstanding belief in U.S. thinking about Iraq that Saddam was hell-bent, to the point of irrational obsession, on revenge against the United States. This focus on revenge was not a perfunctory assertion of Saddam's villainy but a specific claim rooted in the conspiratorial research of Laurie Mylroie, who worked as a fellow at AEI in the years before the Iraq War.

Through a web of tendentious connections, Mylroie argued that Saddam had sponsored several terrorist attacks on the U.S., including the World Trade Center in 1993, Oklahoma City in 1995, the Khobar Towers in 196, and the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, as part of a campaign of vengeance for the Gulf War.¹⁰⁸ Immediately after 9/11, she and several of

¹⁰⁶ CIA Report, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, "Iraq: Developing Biological Weapons as a Strategic Deterrent," August 10, 2001, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1; Report, Defense Intelligence Agency, "Iraqi Chemical/Biological Support to al-Qaida Unlikely," February 28, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1; Defense Intelligence Agency, Joint Intelligence Task Force on Combatting Terrorism, "Iraq's Inconclusive Ties to Al-Qaida," July 31, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1-3. British intelligence generally agreed that Iraq and al-Qaeda lacked a meaningful relationship: Assessment, Joint Intelligence Council, "International Terrorism: The Threat from Iraq," October 10, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 126-127.

¹⁰⁷ For example, while the Bush administration continued to assert that 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta and Iraqi Intelligence met in Prague in April 2001, U.S. and several foreign intelligence agencies assessed that this meeting probably did not happen. See: Chaim Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," *International Security* 29, no. 1 (Summer, 2004), 17. There was no photographic, immigration, or other documentary evidence indicating that Atta was in the Czech Republic at the time, and the Czech intelligence agent who identified Atta reported this sighting after Atta's picture was widely circulated in the press after 9/11, 5 months after the purported meeting. Czech intelligence also retracted this report. For intelligence community assessments of this meeting, see: Defense Intelligence Agency, "Iraq's Inconclusive Ties to Al-Qaida," July 31, 2002, 3; CIA Report, "Interpreting a Murky Relationship," June 21, 2002, 1; James Risen, "Prague Discounts an Iraqi Meeting," *New York Times*, October 21, 2002, A1.

¹⁰⁸ Laurie Mylroie, *Study of Revenge: Saddam Hussein's Unfinished War Against America* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 2000). For an examination of the flaws in Mylroie's work, see: Peter Bergen, "Armchair Provocateur," *The Washington Monthly* 35, no. 12 (December, 2003), 27; David Korn and Michael Isikoff, *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 74-85.

her adherents suggested that Saddam had a hand in the attacks, declaring it “merely another phase of the Gulf War.”¹⁰⁹ She became a frequent media commentator and an advisor to the Iraqi National Congress (INC), promoting her theory and accusing the CIA of engaging in an “enormous cover-up” of Iraq’s role in 9/11.¹¹⁰

While discounted by the intelligence agencies, Mylroie had gained significant influence in neoconservative and pro-regime change circles. Her book on Saddam’s purported responsibility for these terrorist attacks, published in 2000 by AEI Press, received fulsome praise from former CIA Director R. James Woolsey, Richard Perle, Scooter Libby, and Paul Wolfowitz. She thanked Wolfowitz and John Bolton by name in the acknowledgments section for their help on the book.¹¹¹ Wolfowitz had defended her ideas throughout the 1990s, telling a Congressional hearing in 1998: “There are all kinds of reasons to suspect connections between the Iraqis and this Osama bin Laden fellow.”¹¹² Counterterrorism expert Richard Clarke recalled that in a January 2001 NSC meeting Wolfowitz said the United States needed to focus more on “Iraqi terrorism” and told Clarke that Bin Laden “could not do all these things like the 1993 attack on New York, not without a state sponsor. Just because the FBI and CIA have failed to find the linkages does not mean they don’t exist.”¹¹³ Wolfowitz mentioned Saddam’s ostensible

¹⁰⁹ Laurie Mylroie, “The Iraqi Connection,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 13, 2001, A20; Hoagland, “Hidden Hand,” September 12, 2001. Editorial, “The Anthrax War,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2001, A26; Woolsey, “Iraq Connection,” October 18, 2001.

¹¹⁰ Isikoff and Korn, *Hubris*, 75, 83-84.

¹¹¹ Peter Bergen, “Armchair Provocateur: Laurie Mylroie: The Neocons’ Favorite Conspiracy Theorist,” *Washington Monthly* 35, no. 12 (December 2003), 28.

¹¹² Paul Wolfowitz, House Committee on National Security, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., September 16, 1998, 49.

¹¹³ Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 232; There are numerous additional reports of Wolfowitz mentioning Mylroie’s work or the revenge hypothesis. See: Memorandum, British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Christopher Meyer to David Manning, “Iraq and Afghanistan: Conversation with Wolfowitz,” March 18, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1.

responsibility for the 1993 attacks to Rumsfeld on September 17, 2001, and in later in 2002, Wolfowitz described Saddam in a speech as having “an enormous thirst for revenge.”¹¹⁴ He pressed other officials on whether they had read Mylroie’s book, and he sent Woolsey to Great Britain to find data that would bolster this claim.¹¹⁵

The influence of this revenge hypothesis bled into the administration’s thinking about Iraq. One Defense Department briefing stated: “For Saddam, Gulf War never ended.”¹¹⁶ One of Bush’s major speeches before the war argued that Iraq held “unrelenting hostility toward the United States” before explaining Iraq’s links to al-Qaeda.¹¹⁷ This hypothesis bolstered the plausibility of the Bush administration’s nexus case by appealing to the deeply embedded sense that Saddam was an irrational actor with a record of revenge-driven terrorist attacks. This belief legitimized the idea that he might strike again through his terrorist allies regardless of the risk of U.S. retaliation, in contrast to the intelligence community’s estimates.

The Bush administration’s exaggerated presentation of intelligence fostered broad public and political consensus that Saddam was making significant progress on his WMD programs and had meaningful links to al-Qaeda. A Harris Poll from before the invasion found that 80% of Americans believed Saddam had or was making nuclear weapons.¹¹⁸ Another survey from February 2003 found that 72% of Americans believed eliminating Saddam’s WMD was a “very

¹¹⁴ *9/11 Commission Report*, 337; Wolfowitz, “Remarks,” October 16, 2002.

¹¹⁵ Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 95; Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation,” 5-48.

¹¹⁶ Briefing, Department of Defense, “Assessing the Relationship,” September 16, 2002, 6.

¹¹⁷ Bush, “Confronting Iraq Threat,” *New York Times*, October 8, 2002; Gellman, *Angler*, 117-119.

¹¹⁸ Harris Telephone Survey, March 6, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018; See also, Gallup Telephone Survey, February 11, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018. This poll said that 90% of American believed that it was either “certain” or “likely” that Iraq was developing nuclear weapons.

convincing” or “fairly convincing” reason for war.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, by mid-March of 2003, 80% of Americans had come to believe that without military action “Saddam Hussein would be instrumental in helping al-Qaeda terrorists carry out future attacks.”¹²⁰

The Bush administration viewed Iraq as a threat to national security, but it also saw the removal of Saddam as an opportunity to spark broader reforms in the Middle East that would address the causes of terrorism. Most importantly, after 9/11 spreading democracy in Iraq and the greater Middle East became not just an ideal but a strategic imperative for the administration. Regime change advocates like Paul Wolfowitz, Ahmed Chalabi, and Fouad Ajami had long argued that democratizing Iraq was essential for uprooting the violent Baathist political culture and making Iraq an unthreatening country.¹²¹ They interpreted the rise of terrorism in the Middle East as the product of deficits in democracy, development, and dignity.¹²² Tyrannical governments and extremist ideologies bred anti-Western and anti-Israeli terrorism throughout the region.¹²³ Ajami, for instance, argued that 9/11 stemmed from the “deep structure” of Arab

¹¹⁹ Time/CNN Telephone Survey, February 21, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018.

¹²⁰ Newsweek Telephone Survey, March 15, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018. See also CNN/USA Today Telephone Survey, February 11, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018, in which 86% of Americans said it was either “certain” or “likely” that Iraq was cooperating with al Qaeda.

¹²¹ Ajami described the main problem of Arab political culture as a “freedom deficit” that enabled radicalism to flourish. Fouad Ajami, “A Settling of Accounts Past Due,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 24, 2002, 34. Ajami later defended the Iraq War at length in his book *The Foreigner’s Gift: The Americans, The Arabs, and the Iraqis in Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2006). See also: Ahmed Chalabi, “Iraqi for the Iraqis,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 19, 2003, A14. There were notable dissenters to this pro-democracy thinking in the Bush administration, including Donald Rumsfeld. See Daalder and Lindsay, *Bush Revolution*, 47.

¹²² Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 113-119, 162-163.

¹²³ Fouad Ajami, “Two Faces, One Terror,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2002, A12; For more on the role of pro-Israeli sentiment in Bush administration’s case for war with Iraq, see: Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 182-221.

politics, referring to “its repressed young people, its mix of belligerence and self-pity, [and] the terrible anti-Americanism.” He labelled Iraq the “citadel of Arab radicalism.”¹²⁴

Drawing on these ideas and the democratic peace concept, the administration argued that democratization would grant Middle Eastern peoples a chance to participate in their own governance so they would not succumb to despair and extremism. As Bush claimed in a February 2003 speech: “The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values because stable and free nations do not breed the ideologies of murder.” Regime change in Iraq could empower liberal forces, intimidate other autocratic states like Iran, and possibly spark a broad democratic transformation that would inoculate the Middle East against terrorism.¹²⁵

Bush officials adopted a universalistic rhetoric of human rights and democracy to bolster the argument that democracy could flourish in the Middle East. In the 2002 National Security Strategy, the administration declared that the great struggles of the 20th century had ended in a “decisive victory” for “a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.”¹²⁶ In turn, they rejected, in Rice’s words, the “condescending view that freedom will not grow in the soil of the Middle East-or that Muslims somehow do not share in the desire to be free.”¹²⁷ Building on a claim from the 1990s, the administration argued that as a passive

¹²⁴ Fouad Ajami, “A Chronicle of a War Foretold,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 31, 2003, 34.

¹²⁵ Quote is from: “In the President’s Words: ‘Free People Will Keep the Peace of the World,’” *New York Times*, February 27, 2003, A10. For influential boosters of the ideas of democratization and human rights in Iraq and the broader political transformation of the Middle East, see: “In Cheney’s Words,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2002; John McCain, “The Road to Baghdad,” *Time Magazine*, September 11, 2002, 107; Richard Perle, “The U.S. Must Strike at Saddam Hussein,” *New York Times*, December 28, 2001, A19; Editorial, “Arabs and Democracy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2002, A22; Thomas Friedman, “Iraq, Upside Down,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2002, A31; Tom Lantos, House Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Iraq: Administration Views*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., September 19, 2002, 5; William Kristol, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *What’s Next*, 22; Lawrence Kaplan, “Regime Change,” *The New Republic*, March 3, 2003, 21-23.

¹²⁶ Bush and Rice, “2002 National Security Strategy,” 81.

¹²⁷ Rice, “Wriston Lecture, October 1, 2002; “In the President’s Words,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2003.

strategy containment could not bring about this type of change. Only a bold move in the heart of the Middle East could put the region on a more peaceful and humane track.

In making the case that a war was less risky than containment, the Bush administration adopted an unrealistically optimistic view of the aftermath of the conflict, especially the difficulties of rebuilding the Iraqi economy, society, and government. Officials frequently cited Ajami and Kanan Makiya, who argued that Iraqis would joyously welcome U.S. soldiers and cooperate in rebuilding Iraq.¹²⁸ Makiya, for one, wrote shortly after 9/11: “Iraq’s infrastructure, its middle class, its secular intelligentsia, its high levels of education...are all reason for thinking that a new kind of westward political order can, with help from the West, be set up in Iraq.”¹²⁹ On January 10, 2003, he met with Bush and Cheney and told them: “People will greet the troops with sweets and flowers.”¹³⁰ Ajami boldly prophesied that: “We shall be mobbed when we go there by people who are eager for deliverance...from the great bit prison of Saddam Hussein.”¹³¹ Overlooking the devastation of a decade of sanctions, Wolfowitz likewise contended:

It is hard to believe that the liberation of the talented people of one of the most important Arab countries in the world from the grip of one of the world’s worst tyrants will not be an opportunity for Americans and Arabs...to begin to move forward in what the president had described as ‘building a just and peaceful world beyond the War on Terror.’¹³²

¹²⁸ Cheney cites Ajami in: “In Cheney’s Words,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2002. Wolfowitz cites him in: “Remarks,” October 16, 2002.

¹²⁹ Makiya, “Help the Iraqis,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2001; Barham Salih, “Give Us A Chance to Build a Democratic Iraq,” *New York Times*, February 5, 2003, A27; Kaplan and Kristol, *War Over Iraq*, 99.

¹³⁰ Baker, *Days of Fire*, 235.

¹³¹ Fouad Ajami, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Hearings to Examine Threats, Responses, and Regional Considerations Surrounding Iraq*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., July 31, 2002, 126.

¹³² Paul Wolfowitz, “United on the Risks of A War With Iraq,” *Washington Post*, December 23, 2002, A19. See similar statements in Bush’s AEI Speech: “In the President’s Words,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2003; Rumsfeld, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy on Iraq*, 32.

Sectarian tensions were overblown, Ajami and Makiya promised, as in Iraqi society “virtually all constituent parts agree on the need for representative democracy, the rule of law, and a pluralist system of government and federalism.”¹³³ Ajami, Makiya, and their ally Bernard Lewis met repeatedly with Cheney, Wolfowitz, and others following 9/11.¹³⁴ The administration’s egregious lack of planning for the aftermath of invasion, including Rumsfeld’s tireless efforts to reduce troop numbers, resulted not just from incompetence but from longstanding ideological assumptions. Particularly important were beliefs about the universality of democracy and the Iraqi people as modern, educated, and pro-Western rather than tribalized, impoverished, and resentful of the United States.¹³⁵

The ideas that the United States would be “greeted as liberators” and that the war would benefit the region became additional reasons to embrace regime change.¹³⁶ This hope, however, contradicted the warnings of the intelligence agencies and other area experts. Intelligence

¹³³ “Building a Democratic Iraq,” November 1, 2002, AEI Newsletter, Accessed September 21, 2018, <https://www.aei.org/publication/building-a-democratic-iraq>. Ajami said, in a similar vein, that the majority of Iraqi Shia were “secularists who understand that the brutalized country will have to be shared among its principal communities if it is to find a way out of fear and terror.” See: Fouad Ajami, “Iraq and the Arabs’ Future,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 2003), 2-18.

¹³⁴ Richard Bonin, *Arrows of the Night: Ahmad Chalabi’s Long Journey to Triumph in Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 192; Daalder and Lindsay, *Bush Revolution*, 130.

¹³⁵ For works that document this lack of planning and the fantastical optimism that undergirded it, see: Ricks, *Fiasco*; James Fallows, *Blind into Baghdad: America’s War in Iraq* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006); David Phillips, *Losing Iraq: Inside the Postwar Reconstruction Fiasco* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2005); Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 95-105, 138-163. The tribal and ethnic polarization of Iraq was to some extent a product of the Baathists’ own divide-and-rule strategy for staying in power and silencing dissent during the sanctions period. See: Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

¹³⁶ The phrase “greeted as liberators” comes from a Richard Cheney interview on Meet the Press on March 16, 2003: Transcript, Meet the Press, Interview of the Vice President, March 16, 2003, whitehouse.archives.gov, accessed November 9, 2018, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060910.html>. Officials who dissented from this sunny prediction found themselves publicly and privately denounced. When Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki, for example, told a Congressional hearing that the occupation of Iraq might require far more soldiers than existing plans, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz quickly condemned his remarks. Wolfowitz called Shinseki’s prescient observation “wildly off the mark” and added that “it is hard to conceive that it would take more forces to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq than it would take to conduct the war itself and to secure the surrender of Saddam’s security forces and his army-hard to imagine.” See: Ricks, *Fiasco*, 96-98.

assessments of Iraqi political culture as backward and illiberal had persisted throughout the 1990s, including one 1993 report that stated: “Many of the nationalistic, xenophobic, and Pan-Arab themes that pervade Saddam’s policies and propaganda resonate with the Iraqi public and probably would be used by likely Arab Sunni successors.”¹³⁷

In 2002, the CIA’s Near East and South Asian Office similarly judged that “A transformation of Iraq to a true democracy could require a U.S. role lasting a generation.”¹³⁸ These analysts noted the “lack of ingrained democratic traditions, innate distrust of other groups, and the tendency to substitute tribal, ethnic, or sectarian loyalties” as obstacles to democracy and pluralism in Iraq.¹³⁹ They also doubted that overthrowing Saddam would foment regional political transformation, arguing that Arab societies still lacked “such important components of democracy as the concept of a loyal opposition, vibrant civil society institutions, respect for the rule of law, transparency, and a strong middle class.”¹⁴⁰ Even if democracy took hold in the region, one State Department report warned, it “could well be subject to exploitation by anti-

¹³⁷ CIA Report, National Intelligence Estimate 93-42, “Prospects for Iraq; Saddam and Beyond,” December 1993, accessed April 10, 2018, [http://primarysources.brillonline.com/reader/open?rotate=1&searchTerms=iraq&starEnabled=1&shareLink=, 1.](http://primarysources.brillonline.com/reader/open?rotate=1&searchTerms=iraq&starEnabled=1&shareLink=,)

¹³⁸ CIA Report, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, “The Postwar Occupation of Germany and Japan: Implications for Iraq,” August 7, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 2. For another report that contradicted the administration’s sunny predictions about the aftermath of war, see: CIA Report, “The Perfect Storm: Planning for Negative Consequences of Invading Iraq,” August 13, 2002, 1-3.

¹³⁹ Quote is from: Assessment, National Intelligence Community, “Principal Challenges in Post-Saddam Iraq,” January 2003, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 14; See also Paul Pillar, *Intelligence in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 14; Phebe Marr, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “Threats, Responses, and Regional Considerations,” 166; Fawaz Gerges, “Illusions of Iraqi Democracy,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2002, A25.

¹⁴⁰ Assessment, National Intelligence Council, “Regional Consequences of Regime Change,” January 2003, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 30.

American elements.”¹⁴¹ CENTCOM planners throughout the 1990s had estimated that if the United States invaded Iraq, it could have soldiers there for up to ten years.¹⁴²

The Bush administration’s case for war with Iraq rested on more than preventing another terrorist attack and defeating a rival. Iraq served as the cornerstone in a grand strategy of global primacy, which has often been labelled the Bush Doctrine. The key tenets of this vision predated 9/11, but 9/11 served as both impetus and opening for advocates of this vision to establish these ideas the guiding principles of U.S. foreign policy. Bush officials aimed to transform the international political order in a time of crisis.¹⁴³ The United States would guarantee the security and openness of an increasingly interconnected world by using overwhelming military power to deter great power challengers and defeat the nexus of rogue states and terrorists.¹⁴⁴ In contrast to the “realist” first Bush administration, U.S. global primacy would ensure “a balance of power that favored freedom” and enable the flourishing of democracies that would respect human rights and eschew aggression.¹⁴⁵ In contrast to the anemic Clinton administration, the United States would possess the will to act unilaterally or with small coalitions, and it would not be restrained by international treaties and institutions.¹⁴⁶ The administration’s case for war emerged from this

¹⁴¹ Greg Miller, “Democracy Domino Theory ‘Not Credible,’ A State Department Report Disputes Bush’s Claim,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 2003, A1.

¹⁴² Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 26-27.

¹⁴³ Condoleezza Rice, “Remarks by National Security Advisor on Terrorism and Foreign Policy,” April 29, 2002, [whitehouse.archives.gov](https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020429-9.html), accessed October 2, 2018, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020429-9.html>

¹⁴⁴ Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter, 196-1997), 5-53; For more on the post-9/11 development of this strategy, see: Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 316-331; David Hastings Dunn, “Myths, Motivations, and ‘Misunderestimations’ The Bush Administration and Iraq,” *International Affairs* 79, no. 2 (March, 2003), 279-297; Daalder and Lindsay, *Bush Revolution*, 116-128.

¹⁴⁵ Rice, “Remarks by National Security Advisor,” April 29, 2002. For similar universalistic claims, see Bush’s AEI Speech: “In the President’s Words,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 121-131.

global vision, their interpretation of the post-9/11 security environment, and more deeply rooted discrediting of containment as the main alternative to regime change.

“The Right Way to Change a Regime:” The Public Debate on Iraq and the Powell-Blair Approach

Compared to the Bush administration’s case for war, the public debate on Iraq from 2002 to 2003 has been relatively under-examined. This debate encompassed a narrow range of options and perspectives on Iraq, and only a small group still argued that containment should remain U.S. policy barring open Iraqi aggression. The largest camp of “skeptics” consisted of politicians, intellectuals, and policymakers who disagreed with many of the administration’s claims about Iraq and criticized its tactical and procedural actions. Nonetheless, proponents of this Powell-Blair approach did not dissent from the core assumptions undergirding Bush’s argument, and they offered no clear alternative besides requesting more time for inspections and coalition-building. To a significant degree, the regime change consensus shaped and restrained the thinking even of those who saw themselves as skeptics, thereby undermining the search for alternatives. The Iraq debate was much more about “the right way to change a regime,” in James Baker’s phrasing, than whether the United States should seek regime change or restore containment.¹⁴⁷

The Bush administration’s push for war benefitted from the support of an overlapping but significantly different liberal case for war promulgated by figures like *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, and Kanan Makiya. Liberals usually argued that Bush was exaggerating Iraq’s WMD programs and objected to the Bush Doctrine as harmful to international law and U.S. alliances.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, they believed

¹⁴⁷ James Baker, “The Right Way to Change a Regime,” *New York Times*, August 25, 2002, C9.

that removing Saddam's regime with the blessing of the United Nations would reinforce the authority of international law, which Saddam had defied for years. Jonathan Chait argued, for example: "War with Iraq does not require trashing international law. Just the opposite: sustaining international law is central to its very rationale."¹⁴⁹

Saddam did not pose an imminent threat, liberal hawks argued, but the totalitarian nature of the regime meant that it would continue to pursue WMD and abuse its people "the way junkies seek a fix," as Cohen put it.¹⁵⁰ They took this danger seriously, but the moral importance of liberating the Iraqi people from this "morally outrageous regime" motivated them at least as much.¹⁵¹ Pro-war liberals consistently referred to Baathist Iraq as a "penitentiary" or "concentration camp," evoking a liberal narrative of an ongoing struggle against totalitarianism.¹⁵² Robert Kerrey, for instance, told Congress: "We want to have the same

¹⁴⁸ Bill Keller, "The I-Can't-Believe-I'm-a-Hawk Club," *New York Times*, February 8, 2003, A17; Jonathan Chait, "False Alarm: Why Liberals Should Support the War," *The New Republic*, October 21, 2002, 18-21; Michael Tomasky, "Between Cheney and Chomsky: Making a Domestic Case for a New Liberal Foreign Policy," in *The Fight is for Democracy: Winning the War of Ideas in America and the World*, ed. George Packer (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 41.

¹⁴⁹ Chait, "Liberals Should Support the War," 20.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Cohen, "Ready for War," *Washington Post*, October 10, 2002, A33; Robert Kerrey, "Finish the War, Liberate Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2002, A14;

¹⁵¹ Quote is from interview with Makiya. See also: Salman Rushdie, "A Liberal Argument for Regime Change," *Washington Post*, November 1, 2002, A35; Thomas Friedman, "Tell the Truth," *New York Times*, February 19, 2003, A25; Leon Wieseltier, "Against Innocence," *The New Republic*, March 3, 2003, 26-28; Thomas Cushman, "Introduction: The Liberal-Humanitarian Case for War in Iraq," in *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*, edited by Thomas Cushman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 22-23.

¹⁵² Several former dissidents from the Eastern Bloc countries played an especially important role in bolstering this narrative of an ongoing struggle with totalitarianism. See: Natan Sharansky, "AEI World Forum Speech," AEI.org, June 20, 2002, accessed September 22, 2018, <https://www.aei.org/publication/democracy-for-peace/print/>; Thomas Cushman, "Anti-totalitarianism as a Vocation: An Interview with Adam Michnik," in *A Matter of Principle*, edited by Thomas Cushman, 271-281; Garry Kasparov, "The War Is Not Yet Won," *Wall Street Journal*, August 5, 2002, A10; For writers referring to Iraq as a giant prison, see: Robert Kaplan, "Slave State: Why Saddam is Worse than Sloba," *New Republic*, October 21, 2002, 10; Kanan Makiya, phone interview by author, November 1, 2017.

experience we had when Kim Dae June, Nelson Mandela, Václav Havel, and Lech Wałęsa came to a joint session of Congress and said ‘thank you for liberating us.’”¹⁵³

These liberals wanted to position themselves “between Cheney and Chomsky,” in Michael Tomasky’s memorable phrasing.¹⁵⁴ This meant that liberals should challenge both Cheney’s narrow, unilateral nationalism and Noam Chomsky’s evocation of moral equivalence between the United States and its enemies. They promoted a “vibrant, hard-headed” liberalism that was more cautious and self-critical than the imperialistic neoconservatives but still defended liberal values against the new totalitarians of al-Qaeda and the Baathists.¹⁵⁵

Containment, for many liberals, had not only failed to disarm Saddam, it tolerated an oppressive status quo in the Middle East that bred terrorism and permitted massive human suffering.¹⁵⁶ They wanted regime change in Iraq to be part of a “transforming moment” in which the United States reoriented its priorities by developing alternative energy sources to reduce dependence on foreign oil, pressuring its allies for democratic change, and pursuing a progressive agenda at home.¹⁵⁷ In the Middle East, the United States would have to further better governance, open economies, women’s empowerment, and a free press. The writer Paul Berman,

¹⁵³ Robert Kerrey, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, 107th Cong., 1st sess., March 1, 2001, 34.

¹⁵⁴ Tomasky, “Cheney and Chomsky,” 21-48. This argument is echoed in Cushman, “Liberal-Humanitarian Case,” 10-13.

¹⁵⁵ Quote is from George Packer, “Introduction: Living Up To It,” in *The Fight is for Democracy: Winning the War of Ideas in America and the World*, ed. George Packer (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 17. In the same volume, see also: Tomasky, “Cheney and Chomsky,” 44-45; Kanan Makiya, “Arab Demons, Arab Dreams: 1967-2003,” 141, 162; Paul Berman, “Thirteen Observations on a Very Unlucky Predicament,” 279-288.

¹⁵⁶ Keller quotes several liberals on this point, including Robert Kerrey and George Packer. See: Bill Keller, “The Selective Conscience,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2002, A29; David Ignatius, “Wilsonian Course for War,” *Washington Post*, August 30, 2002, A23; Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 197.

¹⁵⁷ Quote is from: Thomas Friedman, “Bush, Iraq, and Sister Souljah,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2002. See also: Packer, “Introduction,” 19.

for instance, said that the real goal of the Iraq War should be “to begin a rollback of the several...political movements that add up to Muslim totalitarianism” and “foment a liberal revolution in the Middle East.”¹⁵⁸ Without these larger changes, simply overthrowing Saddam would not defeat radicalism in the region.¹⁵⁹ The liberal case for war demonstrated that the perceived bankruptcy of containment had spread beyond neoconservative circles, as did the belief that politically transforming the Middle East was both ethical and vital to U.S. security.

Openly pro-war liberals were a minority compared with members of the Powell-Blair approach. These figures objected to the hawks’ rush to war, their unilateralism, and their reckless use of intelligence. Nevertheless, they focused on shaping how and when Bush confronted Iraq rather than questioning the necessity of regime change. Among those with intimate access to the President, Colin Powell and Tony Blair best represented this viewpoint. Blair and Powell did not approach foreign policy from the same perspective. For instance, Blair passionately defended the R2P doctrine and argued for intervention in the Balkans and Kosovo crises.¹⁶⁰ In contrast, Powell opposed the Balkan intervention as the JCS Chairman because he believed U.S. forces should not be used for humanitarian crusades that were inessential to the national interest.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, they both endorsed a multilateral foreign policy in which great powers should work with international institutions and eschew military force until peaceful strategies have been exhausted.

¹⁵⁸ Berman quoted in: “Roll Call: Who’s For War, Who’s Against It, and Why,” February 19, 2003, Slate.com, accessed September 28, 2018 http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2003/02/roll_call.html. For more on the concept of Islamic and Baathist totalitarianism, see: Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*, 54-58.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Friedman, “Thinking about Iraq,” *New York Times*, January 22, 2003, A21; Keller, “Hawk Club,” *New York Times*, February 8, 2003; Zakaria, “Invade Iraq,” 37.

¹⁶⁰ Tony Blair, “Speech Before Chicago Economic Club,” April 22, 1999, globalpolicy.org, accessed September 26, 2018, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/154/26026.html>

¹⁶¹ David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 34-42, 139-142; Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 543-544, 560-562; Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 221.

The Blair government became concerned in early 2002 that Bush had decided upon war without consulting U.S. allies.¹⁶² Cheney had even told several British officials that a coalition “would be nice” but was “not essential.”¹⁶³ They also feared, in David Manning’s words: “There is a real risk that the Administration underestimates the difficulties” of occupying Iraq.¹⁶⁴ While Blair did not see strong links between Iraq and al-Qaeda, he agreed with many of the assumptions of Bush’s case for war: “Getting rid of Saddam is the right thing to do. He is a potential threat. He could be contained. But containment, as we found with Al Qaida, is always risky. His departure would free up the region.”¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Blair believed that any move against Saddam needed to be complemented by a diplomatic push to counter proliferation and resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he saw as the main driver of radicalism in the region. Blair told Bush that the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) was “the huge undercurrent in this situation. It is the context in the Arab world.”¹⁶⁶ Blair wanted to make Iraq “a problem for the international community as a whole, not just for the U.S.” by focusing on Saddam’s violation of U.N. resolutions rather than the controversial nexus and pre-emptive war concepts.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² House of Commons, “Report of the Iraq Inquiry,” July 6, 2016, Vol. 1, Section 3.1, 377, 395; United Kingdom Overseas and Defense Secretariat Cabinet Office, “Iraq: Options Paper,” March 8, 2002, in *The Secret Way to War: The Downing Street Memo and the Iraq War’s Buried History*, ed. Mark Danner (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), 103.

¹⁶³ John Prados and Christopher Ames, “The Iraq War-Part II: Was There Even a Decision?” October 1, 2010, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 328, Accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB328/index.htm>

¹⁶⁴ House of Commons, “Report of the Iraq Inquiry,” July 6, 2016, Vol. 1, Section 3.1, 377, 455.

¹⁶⁵ Note, Tony Blair to George W. Bush, “Note on Iraq,” July 28, 2002, iraqinquiry.org.uk, accessed September 10, 2018, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123122728/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/243761/2002-07-28-note-blair-to-bush-note-on-iraq.pdf>, 1.

¹⁶⁶ Underlined in original. Letter, Tony Blair to George W. Bush, October 11, 2001, iraqinquiry.org.uk, accessed September 9, 2018, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123122709/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/243721/2001-10-11-letter-blair-to-bush-untitled.pdf>, 2.

The British started pressing U.S. officials on these points in the early spring of 2002. In deliberations with Bush, however, Blair said he supported Saddam's removal and he did not defend containment as a viable strategy. At a meeting in Crawford, Texas in April 2002, Blair assured Bush that Britain would support military action against Iraq once certain conditions had been satisfied. A British Cabinet Office Memo detailed these terms:

When the Prime Minister discussed Iraq with President Bush at Crawford in April he said that the UK would support military action to bring about regime change, provided that certain conditions were met: efforts had been made to construct a coalition/shape public opinion, the Israel-Palestine Crisis was quiescent, and the options for action to eliminate Iraq's WMD through the UN weapons inspectors had been exhausted.¹⁶⁸

Christopher Meyer, the British ambassador to the United States, claimed in February 2002 that the British objective was "to persuade the U.S...that they must show that they are serious about implementing the resolutions-even if only to prepare the ground properly in the international community for action is Saddam fails to comply."¹⁶⁹ The Blair government decided to use its status as the United States' closest ally to shape how the United States confronted Iraq, acknowledging that force would be an option if other means failed.¹⁷⁰

Blair and Powell helped convince Bush to seek a U.N. resolution to readmit inspectors to Iraq in late summer 2002. As Richard Armitage later confirmed, "Powell and I did not object to the prospect of taking out Saddam Hussein, but we had real questions about timing."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Peter Ricketts, "Iraq: Advice for the Prime Minister," March 22, 2002, in Danner, *The Downing Street Memo*, 141.

¹⁶⁸ United Kingdom, Cabinet Office Options Paper, "Iraq: Conditions for Military Action (A Note by Officials)," July 21, 2002, National Security Archives, Accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB328/index.htm>

¹⁶⁹ House of Commons, "Iraq Inquiry," July 6, 2016, Vol. 1, Section 3.1, 395.

¹⁷⁰ House of Commons, "Report of the Iraq Inquiry," July 6, 2016, Vol. 1, Section 3.2, 526.

¹⁷¹ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 85.

However, Powell had watched with concern as Cheney and Rumsfeld pressed Bush to shift focus to Iraq throughout early 2002.¹⁷² Powell held that Saddam could be disarmed if the United States rallied a large coalition and threatened him with force if he failed to comply.¹⁷³ In a meeting on August 5, he conveyed to Bush the possible consequences of invading Iraq without a large coalition, including regional chaos, rising oil prices, and alienated allies.¹⁷⁴ Without a coalition, the United States would face the massive challenges of rebuilding Iraq virtually by itself.¹⁷⁵

Blair likewise intervened with Bush in a meeting at Camp David, where he warned that he would not be able to rally domestic political support without the exhaustion of alternatives and a U.N. mandate.¹⁷⁶ In a September 7 NSC meeting, Bush decided to follow Blair and Powell's advice, despite Cheney and Rumsfeld's pleas that Saddam already had enough chances and that the United States should give Iraq 30-60 days to comply and then invade.¹⁷⁷ Rice says that Bush stated: "Either he will come clean about his weapons, or there will be war."¹⁷⁸ On September 12, Bush spoke before the U.N. General Assembly and called for a resolution that would readmit inspectors to Iraq and authorize the use of force if Iraq failed to comply.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² Alan Sipress and Peter Slevin, "Powell Wary of Iraq Move," *Washington Post*, December 21, 2001, A1.

¹⁷³ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 221-224; Bamford, *A Pretext for War*, 268.

¹⁷⁴ Douglas Feith confirms that in a variety of meetings that Powell argued for multilateralism and caution, not containment. Feith, *War and Decision*, 246.

¹⁷⁵ DeYoung, *Soldier*, 401; Baker, *Days of Fire*, 218.

¹⁷⁶ British public opinion in early September 2002 was deadlocked on Iraq, with 47% favoring the use of force to remove Saddam and 47% opposing. See: Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, "What the World Thinks in 2002," December 4, 2002, accessed September 24, 2014, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2002/12/04/what-the-world-thinks-in-2002>.

¹⁷⁷ Rice, *Higher Honor*, 180; Karen DeYoung, "For Powell, a Long Path to Victory," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2002, A1.

¹⁷⁸ Rice, *Higher Honor*, 181.

¹⁷⁹ Bush, "Speech to the U.N. General Assembly," September 12, 2002, 314.

Blair and Powell envisioned that going the “U.N. route” might lead to the peaceful disarmament of Iraq. Powell, for instance, reportedly told Bush on August 5: “If you take it to the U.N., you’ve got to recognize that they might be able to solve it. In which case there’s no war.”¹⁸⁰ In exchange for pursuing this strategy, however, Bush pressed Blair and Powell to promise that if diplomacy failed they would support the use of force.¹⁸¹ They made these pledges despite warnings that the hawks were fixated on war and would not make a good faith effort to back inspections and build multilateral support. Ambassador Meyer, for instance, warned Blair in September that Bush’s instincts were “with the hawks,” that the hawks saw the destruction of Iraq’s WMD as “inseparable from the elimination of Saddam himself,” that “inspections were a discredited instrument,” and that the United Nations was “not to be trusted.”¹⁸²

This Powell-Blair approach was mirrored in public by intellectuals, politicians, and policy-makers who concurred with the regime change consensus and conceded that war with Iraq would be necessary once certain conditions were satisfied. They argued that Iraq policy should be to be more multilateral, to attempt non-violent means of disarming Iraq first, and to plan more realistically for the aftermath of invasion. While the public members of this approach spanned the ideological gamut, they clustered in the leadership of major political parties and institutions. They included leading Democrats like Joseph Biden, Al Gore, and John Kerry, former policymakers like Zbigniew Brzezinski, Sandy Berger, and James Baker, as well as Republicans such as Chuck Hagel and Richard Lugar.

¹⁸⁰ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 178; House of Commons, “Report of the Iraq Inquiry,” July 6, 2016, Vol. 2, Section 3.4, 165.

¹⁸¹ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 178. Blair made a similar pledge in July 2002. See: Note, Blair to Bush, “Note on Iraq,” July 28, 2002, 1.

¹⁸² House of Commons, “Report of the Iraq Inquiry,” July 6, 2016, Vol. 2, Section 3.4, 153.

Adherents of this approach particularly disliked Bush's unilateralism, arguing that the legitimacy of U.S. global power depended on working through partners and rules-based institutions. Bush needed to slow down and build a coalition just as his father had done during the Gulf War, which required a Security Council resolution demanding the return of inspectors.¹⁸³ Gore noted, for instance, that the George H.W. Bush had patiently rallied "every Arab nation except Jordan" and our European and Asian allies "without exception" for a more limited undertaking, in stark contrast to the second Bush's cavalier ambivalence toward his allies.¹⁸⁴ These steps would, in Berger words, help with "isolating Saddam and gaining broader international support for what may be necessary if we fail."¹⁸⁵

Backers of the Powell-Blair approach would not support a war until Bush had taken these steps.¹⁸⁶ This approach would focus the case against Saddam on his repeated defiance of the United Nations, making war an "enforcement of a binding international legal commitment," as Biden put it.¹⁸⁷ They preferred this justification to the doctrine of preventive war, which these skeptics believed alienated allies and corroded international norms against the use of force.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Albert Gore, "Speech at the Commonwealth Club of California Against A Doctrine of Pre-Emptive War," September 23, 2002, in Sifry and Cerf, *Iraq War Reader*, 328; Sandy Berger, "Building Blocks to Iraq," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2002, A27.

¹⁸⁴ Gore, "Speech at Commonwealth Club," 329.

¹⁸⁵ Sandy Berger, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy on Iraq*, 178; Sandy Berger, "We Can Outmaneuver Saddam Hussein," *Washington Post*, October 3, 2002, A19; Wesley Clark, "Let's Wait to Attack," *Time Magazine*, October 14, 2002, 36; Zakaria, "Invade Iraq," 37.

¹⁸⁶ Baker, "Right Way," *New York Times*, August 25, 2002; Editorial, "A Time for Candor on Iraq," *New York Times*, A14.

¹⁸⁷ Joseph Biden, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *UNMOVIC and IAEA Reports to the U.N. Security Council on Inspections in Iraq*, 108th Cong., 1st sess., January 30, 2003, 7.

¹⁸⁸ Gore, "Speech at the Commonwealth Club," 330; Sandy Berger, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy on Iraq*, 205; Gary Ackerman, House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq*: 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 2-3, 2002, 8; Editorial, "The Iraq Debate Continues," *Washington Post*, August 18, 2002, B6.

Brzezinski captured this perspective in saying: “If it is to be war, it should be conducted in a manner that legitimizes U.S. global hegemony and, at the same time, contributes to a more responsible system of international security.”¹⁸⁹

One of the main reasons that members of the Powell-Blair school supported a more multilateral approach was that they believed that war with Iraq would be much harder than the Bush administration promised. As Hagel argued: “I can think of no historical case where the United States succeeded in an enterprise of such gravity and complexity as regime change in Iraq without the support of a regional and international coalition.”¹⁹⁰ They anticipated a costly invasion and occupation as well the risk of a wider regional war if countries like Iran tried to gain influence in a weakened Iraq. If the United States hoped to leave behind a stable, democratic Iraq, it would need a multilateral, multi-year effort.¹⁹¹

Iraq was only part of a broader struggle for adherents to the Powell-Blair approach, and the United States should not jeopardize the coalition they needed to fight terrorism by rushing into Iraq.¹⁹² Gore, for one, claimed that Bush’s narrow obsession with Iraq had “disposed of the sympathy, good will, and solidarity compiled by America and transformed it into a sense of deep misgiving and even hostility.”¹⁹³ These skeptics also believed, like Blair and Powell, in more concerted action on the MEPP as a means of countering extremism.¹⁹⁴ Brzezinski, for instance,

¹⁸⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “If We Must Fight,” *Washington Post*, August 18, 2002, B7; John Kerry, “We Still Have a Choice on Iraq,” *New York Times*, September 6, 2002, A23; Madeleine Albright, “Where Iraq Fits in the War on Terror,” *New York Times*, A27; William Cohen, “The Real Case Against Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2003, A18; Gore, “Speech at the Commonwealth Club,” 328.

¹⁹⁰ Chuck Hagel, *Cong. Rec.*, 71st Cong., 2nd sess., August 1, 2002, 7863.

¹⁹¹ Baker, “Right Way,” *New York Times*, August 25, 2002; Kerry, “Choice on Iraq,” *New York Times*, September 6, 2002; Richard Cohen, “The Dangers of an Unexplained War,” *Washington Post*, July 25, 2002, A21.

¹⁹² Gore, “Speech at the Commonwealth Club,” 329; Berger, “Building Blocks,” *Washington Post*, August 1, 2002.

¹⁹³ Gore “Speech at the Commonwealth Club,” 330.

argued that Bush viewed terrorists too simplistically, describing them as simple “evildoers” who emerged from an “historical void.” Rather, he said that to counter extremism the United States needed to address the many “political antecedent[s]” that fueled it, including colonial legacies, the treatment of Palestinians, and U.S.-backed dictators.¹⁹⁵

While members of the Powell-Blair approach criticized Bush’s case on many points and viewed themselves as skeptics, they nonetheless agreed with the underlying tenets of the regime change consensus. Chuck Hagel, for instance, stated: “I support regime change and a democratic transition in Iraq. That’s easy...the tough questions are when, how, with whom, and at what cost.”¹⁹⁶ Al Gore, for instance, criticized almost every aspect of Bush’s foreign policy but still supported a multilateral military effort at regime change on the grounds of enforcing international law.¹⁹⁷ For proponents of the Powell-Blair approach, the question was how to do regime change correctly, not whether to pursue it. If inspections failed, most of these skeptics conceded that war would be necessary and justified. Baker, for example, argued about Iraqi obstruction of inspectors: “The first time he resorts to those tactics, we should apply whatever means are necessary to change the regime.”¹⁹⁸ In contrast to the conditionalist approach, they usually agreed with Bush that containment had already collapsed and that shifting back to this policy would only lead to more obstruction of inspections while Saddam built additional WMD.

¹⁹⁴ Editorial, “A Coalition for Iraq,” *Washington Post*, March 24, 2002, B6; Brzezinski, “Must Fight,” *Washington Post*, August 18, 2002; Berger, “Building Blocks,” *Washington Post*, August 1, 2002.

¹⁹⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Confronting Anti-American Grievances,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2002, C9; Editorial, “Double Talk on Democracy,” *New York Times*, October 6, 2002, A12.

¹⁹⁶ Charles Hagel, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Threats, Response, and Regional Considerations*, 45.

¹⁹⁷ Gore, “Speech at the Commonwealth Club,” 326.

¹⁹⁸ Baker, “Right Way,” *New York Times*, August 25, 2002; Cohen, “Without Evidence” *Washington Post*, September 10, 2002; Dianne Feinstein, *Cong. Rec.*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., September 5, 2002: 16162.

A sampling of public opinion before the Iraq War shows that the Powell-Blair approach mirrored public views more closely than any other perspective. A Brookings Institution study aptly described U.S. public opinion as “permissive: it was willing to follow the White House to war but not demanding war.” According to their summary of polls, about 30% of Americans implacably believed the war was just and necessary, and another 30% opposed war under almost any circumstance. The other 40% wavered depending on a number of factors.¹⁹⁹ For instance, in one poll from August 2002, backing for invasion dropped from 57% to 36% when respondents were asked if they would support a war that caused “significant” U.S. casualties.²⁰⁰ Americans were far more equivocal about invasion if Saddam had only the potential to produce WMD compared to the possession of actual weapons.²⁰¹ Moreover, Americans consistently wanted Bush to build a broader coalition, try out inspections, and gain U.N. and Congressional authorization for the use of force.²⁰² However, in keeping with the Powell-Blair approach’s pessimism about peaceful solutions, a December 2002 Gallup poll found that 81% of respondents believed that Iraq could only be disarmed if Saddam was overthrown.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ James Lindsay and Caroline Smith, “Rally Round the Flag: Opinion in the United States Before and After the Iraq War,” *Brookings Review* 21, no. 3 (Summer 2003), 21-22.

²⁰⁰ Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, “Poll: Americans Cautiously Favored War in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, August 13, 2002, A10. Another poll found that only 43% of Americans supported invasion if it led to “an expensive, long-term occupation by our troops. See: NBS/Wall Street Journal Telephone Survey, October 21, 2002, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018.

²⁰¹ A Pew survey from January 16, 2003 found that Americans were split 46-47%, yes to no, on the question about Iraqi potential to produce WMD, but in the second scenario support for war surged to 76%. Pew Telephone Survey, January 16, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018.

²⁰² An ABC News/Washington Post Survey from February 24, 2003 found that 56% of respondents wanted the United States to keep trying to “win support” from the United Nations rather than “move quickly” on Iraq. See ABC News/Washington Post Telephone Survey, February 24, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018. One poll from September 7, 2002 found that 62% of Americans believed Bush should gain Congressional approval before trying to remove Saddam. See: CBS News Telephone Survey, September 7, 2002, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018; 93% of respondents in a September 18, 2002 poll supported reinserting inspectors in Iraq under U.N. auspices before considering the use of force. See: Gallup Telephone Survey, September 18, 2002, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018.

In contrast to the Powell-Blair approach, one much smaller school of thought defended containment as a superior option to war by attacking the foundations of the regime change consensus. They continued the conditionalist school of thought by arguing that containment could still be adjusted to new conditions and that without open Iraqi aggression, war was unnecessary. They believed that the Iraqi threat should be measured not by the seemingly fixed intentions of its regime but by its capability to do harm, which could be limited by U.S. actions. They wanted to use the urgency of the post-9/11 political moment to revive containment by tightening the sanctions, re-inserting even tougher inspections, and diplomatically isolating Saddam.²⁰⁴ Key supporters of this argument included policy scholars like Carnegie Endowment President Jessica Matthews and political scientist John Mearsheimer, Democrats like Senators Edward Kennedy and Robert Byrd, and some notable policymakers, including Brent Scowcroft and Richard Haass. Haass was one of the few high-ranking members of the Bush administration to argue for containment while in office.²⁰⁵

One of the key pillars of the pro-containment position was their alternative perspective on Saddam's behavior and psychology. The Bush administration and other hawks believed either that Saddam was irrational and revenge-driven or prone to massive miscalculation. The defenders of containment claimed instead that Saddam mainly desired power and survival, and

²⁰³ Gallup Telephone Survey, December 12, 2002, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018. A January 27, 2003 poll found that 20% of respondents thought "inspections alone" could disarm Iraq, whereas 71% said military action would be required. See Gallup Telephone Survey, January 27, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018. A November 15, 2002 poll likewise found that 76% of respondents believed inspections would not eliminate the Iraqi threat. See: Time/CNN Telephone Survey, November 15, 2002, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018.

²⁰⁴ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 211; Michael O'Hanlon, House Committee on Armed Services, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 2, 2002, 349-352; Morton Halperin, "A Case for Containment," *Washington Post*, February 11, 2003, A21; Michael Walzer, "The Right Way," *New York Times Book Review*, March 13, 2003, 34.

²⁰⁵ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 222-223, 233. Haass wrote a memo to Powell to this effect in early 2003, but he claims it did not change the policy direction.

containment had kept him preoccupied with domestic security rather than external aggression.²⁰⁶ Moreover, they argued that Saddam's major acts of aggression, supposed signs of the uselessness of deterrence, actually had not been deterred by the United States. John Mearsheimer noted that Saddam's invasion of Iran sought limited goals and responded in part to Iranian subversion.²⁰⁷ The United States actually supported Saddam during this war, even when he used chemical weapons on the Kurds. This crime, however heinous, did not demonstrate that Saddam would use WMD on Americans because the Kurds, unlike the Americans, could not respond in kind. In 1990, the United States also failed to signal to Saddam that he should not invade Kuwait. Mearsheimer claimed: "Deterrence did not fail in this case; it was never tried."²⁰⁸

Under containment, in contrast, Saddam had avoided open aggression and quickly withdrawn his own threats when the United States threatened him back, as he did in the 1994 Kuwaiti border crisis. The lesson here for Mearsheimer and other defenders of containment was: "Iraq has never gone to war in the face of a clear deterrent threat." There was no reason to think 9/11 had changed this fact, especially when Saddam's military still had not recovered from the Gulf War and sanctions.²⁰⁹ Even if inspections did not fully succeed and Saddam developed some WMD, the threat of massive U.S. retaliation would still deter him. Thus, Mearsheimer and

²⁰⁶ Jessica Matthews, "The Wrong Target," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2002, A19; Michael O'Hanlon and Philip Gordon, "Is Fighting Iraq Worth the Risks?" *New York Times*, July 25, 2002, A17; Thomas Ricks, "Ex-Commander Opposes Iraq Invasion," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2002, A7; Patrick Leahy, *Cong. Rec.*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., September 26, 2002: 18180; Morton Halperin, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Threats, Responses, and Regional Considerations*, 82.

²⁰⁷ John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "An Unnecessary War," *Foreign Policy* 134, (Jan.-Feb. 2003), 52-52.

²⁰⁸ Mearsheimer and Walt, "Unnecessary War," 53.

²⁰⁹ Quote is from Mearsheimer and Walt, "Unnecessary War," 54. For similar arguments, see: O'Hanlon, House Armed Services Committee, "Policy Toward Iraq," 353; William Delahunt, House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization For Use of Military Force: Markup*, 116; Richard Betts, "Suicide From Fear of Death?" *Foreign Affairs* 38, no. 5 (January, 2003), 38.

other defenders of containment contested a key idea shared by the Bush administration and the Powell-Blair approach: the claim that if inspections failed then war would become necessary.²¹⁰

The pro-containment school also dissented from the widely held idea that 9/11 should change the way Americans viewed Iraq. They argued that 9/11 changed Americans' psychology and worldview, while the Iraqi threat remained the same.²¹¹ The core of the nexus concept, Iraqi handoff of WMD to international terrorists, was as unrealistic now after 9/11 as it was beforehand. Scowcroft argued, for instance, that there was "scant evidence to tie Saddam to terrorist organizations," that Iraq and al-Qaeda held disparate goals and ideals, and that Saddam was "unlikely to risk his investment in weapons of mass destruction, much less his country, by handing such weapons to terrorists who would use them for their own purposes."²¹² Saddam mainly wanted these weapons to "deter us from intervening to block his aggressive designs" and to protect himself from domestic and regional challengers.²¹³ The 98-year-old George Kennan echoed this assessment, calling the administration's attempts to link Iraq and al-Qaeda "pathetically unsupportive and unreliable," adding that the invasion "seems to me well out of proportion to the dangers involved."²¹⁴

Defenders of containment further argued that a global consensus had arisen around stopping al-Qaeda, and the United States should keep its focus there rather than take on a

²¹⁰ Mearsheimer and Walt, "Unnecessary War," 57; Nicholas Kristof, "War and Wisdom," *New York Times*, February 7, 2003, A25.

²¹¹ Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 516.

²¹² Brent Scowcroft, "Don't Attack Saddam," *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2002, A12. For similar arguments, see: Daniel Benjamin, "Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda Are Not Allies," *New York Times*, September 30, 2002, A25; Paul Krugman, "Still Living Dangerously," *New York Times*, October 15, 2002, A27; Mearsheimer and Walt, "Unnecessary War," 57-58.

²¹³ Scowcroft, "Don't Attack," *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2002.

²¹⁴ Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 398.

divisive and costly war with Iraq.²¹⁵ They maintained that Iraq was not the most dangerous rogue state, often pointing to North Korea. North Korea possessed an active uranium enrichment program and in October 2002 announced it was restarting several reactors and withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in violation of the 1994 Agreed Framework.²¹⁶ While these actions far exceeded Saddam's suspected activities, Bush claimed that this was a "diplomatic showdown" and that the United States had "no intention of invading" North Korea.²¹⁷ Senator Russ Feingold noted that the discrepancy between U.S. policies toward Iraq and North Korea suggested a clear lesson for any rogue state: "Acquire weapons and then be free from the threat of military action, or do not acquire weapons and then perhaps be subject to invasion." Thus, preventive war in Iraq would incentivize WMD proliferation rather than curb it.²¹⁸

Many pro-containment figures also challenged the morality and legality of Bush's case for war. Bush had not shown that Saddam could strike the United States, much less imminent plans to do so, making the war preventive rather than preemptive.²¹⁹ The doctrine of preventive war could not become "an acceptable norm of international behavior" lest any state cite the mere possibility of being struck as justification for striking first.²²⁰ Preventive war would lower the bar

²¹⁵ Haass, *War of Necessity*, 200-201; Joseph Nye, "Attacking Iraq Now Would Harm War on Terror," *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2002, A26; Scowcroft, "Don't Attack," *Wall Street Journal*, A12.

²¹⁶ Robert Litwak, *Regime Change: U.S. Strategy Through the Prism of 9/11* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2007), 267.

²¹⁷ Litwak, *Regime Change*, 269; David Sanger, "President Makes Case that North Korea is No Iraq," *New York Times*, January 1, 2003, A1; Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 346.

²¹⁸ Russell Feingold, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *UNMOVIC and IAEA Reports*, 39; Matthews, "Wrong Target," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2002; John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "Keeping Saddam Hussein in a Box," *New York Time*, February 2, 2003, A15.

²¹⁹ William Galston, "Perils of Preemptive War," *The American Prospect*, September 23, 2002, 15; Walzer, "Right Way," 34.

²²⁰ Quote is from Matthews, "Wrong Target," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2002. See also: Editorial, "Saying No to War," *New York Times*, March 9, 2003, A1; See statements of Sherrod Brown, Barbara Lee, and William Delahunt

for violence from imminence and self-defense to suspicion and fear, possibly even excusing thinly veiled aggression.²²¹ Other countries, as Robert Byrd argued, saw the United States as asserting “the right to turn its firepower on any corner of the globe which might be suspect in the war on terrorism. We assert that right without the sanction of any international body.”²²² Humanitarian intervention, moreover, did not justify an invasion because Saddam’s worst crimes occurred over a decade ago, and the regime was horrible but not uniquely immoral.²²³

Lastly, like area experts in the U.S. government, defenders of containment cast doubt on the idea that the war would be easy and the Iraqi people would welcome Americans as liberators. Nicholas Kristof, for instance, had travelled to Iraq and encountered great hostility for the United States, which Iraqis saw as a new colonial power that had caused immense Iraqi suffering under sanctions. One university president waved a pencil in Kristof’s face and said angrily: “You see this? It took 15 months just to import pencils for our students.”²²⁴ Democratic transformation was a neoconservative fantasy, these critics argued, as neither the region nor Iraq had any preconditions for democracy or liberalism.²²⁵ They also excoriated the administration for inadequate preparation for occupying and rebuilding an economically devastated and socially divided country. The more probable outcome of invasion was retribution and civil war along

in House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq: Markup*, 17, 34, 116.

²²¹ Edward Kennedy, *Cong. Rec.*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 7, 2002: 10001; Robert Byrd, *Cong. Rec.*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 7, 2002: 10007.

²²² Robert Byrd, “Speech in the Senate,” March 19, 2003, salon.com, accessed September 25, 2018, <https://www.salon.com/2008/03/19/byrd/>.

²²³ Michael Walzer, “No Strikes: Inspectors Yes, War No,” *The New Republic*, September 30, 2002, 19-20.

²²⁴ Nicholas Kristof, “The Stones of Baghdad,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2002, A27.

²²⁵ Adam Garfinkle, “The Impossible Imperative?” Conjuring Arab Democracy,” *The National Interest* 69, (Fall 2002), 156-167. Tony Judt, “The Wrong War at the Wrong Time,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2002, C11.

ethnic lines, interference from regional actors, and terrorist groups finding haven and recruits in the chaos.²²⁶

While the pro-containment position occupied a thin slice on the U.S. spectrum of thought on Iraq, it was a mainstream viewpoint in countries like France and Germany. French President Jacques Chirac and German Prime Minister Gerhard Schroeder did not believe that Saddam represented a severe enough threat to justify war. They disputed the Americans' dire assessment of Iraq's WMD programs and claimed that the MEPP was the key to deflating radicalism in the region.²²⁷ Chirac warned Bush in February 2003 that "war will have catastrophic consequences, including on terrorism throughout the entire world."²²⁸ Chirac, Schroeder, and other leaders feared that Bush was driving U.S. foreign policy in a unilateral and unethical direction, including violations of international law like indefinite detention and "enhanced" interrogation techniques.²²⁹ For France, Germany, China, and Russia, containment through inspections would control Saddam's WMD programs and limit his menace to the region. Schroeder ruled out German participation in a war completely, with or without a U.N. mandate, and France refused to consider the question until inspections had a chance to disarm Iraq peacefully.²³⁰

²²⁶ Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 522; Michael O'Hanlon, "The Price of Stability," *New York Times*, October 22, 2002, A31; Anthony Cordesman, "Security and WMD Issues in a Post-Saddam Iraq," February 11, 2003, csis.org, accessed January 26, 2019, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/attachments/ts030211_cordesman.pdf, 2-4.

²²⁷ Frederic Bozo, *A History of the Iraq Crisis: France, The United States, and Iraq, 1991-2003* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2016), 111. David Malone, *The International Struggle Over Iraq: Politics in the U.N. Security Council, 1980-2005* (New York: Oxford University, 2005), 192.

²²⁸ Frederic Bozo, "'We Don't Need You': France, the United States, and Iraq, 1991-2003," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 1 (January 2017), 200; Joschka Fischer, "Address Before the United Nations Security Council," March 19, 2003, in *The Iraq Papers*, ed. John Ehrenberg, J. Patrice McSherry, Jose Sanchez, and Caroleen Sayej (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 154-157.

²²⁹ Rubin, 59; Steven Erlanger, "Russian Aide Warns U.S. Not to Extend War to Iraq," *New York Times*, February 4, 2002, A10.

The other significant group that opposed the Iraq War was the political and intellectual left. Unlike the pro-containment school, the left argued that both containment and war were immoral and unnecessary. A key underlying premise of the leftist approach was that the United States had little moral high ground in the struggle against extremism in the Middle East. As activists like Phyllis Bennis argued, the United States had bombed and starved the Iraqi people, supported dictators, and backed Israeli aggression.²³¹ For the left, 9/11 was an unjustifiable but predictable manifestation of a justified subaltern rage at U.S. crimes and hypocrisy. As scholar Noam Chomsky put it: “We can think of the United States as an ‘innocent victim’ only if we adopt the convenient path of ignoring the record of its actions and those of its allies.”²³² Leftists like historian Howard Zinn said that now that Americans had a taste of the suffering of “the victims of American military action—in Vietnam, in Latin America, in Iraq,” they should rethink their capitalistic and hegemonic foreign policy.²³³ From this vantage point, another U.S. war in the Middle East would only exacerbate terrorism and extremism.

The anti-war left also argued that human rights, democracy, and the nexus threat were all pretexts for an aggressive, illegal war in the name of oil interests and a vision of “absolute military hegemony over the earth.”²³⁴ Containment was hardly better, given its dependence on

²³⁰ James Rubin, “Stumbling into War,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (Sep.-Oct., 2003), 52; Fischer, “Address Before the United Nations Security Council,” March 19, 2003, in *The Iraq Papers*, 154-157; Malone, *International Struggle*, 192.

²³¹ Phyllis Bennis, “The Failure of U.S. Policy Toward Iraq and Proposed Alternatives,” *Middle East Policy* 8, no. 3 (September, 2001), 104-107.

²³² Noam Chomsky, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories, 2001), 35; Susan Sontag, “Reflections on September 11th,” in Sifry and Cerf, *Iraq War Reader*, 215.

²³³ Howard Zinn quoted in *Christopher Hitchens and His Critics: Terror, Iraq, and the Left*, ed. Simon Cottee and Thomas Cushman (New York: New York University Press, 2008); 12. See also Noam Chomsky, “Drain the Swamp and There Will Be No More Mosquitoes,” in Sifry and Cerf, *Iraq War Reader*, 302.

immoral sanctions. Left-wing Democrats like Dennis Kucinich argued that the United States should support inspections but lift economic sanctions and end the no-fly zones.²³⁵ They hoped that this strategy would enable a middle class to regrow in Iraq and possibly moderate the regime.²³⁶ Even the anti-war left did not support containment, which shows how narrow a slice of the political and intellectual spectrum the defenders of containment occupied.

The pro-containment and leftist viewpoints failed to gain broad support because they did not appeal to the standard “lessons” embedded in the now-dominant regime change consensus. The shared Bush and Powell-Blair view that Saddam was developing a major WMD program and possibly supporting al-Qaeda fit with what had become ingrained perceptions of the dictator and his regime over the course of the 1990s. Moreover, the leftists possessed little institutional power, and neither school addressed the post-9/11 atmosphere of fear and vulnerability that primed the public to accept the potent, if inflated, case for war. Again, defenders of containment could only spell out the end point of this policy in vague terms. The key, as former Clinton official Morton Halperin argued, was to avoid putting a time limit on a policy that was basically working.²³⁷ This seemingly indefinite toleration of a rogue actor like Saddam had always been a flaw in containment’s political viability, and it fit especially poorly with the post-9/11 climate.

²³⁴ Quote is from Jonathan Schell, “The Case Against the War,” *The Nation*, March 3, 2003, 17. See also: Editorial, “The War on Iraq is Wrong,” *The Nation*, July 8, 2002, 3-5; Arundathi Roy, “Wars Are Never Fought for Altruistic Reasons,” in Sifry and Cerf, *Iraq War Reader*, 341-342.

²³⁵ Dennis Kucinich, *Cong. Rec.*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., September 18, 2002: 17010. See also Editorial, “War on Iraq is Wrong,” *The Nation*, July 8, 2002, 5; Phyllis Bennis, “The UN, the US, and Iraq,” *The Nation*, November 11, 2002, 9.

²³⁶ Editorial, “War on Iraq is Wrong,” *The Nation*, July 8, 2002, 4.

²³⁷ Morton Halperin, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Threats, Responses, and Regional Considerations*, 82. Halperin was the State Department’s Director of Policy Planning from 1998-2001.

Congress, Inspections, and the Coming of the Iraq War, October 2002-March 2003

In the months before the war began on March 20, 2003, skeptics of Bush's case for war had two major chances to impede the rush to war or find alternative means for disarming Iraq. The first was the Congressional debate in September and October 2002 over authorizing the President to use force. The second was the process of inspections itself, which restarted in November 2002. Nevertheless, followers of the Powell-Blair approach continued to argue in procedural terms without challenging the Bush administration's fundamental assumptions about the Iraqi threat, which they shared to a large degree. Congress, which was shaped by this line of thought, put no meaningful restrictions on Bush's authority to use force against Iraq, focusing instead on ensuring that he put a real effort into diplomacy and inspections. The Congressional debates on Iraq and the broader public conversation about inspections in late 2002 and early 2003 generally receive less scholarly attention than the ideas and internal deliberations of the Bush administration. However, these discourses reveal just how narrow and ineffective the Powell-Blair criticism of Bush's Iraq policy was and how its shortcomings facilitated the coming of war in March 2003.

Moreover, members of the Powell-Blair approach conceded to the Bush administration that the success of inspections would be measured by Saddam's level of compliance rather than the degree to which inspections constrained his WMD programs or whether or not inspectors found anything substantial. Like the hawks, they believed in what might be called "inspections entropy," a perceived lesson of the 1990s experience. Eventually, within this logic, the world would abandon tough inspections, Iraq would start obstructing, and the process would collapse, letting Saddam off the hook again.²³⁸ This section's narratives of the Congressional debate and

²³⁸ Editorial, "Iraq's False Response," *Washington Post*, November 17, 2002, B6; Editorial, "Decisive Days for Iraq," *New York Times*, December 6, 2002, A34.

the inspections process demonstrates that the Powell-Blair school's arguments for proper Congressional authorization and a last chance for inspections were mostly procedural, designed for pursuing regime change "the right way" rather than exploring alternatives.

Congressional debate started when the Bush administration sent a draft authorization to Congress on September 13, 2002. Many Democrats and some Republicans objected to this draft, which carved out war powers that could be read as extending beyond Iraq.²³⁹ Joseph Biden and Richard Lugar, both skeptics of the Bush case who followed the Powell-Blair approach, drafted a bill that required Bush to receive Security Council authorization for the use of force after inspections had failed. Alternatively, under this version Bush could issue a presidential determination that the threat to the United States was "so grave" that he needed to strike without U.N. support.²⁴⁰ Whereas the White House resolution authorized the President to enforce all Security Council resolutions relevant to Iraq, the Biden-Lugar version authorized force only for U.N. resolutions relating to WMD disarmament.²⁴¹

Bush announced a deal with House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt on October 2 that sidelined the Biden-Lugar bill and added a few more conditions in exchange for broader Democratic support.²⁴² The final resolution, House Joint Resolution 114 (H.J. Res. 114) required the President to issue a determination to Congress within 48 hours of launching any military action regarding why diplomatic measures could no longer protect national security or enforce

²³⁹ Chuck Hagel, interview by Wil Hylton, January 21, 2007, GQ.com, Accessed October 20, 2018, <https://www.gq.com/story/repulican-senator-chuck-hagel-war>.

²⁴⁰ Miles Pomper, "Evolution of the Resolutions," *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, October 5, 2002, 2607.

²⁴¹ Elizabeth Bumiller, "Bush Strikes Deal for House Backing on Action in Iraq," *New York Times*, October 3, 2002, A1.

²⁴² Packer, *Assassins' Gate*, 388; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 200.

the Security Council's resolutions. This resolution limited Bush's authority specifically to Iraq, whereas the original White House resolution more broadly authorized Bush to use force to "restore international peace and security in the region."²⁴³ Nonetheless, this resolution featured essentially the same authorization of force as the White House draft, empowering Bush to "defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq" and to "enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq."²⁴⁴

On October 10, 2002, the House voted 296-133 for H.J. Res. 114, and the next day the Senate passed the same resolution by a vote of 77-23. Democrats voted against this bill 126-82 in the House 29-21 in favor in the Senate.²⁴⁵ Republicans echoed Bush's case for war, and they voted overwhelmingly in favor of H.J. Res 114. The Senate was equally divided and the Republicans had a slim majority in the House, making Democratic votes vital for creating these large margins. In contrast to this vote, 179 out of 265 Democrats in the House and 45 of 55 in the Senate voted for the January 1991 authorization for the Gulf War.²⁴⁶

Democrats and skeptical Republicans who supported the authorization argued that a united domestic front was the best way to convince the United Nations to support a tough resolution against Saddam, which was ultimately the best way to resolve the crisis without war.²⁴⁷ They also appeared to believe that Bush would thoroughly pursue the U.N. route. Chuck

²⁴³ S.J. Res. 45, September 26, 2002, govtrack.us, accessed November 2, 2018, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/sjres45/summary>

²⁴⁴ H.J. Res. 114-Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002, Congress.gov, October 10, 2002, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-joint-resolution/114>

²⁴⁵ H.J. Res. 114-Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002, October 10, 2002,

²⁴⁶ Carroll Dohery and Pat Towell, "Democrats Try to Bury Image Of Foreign Policy Weakness," *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, March 23, 1991, 752-759.

²⁴⁷ See Statements of Howard Berman, Gary Ackerman, and Robert Wexler in: House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq: Markup*, 5, 7, 21.

Hagel, for example, recalled: “I was told by the president-we all were-that he would exhaust every diplomatic effort.”²⁴⁸ Every prospective candidate for the 2004 presidential election, including Kerry, Gephardt, Edwards, and Liebermann, voted for the resolution and mostly supported Bush’s arguments.²⁴⁹ They were also influenced by the post-9/11 mood, as one Congressman said that Democrats “have changed in the same way the American people have changed. We are acutely aware of how vulnerable the country is.”²⁵⁰

The desire to look tough on foreign policy before the 2002 midterm elections also influenced Democrats, many of whom were still trying to shed the post-Vietnam impression that they were weak and irresponsible on foreign affairs. Bush still held high approval ratings, and he carried great political momentum from his seeming successes in Afghanistan. Indeed, many Republicans used Iraq and the War on Terror to assail Democrats’ patriotism. Bush himself argued on September 13 that Democrats could not “wait for the United Nations to make a decision” before they voted. He added: “If I were running for office, I’m not sure how I would explain to the American people...you know ‘Vote for me, and oh, by the way, on a matter of national security, I think I’m going to wait for somebody else to act.”²⁵¹ Democrats like Gephardt regretted that they had voted against the successful Persian Gulf War, and they feared further political fallout for not endorsing this war.²⁵² The Republicans nevertheless picked up eight seats

²⁴⁸ Hagel, interview by Wil Hylton, January 21, 2007, GQ.com.

²⁴⁹ Dan Balz, “Democratic Hopefuls Back Bush on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, September 14, 2002, A4.

²⁵⁰ Jim VandeHei and Julie Eilperin, “9/11 Changed Equation for Democrats,” *Washington Post*, October 6, 2002, A1.

²⁵¹ Miles Pomper, “Lawmakers Pushing Back from Quick Vote on Iraq,” *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, September 14, 2002, 2352-2357; Alison Mitchell, “Republicans Wielding Iraq as an Issue in Senate Races in Conservative States,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2002, A28.

²⁵² VandeHei and Eilperin, “Changed Equation,” *Washington Post*, October 6, 2002; Ricks, *Fiasco*, 61-64; Julian Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 460-461.

in the House and regained control of the Senate in the midterms in November, using several Democrats' votes against the Iraq resolution to great effect.²⁵³

Democrats who voted against the resolution saw it as a vast and unjustified grant of authority, in advance of diplomacy, to declare war against an exaggerated threat.²⁵⁴ Prominent Democrats who voted no included Carl Levin, Robert Byrd, and Edward Kennedy. Nevertheless, attempts by pro-containment Democrats to more substantially restrain the President's authority were both limited in scope and unsuccessful. Levin introduced a resolution that authorized Bush to use force only if he received a U.N. mandate. Nonetheless, upon presenting his resolution, Levin said: "I don't differ much from Bush in his detailing of the threat posed by Saddam." Levin mainly sought to prevent the United States from taking unilateral action against Iraq and to bind Bush more tightly to diplomacy.²⁵⁵

Furthermore, in the markup of H.J. Res. 114 in the House International Relations Committee, a group of Democrats proposed twelve alternative resolutions. Brad Sherman (D-CA) introduced a resolution that struck every justification for the use of force from H.J. Res 114 except those relating to WMD. This resolution treated WMD as the sole legitimate reason for invading Iraq, given other countries' dismal human rights practices.²⁵⁶ His draft authorized force only if the President certified that Iraq had refused to readmit or cooperate with inspectors.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy*, 464.

²⁵⁴ Barbara Lee, House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq: Markup*, 35; Patrick Leahy, *Cong. Rec.*, September 26, 2002: 18178; Russell Feingold, *Cong. Rec.*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., September 26, 2002, 18234.

²⁵⁵ Carl Levin, *Cong. Rec.*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 9, 2002, 10191-10192.

²⁵⁶ Jo Ann Davis, House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for the Use of Force Against Iraq: Markup*, 145.

²⁵⁷ Brad Sherman, House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq: Markup*, 75-77.

Most resolutions from skeptical Congressmen like Sherman still authorized Bush to use force, merely requiring him to offer more elaborate determinations to Congress that other means had failed. Sherman framed his amendment, for example, as authorizing Bush to take the “Powell-Blair approach,” justifying war once inspections had been tried and encouraging but not requiring a U.N. mandate. Under his resolution, if the United States does go to war, Sherman argued “We do so with considerably more international support and considerably more domestic support than we would have otherwise.”²⁵⁸

Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced a far more restrictive amendment that noted the success of inspections in the 1990s in dismantling most of Iraq’s WMD program. Her draft struck the entire war powers clause from H.J. 114 and called for the United States to pursue only diplomatic means at this time. Lee called for “an enhanced containment system,” tough military sanctions, and long-term inspections as an alternative to regime change.²⁵⁹ Her resolution was rare in mandating a second Congressional vote after diplomacy had been attempted and for arguing that containment had managed the Iraqi threat well. None of these resolutions, however, gained much steam. Levin’s amendment failed in the Senate 24-75, and Lee’s failed in the House 72-355. Sherman’s amendment failed 31-15 in committee, with most Democrats voting no in large part to avoid upsetting the Gephardt’s deal with the President.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Sherman, House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq: Markup*, 80, 86.

²⁵⁹ Barbara Lee, *Cong. Rec.*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 10, 2002: H7740.

²⁶⁰ Vote count for the Sherman amendment can be found in: House Committee on International Relations, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq: Markup*, 97. For the Lee amendment, see H. AMDT. 608, October 10, 2002, Accessed November 12, 2018 <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2002/roll452.xml>; For the Levin Amendment, see: S. AMDT. 4862, October 10, 2002, Accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.c-span.org/congress/bills/bill/?107/samdt4862>

Robert Byrd was the only Senate Democrat who did not support the opening of debate on Iraq, and he eventually voted against the authorization.²⁶¹ On October 10, he upbraided his peers for handing over vast war powers and failing to challenge a President who was “changing the conventional understanding of the term ‘self-defense’” and using the upcoming midterm election to silence dissent. In his eyes, Congress had abdicated its responsibility to conduct a substantive debate about the war. His words capture the narrow terms of the Congressional debate on Iraq:

The debate that began in the Senate last week is centered not on the fundamental and monumental questions of whether and why the United States should go to war with Iraq, but rather on the mechanics of how to best wordsmith the president’s use of force resolution in order to give him virtually unchecked authority to commit the nation’s military to an unprovoked attack on a sovereign nation.²⁶²

Most Democrats who voted for the authorization continued to criticize Bush’s Iraq policy, but in October 2002 they gave away their main opportunity to restrain the Bush administration.

Following the passage of H.J. Res. 114, members of the Powell-Blair approach saw inspections and coercive diplomacy as the best opportunity to resolve the Iraq confrontation peacefully. Throughout the fall of 2002, Powell worked at the Security Council to draft such a resolution, which passed as Resolution 1441 on November 8. This resolution declared that Iraq “remains in material breach” of its obligation to disarm and afforded Iraq “a final opportunity to comply” with these demands by cooperating with new inspections. The inspections would be conducted by the IAEA under Mohammed el-Baradei, which would handle nuclear weapons, and UNMOVIC under Hans Blix, which would focus on chemical and biological weapons as well as ballistic missiles. Resolution 1441 mandated that Iraq provide these teams “immediate, unimpeded, unconditional, and unrestricted access” to any site, equipment, or person, including

²⁶¹ Alison Mitchell, “Lawmakers Begin Push to Give Bush Authority on Iraq,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2002, A1.

²⁶² Robert Byrd, “Congress Must Resist the Rush to War,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2002, A39.

the so-called “presidential sites” that had caused tension in 1998.²⁶³ Ideally, the inspectors would destroy all of Iraq’s remaining WMD programs and verify disarmament to the Security Council. If Iraq did not cooperate, Resolution 1441 warned that “it will face serious consequences.”²⁶⁴ Iraq accepted this resolution and readmitted inspectors at the end of November.

This resolution, however, papered over serious disagreements between the United States and Great Britain on one side and France, Russia, and China on the other. The United States believed that the phrase “serious consequences” authorized force without further Security Council approval. In contrast, France, Russia, and China argued that before the Security Council authorized the use of force, the inspectors must report that Iraq was not complying and the Security Council must vote again on an explicit authorization.²⁶⁵ In contrast to the United States, Tony Blair supported this idea of a “second resolution” in order to augment international support for the war and to legitimize it to a doubtful audience at home.²⁶⁶ Resolution 1441 did not define how frequent or severe Iraqi non-compliance had to be to trigger the use of force, nor did it specify how long inspections should be allowed to continue. These ambiguities were necessary for passing Resolution 1441 given France, Russia, and China’s deep skepticism about war, and these disagreements would reemerge as inspections proceeded in the winter of 2002-2003.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ “Resolution 1441,” 97.

²⁶⁴ “Resolution 1441,” 98.

²⁶⁵ In the parlance of U.N. Security Council Resolutions, the phrase “all necessary means” is considered an authorization of the use of force whereas “serious consequences” is not. “In the Diplomats’ Own Words,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2002, A10; Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 108-114.

²⁶⁶ House of Commons, “Report of the Iraq Inquiry,” July 6, 2016, Vol. 2, Section 3.5, 215, 242.

²⁶⁷ Malone, *International Struggle*, 194-195; Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 114.

The Bush administration and other hawks could hardly mask their distrust in inspections, which they had held since the 1990s. In early October, Christopher Meyer observed that within the Cabinet: “The points of disagreement were relatively narrow: no one doubts that inspections will fail, the argument is how hard to try for international support for the war.”²⁶⁸ Rumsfeld and Cheney feared that the United States would once again become mired in Saddam’s inspections games, undermining the momentum toward war and dividing the Security Council. Cheney openly disparaged inspections, claiming that in the 1990s they had “consistently underestimated or missed what it was Saddam Hussein was doing.”²⁶⁹ He added: “A return of the inspectors would provide no assurance whatsoever of his compliance...On the contrary, there is a great danger that it would provide false comfort that Saddam was somehow back in his box.”²⁷⁰ As inspections dragged on, as Rumsfeld warned: “Saddam’s preparations to use weapons of mass destruction can be expected to advance daily.”²⁷¹

The Bush administration contended that the standard of evidence for inspections should be simple: Was Saddam fully complying and turning over all relevant materials or not? This standard emerged from the lessons the hawks derived from the 1990s. Rumsfeld wrote to Bush that UNMOVIC’s bureaucrats and scientists would be unable to “catch Saddam Hussein, as it were, with his pants down. The long history of weapons inspections in Iraq tells us that this is highly unlikely.”²⁷² Without such a “flagrant obstruction” by the Iraqis, the process would

²⁶⁸ House of Commons, “Report of the Iraq Inquiry,” July 6, 2016, Vol. 2, Section 3.5, 252

²⁶⁹ Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation,” 42.

²⁷⁰ “Cheney’s Words” *New York Times*, August 27, 2002. See also: Christopher Marquis, “Cheney Doubts Weapons Inspectors Can End Baghdad’s Threat,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2002, A4.

²⁷¹ Memorandum, Donald Rumsfeld to George W. Bush, “UN Inspections of Iraq,” October 14, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 1. See also Rumsfeld testimony in Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy on Iraq*, 69.

inevitably stall in “a protracted period of inconclusive inspections” that offered Saddam his “best hope of inflicting a strategic defeat on the U.S.”²⁷³ They contended instead that past inspections owed most of their success to defections from Iraqi personnel.²⁷⁴ As Rumsfeld argued, even tough inspections had been insufficient: “Even intrusive inspections over several years missed significant parts of the Iraq program and failed to detect an ongoing buildup.”²⁷⁵ Bush officials claimed: “inspections only work in a country that wants to cooperate with them,” pointing to the example of South Africa’s voluntary dismantling of its nuclear program in the early 1990s.²⁷⁶ If Iraq decided to hide its programs, as Powell argued, “they can inspect for 12 years and not get anywhere.”²⁷⁷ Several former inspectors, including David Kay, Richard Spertzel, and Charles Duelfer, supported this standard of evidence and predicted that inspections would fail.²⁷⁸

The hawks concluded that inspectors should not be detectives but verifiers of Iraqi compliance. The hawks envisioned inspections as a test of “whether the Iraqi leadership has had a change of heart and is actually willing to give up the weapons.”²⁷⁹ If Iraq would “answer

²⁷² Memorandum, Rumsfeld to Bush, October 14, 2002, 1.

²⁷³ “Flagrant obstruction” and “best hope” are from: Memorandum, Rumsfeld to Bush, October 14, 2002, 1. “Protracted period” is from: Memorandum, Donald Rumsfeld to Richard Cheney, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice, “Iraqi Inspections/UN Strategy,” October 14, 2002, Digital National Security Archive, Targeting Iraq Part 1, 2.

²⁷⁴ Walter Pincus, “Rumsfeld Disputes Value of Iraq Arms Inspections,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 2002, A13; Donald Rumsfeld, Senate Armed Services Committee, *U.S. Policy on Iraq*, 30; Richard Perle, House Committee on Armed Services, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, 287.

²⁷⁵ Memorandum, Rumsfeld to Cheney, Powell, and Rice, October 14, 2002, 1.

²⁷⁶ Rumsfeld, interview by Clancy, October 24, 2002.

²⁷⁷ Transcript, Face the Nation Interview with Colin Powell by Bob Schieffer, November 10, 2002, Anthony Lewis Papers, Part II, Box 489, Folder 3, Iraq (1 of 4), Library of Congress, 3.

²⁷⁸ Charles Duelfer, “Inspections in Iraq? Be Careful What You Ask For,” *Washington Post*, January 9, 2002, A19; Richard Spertzel, “Iraq’s Faux Capitulation,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 24, 2002, A18; David Kay, “It Was Never About a Smoking Gun,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 2003, B3; Charles Duelfer, *Hide and Seek: The Search for Truth in Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 215

questions without being asked” and disclose programs “fully and voluntarily,” it could demonstrate this change of heart.²⁸⁰ Rumsfeld even suggested that it should only require one or two inspectors to verify Iraq’s decision.²⁸¹ Iraq was too large and the government was too “skilled at hiding and cheating” for inspections to anything besides measure changed strategic intentions “at the highest political level.”²⁸² If Iraq issued a false declaration of its WMD, Rumsfeld argued in October, “The U.N. should not proceed with inspections, for it would be clear then that there is lacking the good faith and cooperative attitude necessary to make the inspections work.”²⁸³ The experience of the 1990s showed that if, as Bush claimed, “Iraq’s leaders stall inspections and impede their progress, it means they have something to hide.”²⁸⁴ This was a crucial claim: even if the inspectors did not find illicit weapons programs, mere Iraqi obstruction or delay would demonstrate that these activities persisted. This standard freed the administration to invade Iraq even if the inspectors did not find major WMD programs.

In a sort of intellectual cul-de-sac, the Bush administration and other hawks maintained that because of the nature of Saddam and his regime, there was almost no chance that he would meet this standard of compliance. When asked by a Congressman if the inspections might disarm Iraq and leave Saddam in power, Rumsfeld replied “Boy, that is a reach,” even though going the

²⁷⁹ Memorandum, Rumsfeld to Bush, October 14, 2002, 1.

²⁸⁰ State Department, Report, “What Does Disarmament Look Like?” January 23, 2003, State.gov, accessed July 11, 2018, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/isn/rls/other/16820.htm>, 2.

²⁸¹ Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 216.

²⁸² State Department, “What Does Disarmament Look Like?” 1.

²⁸³ Memorandum, Rumsfeld to Bush, October 14, 2002, 1; George Bush, “Remarks on the Passage of a United Nations Security Council Resolution on Iraq,” November 8, 2002, American Presidency Project, Accessed July 23, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=73175&st=iraq&st1=>.

²⁸⁴ “Transcript of Bush’s Remarks on the Security Council’s Iraq Resolution,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2002, A12.

U.N. route was predicated on the idea that if inspections succeeded war could be avoided.²⁸⁵

Cheney, for example, said in a speech on August 27, 2002: “Intelligence is an uncertain business, even in the best of circumstances. This is especially the case when you are dealing with a totalitarian regime that has made a science out of deceiving the international community.”²⁸⁶

When the inspectors failed to find an active nuclear program in Iraq by early 2003, Rice deployed a similar response: “We need to be careful about drawing these conclusions, particularly in a totalitarian state like Iraq.”²⁸⁷ Thus, the totalitarian Baathists’ mastery in subterfuge and fabrication would trump the inspectors, leaving regime change as the only option.

The Bush administration’s skepticism of the inspections process reflected its suspicion of the United Nations as a body that sought to restrain U.S. power and coddle dictators. Many hawks distrusted officials like Hans Blix, whom they believed were so “eager to avoid a war” that they might prevaricate on Iraqi behavior or “declare Iraq in compliance when it is not.”²⁸⁸ Cheney even confronted Blix, telling him that if his conclusions differed from the administration’s views, “we will not hesitate to discredit you.”²⁸⁹ France, Russia, and China, moreover, could be expected to undermine tough inspections and make sure their Iraqi trading

²⁸⁵ Donald Rumsfeld, House Committee on Armed Services, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, 110. See also: Feith, *War and Decision*, 306.

²⁸⁶ Richard Cheney, “Remarks Honoring Veterans of the Korean War,” August 29, 2002, American Presidency Project, accessed July 23, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=79749&st=iraq&st1=>

²⁸⁷ Quote is from Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 235. For similar statements about the nature of the regime, see: Richard Spertzel, House Committee on International Relations, *Russia, Iraq, and Other Potential Sources of Anthrax, Smallpox, and Other Bioterrorist Weapons*, 107th Cong., 1st sess., December 5, 2001, 40; David Brooks, “Saddam’s Brain,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 5, 2001, 40; Mortimer Zuckerman, “No More Cat and Mouse,” *U.S. News and World Report*, October 28, 2002, 72.

²⁸⁸ Quote is from Rumsfeld: Memorandum, Rumsfeld to Bush, October 14, 2002, 2. See also: Memorandum, William Luti to Donald Rumsfeld, “Read Ahead for Principles Meeting on Diplomacy re Iraq,” January 26, 2003, Memorandum, Rumsfeld to Bush, October 14, 2002, 1.

²⁸⁹ Burrough et. al., “The Path to War,” *Vanity Fair*, December 19, 2008. In a similar case, reported in this piece, Wolfowitz told a veteran inspector in October 2002: “You do know that they have weapons, don’t you?”

partner remained in power.²⁹⁰ Conservative and neoconservative writers openly mocked the United Nations, calling its leaders “timid” and its inspections a “farce” and a “trap.”²⁹¹ If the United States put too much faith in this institution, entropy would once again take effect, isolating the United States and allowing Saddam to slip the noose.

Defenders of containment contested the administration’s portrayal of the history of inspections and the proper standard of evidence. They argued that many of the major breakthroughs of the 1990s inspections came not just through defections but through a range of methods: environmental and chemical sampling, radiation detectors, ground penetrating radar inventories, physical surveys, computer searches, aerial and satellite surveillance, and interviews.²⁹² Hawks touted the Hussein Kamel episode as evidence of the flaws in inspections. Former UNSCOM chief Rolf Ekeus retorted that in the months before Kamel’s defection the inspectors had compelled Iraq to acknowledge the existence of a biological weapons program and discovered key information about its anthrax, botulism, and aflatoxin research. They did this largely by questioning a foreign firm that exported an agricultural spray drying system to Iraq. The firm said that the Iraqis wanted a machine that would suspend particles in the atmosphere, which was more suited to the inhalation of biological agents than civilian agriculture. The inspectors had also pressed Iraq to explain why it had imported industrial quantities of biological

²⁹⁰ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 440-441; Kristol and Kaplan, *War Over Iraq*, 92.

²⁹¹ For various accusations that the inspections were a “farce” or a “trap,” see: Editorial “The Inspections Trap,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 2002, A10; Martin Indyk and Kenneth Pollack, “How Bush Can Avoid the Inspections Trap,” *New York Times*, January 27, 2003, A25; William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “The U.N. Trap,” *The Weekly Standard*, November 18, 2002, 9; Editorial, “An Ominous Drift,” *The National Review*, February 10, 2003, 11; Lawrence Kaplan, “End Game,” *The New Republic*, February 10, 2003, 16-18; Garry Milhollin, “Hans the Timid,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 26, 2002, A24.

²⁹² Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 152; Jessica Mathews, “Iraq: A New Approach,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 5, 2002, carnegieendowment.org, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2002/09/05/iraq-new-approach-pub-1164>; 2-5. Mohamed El Baradei, “Let Us Inspect,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2003, A10

growth media before the Gulf War, far more than was necessary for civilian uses.²⁹³ By looking into these inconsistencies and searching hospitals, research labs, and health centers, UNSCOM pieced together an undeclared biological weapons program. Kamel then revealed the full extent of this program.²⁹⁴

Defenders of inspections further contended that full Iraqi cooperation was not necessary for restraining Iraq's programs because, as Blix argued, inspections and monitoring worked as "a form of containment" by inhibiting weapons development and providing early warnings of illicit activities.²⁹⁵ El Baradei made a similar case, claiming that the "presence of international inspectors in Iraq today continues to serve as an effective deterrent to and insurance against resumption of programs."²⁹⁶ While they wanted Iraq to commit to permanent disarmament, advocates of inspections argued that they constrained Iraqi capabilities and, along with sanctions and the threat of force, made the resumption of significant WMD activities highly improbable. Nuclear weapons infrastructure could be detected because, as Michael O'Hanlon noted, it was "expensive, sophisticated, hard to hide, and even harder to move."²⁹⁷ As containment advocates had long held, el Baradei and others argued that the world had to accept "some degree of risk" on Iraq's WMD but that this risk must be weighed against the costs of invasion.²⁹⁸

²⁹³ United Nations Special Commission, "Final Compendium: Report 1: Disarmament," January 29, 1999, iraqwatch.org, accessed March 16, 2018.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20051124075332/http://www.iraqwatch.org:80/un/UNSCOM/disarmament.htm>

²⁹⁴ Rolf Ekeus, "Yes, Let's Go into Iraq, With an Army of Inspectors," *Washington Post*, September 15, 2002, B1.

²⁹⁵ Hans Blix, "United Nations Security Council Briefing-UNMOVIC," December 19, 2002, [IraqWatch.org](http://iraqwatch.org), accessed August 1, 2018; Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 114.

²⁹⁶ Mohammed el Baradei, "The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq-IAEA," January 27, 2003, [IraqWatch.org](http://iraqwatch.org), accessed August 10, 2018. See also: Jessica Mathews, "War is Not yet Necessary," *New York Times*, January 28, 2003, A21; Kristof, "War and Wisdom," *New York Times*, February 7, 2003, A25; Walzer, "Right Way," 35.

²⁹⁷ Michael O'Hanlon, "The Weapons Inspectors Can Succeed," November 15, 2002, brookings.edu, accessed September 22, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-weapons-inspectors-can-succeed/>

Many defenders of containment argued for a more militarized form of inspections that would enable the United States to quickly destroy any WMD program. Jessica Matthews of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace composed a plan for “coercive inspections” that many advocates of containment supported.²⁹⁹ She sought to expand U.S. surveillance and destroy from the air any site being sanitized or blocked or suspected materials being moved on the ground. She also advocated a multinational military force to protect inspectors and to immediately destroy suspected sites.³⁰⁰ Matthews argued that this plan could “reduce Iraq’s WMD threat, if not to zero, to a negligible level.”³⁰¹ The Bush administration, however, rejected this idea because if the United States had to use coercion to back inspections it meant that Iraq was still obstructing, which meant that Saddam had not decided to disarm.³⁰² For this reason, Powell, Rumsfeld, and Rice stymied a Franco-German attempt to triple the number of inspectors and possibly insert U.N. peacekeepers into Iraq in a version of coercive inspections.³⁰³

The first step in the inspections was for Iraq to submit a complete declaration of its existing WMD programs, equipment, stockpiles, and related personnel. This declaration would

²⁹⁸ Quote is from: El Baradei, “Let Us Inspect,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2003; Mearsheimer and Walt, “In a Box,” *New York Times*, February 2, 2003; Hans Blix, Lecture, “The UNMOVIC Mission,” October 7, 2002, IraqWatch.org, accessed August 12, 2018.

²⁹⁹ For supporters of coercive inspections, see: Editorial, “No to War,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2003; Nicholas Kristof, “Iraq War: The First Question,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2003, A21; Halperin, “Case for Containment,” *Washington Post*, February 11, 2003; Ekeus, “Army of Inspectors,” *Washington Post*, September 15, 2002; Leahy, *Cong. Rec.*, September 26, 2018: 18178.

³⁰⁰ Jessica Matthews, “Is There A Better Way to Go?” *Washington Post*, February 9, 2003, B1.

³⁰¹ Mathews, “A New Approach,” September 5, 2002, 8.

³⁰² Colin Powell, House Committee on International Relations, *Administration Views*, 15.

³⁰³ Cable, Christopher Meyer to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, February 11, 2003, Iraqinquiry.org.uk, accessed September 16, 2018, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123123954/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/232980/2003-02-11-telegram-189-washington-to-fco-london-iraq-defence-secretarys-visit-to-washington-11-12-feb-ruary.pdf>, 2. Hans Blix also opposed the coercive inspections idea because he feared the presence of soldiers could act as a “trip wire” that forced outside military intervention to protect the inspectors and soldiers. See Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 82.

provide a baseline for the inspectors, who would verify that Iraq had closed or destroyed all materials and programs.³⁰⁴ Iraq provided this declaration in a 12,000-page report on December 7, 2002. The United States and the inspectors judged it as inadequate because it did not clarify the status of unaccounted-for weapons, featured recycled material from previous declarations, and included no further evidence that Iraq had abandoned its nuclear weapons program.³⁰⁵

Inspectors returned to Iraq in late November 2002 and steadily ramped up their activities in the winter. Their reports to the Security Council, issued every two weeks, painted an ambiguous portrait of Iraq's compliance and weapons programs that offered evidence to supporters and detractors of inspections. On the positive side, Blix and El Baradei reported that Iraqi cooperation was "prompt," "expeditious," and "without conditions," in stark contrast to the 1990s. Complying with the demands of Resolution 1441, Iraq even allowed inspectors into the presidential sites that had caused so much consternation in 1998.³⁰⁶

Most importantly, the inspectors found few weapons or other evidence of ongoing WMD production. In December, UNMOVIC found around 12 artillery shells filled with mustard gas, which they destroyed. In February, they found and destroyed missile casting chambers and 70 illegal ballistic missiles.³⁰⁷ Not only did the inspectors find few actual weapons, they repeatedly observed that Iraq's industrial infrastructure had decayed considerably since the Gulf War, undercutting their ability to produce WMD.³⁰⁸ For Bush's claims about Iraq's nuclear program,

³⁰⁴ "Resolution 1441," 98.

³⁰⁵ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 107-108; David Sanger, "Iraq Arms Report Has Big Omissions, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, December 13, 2002, A1.

³⁰⁶ Blix, "Security Council Briefing," December 19, 2002, 1; Mohammed El Baradei, "United Nations Security Council Briefing-IAEA," January 9, 2003, IraqWatch.org, accessed August 11, 2018.

³⁰⁷ Hans Blix, "Briefing to the Security Council-UNMOVIC," February 14, 2003, IraqWatch.org, accessed August 11, 2018; Malone, *International Struggle*, 197.

however, the inspectors found no evidence. The IAEA assessed on February 14: “We have to date found no evidence of ongoing prohibited nuclear or nuclear related activities in Iraq,” although el-Baradei noted several outstanding issues.³⁰⁹ The IAEA also found that the U.S. claims about aluminum tubes and the importing of uranium from Niger were “unfounded.”³¹⁰

On the other hand, Iraq failed to clear up questions about its WMD in several areas, offering the hawks some evidence of inspections’ flaws. Blix and el Baradei noted that Iraq still offered only “passive support, that is, responding as needed to inspectors’ requests” rather fulfilling Resolution 1441’s demand for “proactive support-that is, voluntarily assisting inspectors by providing documentation, people, and other evidence.”³¹¹ Interviewing Iraqi personnel remained a sticking point, as the Iraqis insisted on having minders in the room. The inspectors believed Iraqi officials were still coaching and coercing their personnel to dissemble.³¹² The Iraqis also resisted the use of U-2 spy planes for surveillance of suspected sites, even though Resolution 1441 specifically authorized these flights.³¹³ Furthermore, inspectors found 3,000 pages of documents related to uranium enrichment in the home of an Iraqi scientist in January, making them suspect that Iraq was hiding other information. These problems led Blix to conclude in late January: “Iraq appears not to have come to a genuine

³⁰⁸ Hans Blix, “Briefing to the United Nations Security Council-UNMOVIC,” March 7, 2003, IraqWatch.org, accessed August 11, 2018.

³⁰⁹ Mohammed el Baradei, “The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq-IAEA,” February 14, 2003, IraqWatch.org, accessed August 11, 2018.

³¹⁰ Mohammed el Baradei, “United Nations Weapons Inspectors Report to the UN Security Council on Progress in Disarmament of Iraq-IAEA,” March 7, 2003, IraqWatch.org, accessed August 11, 2018.

³¹¹ El Baradei, “The Status of Nuclear Inspections,” January 27, 2003.

³¹² El Baradei, “Security Council Briefing,” January 9, 2003.

³¹³ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 120-121.

acceptance...of the disarmament which was demanded of it.”³¹⁴ In early March, Blix judged that Iraq still needed to provide evidence of the location or destruction of key materials, including VX gas, anthrax, bacterial growth media, and chemical bombs.³¹⁵

In January 2003, slightly over a month into inspections, Bush and other top U.S. officials privately determined that inspections would fail.³¹⁶ Bush believed that “time is not on our side here” and that “the United States can’t stay in this position while Saddam plays games with the inspectors.”³¹⁷ Cheney told the Saudi Ambassador on January 10 that Bush had already decided on invasion.³¹⁸ On January 15, Bush told Powell, “I think I have to do this. I want you with me,” and Powell pledged his support.³¹⁹ In late January, U.S. officials started to publicly declare that Saddam would not comply, and they excoriated France and Germany for not taking the Iraqi threat seriously.³²⁰ The administration opposed time extensions for inspections, arguing that offering more time “plays into the hands” of Saddam by enabling him to split the coalition.³²¹

Although they expected Bush to give inspections a genuine chance, adherents of the Powell-Blair approach did not contest Bush’s standard of evidence, which virtually preordained the “failure” of inspections. This concession led them either to weakly defend inspections or to

³¹⁴ Hans Blix, “UN Security Council Update on Inspections-UNMOVIC,” January 27, 2003, IraqWatch.org, Accessed August 10, 2018.

³¹⁵ Blix, “Briefing to Security Council, March 7, 2003.

³¹⁶ Bozo, ““We Don’t Need You, ””197; House of Commons, “Report of the Iraq Inquiry,” July 6, 2016, Vol. 3, Section 3.6, 2-3.

³¹⁷ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 254.

³¹⁸ Baker, *Days of Fire*, 233.

³¹⁹ Baker, *Days of Fire*, 234; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 271.

³²⁰ James Dao and Richard Stevenson, “Bush Says Iraqis Are Still Resisting Demand to Disarm,” January 22nd, 2003, *New York Times*. Shapiro and Gordon, *Allies at War*, 128.

³²¹ Karen DeYoung, “Rice Calls Security Council Actions Appeasement,” *Washington Post*, February 17, 2003, A26.

support abandoning them. Tom Daschle, Chuck Hagel, Christopher Dodd, and others faulted Bush for “rushing to war” without giving inspections and diplomacy more time, but they never proposed an alternative course beyond a few more months for these measures.³²² Joseph Biden argued that while “Saddam Hussein has to go,” the United States should continue to pursue a second resolution to provide political cover to allies like Blair, broaden the coalition, and “share the burden” of reconstruction.³²³ James Baker, who had called for restraint in the summer of 2002, declared in February that containment had failed and the only reason the United States should not strike Iraq immediately was to build more international support.³²⁴

The American public had supported continued efforts at inspections and diplomacy through the winter of 2002-2003.³²⁵ However, this support plummeted in March as diplomacy started to collapse. One March poll showed that 67% of respondents believed Bush had “tried hard at diplomacy.”³²⁶ A Pew survey from March showed 60% saying that the inspections have proven that Saddam “will not cooperate,” while another poll showed 75% saying that war was

³²² Quote is from: Carl Hulse, “Top Democrats Say a War Against Iraq is Premature,” *New York Times*, March 7, 2003, A15. See also: Jim Vandehei, “Hill Pressures Bush on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, January 25, 2003, A16; Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Why Unity is Essential,” *Washington Post*, February 19, 2003; Friedman, “Fire, Ready,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2003; Christopher Dodd, *Cong. Rec.*, 108th Cong., 1st sess., March 7, 2003, 3356.

³²³ Joseph Biden, “Why We Need a Second U.N. Resolution,” *Washington Post*, March 10, 2003, A21.

³²⁴ James Baker, “The Case for Military Action,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 3, 2003, A22; This argument was echoed by: William Cohen, “The Real Case Against Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2003, A18.

³²⁵ CBS News Telephone Survey, January 28, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018. This poll showed 60% of Americans calling for more time for inspections.

³²⁶ CBS News Telephone Survey, March 18, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018. A similar Washington Post/ABC News Poll found that 72% believed Bush “has done enough” to win support from other countries. See: Washington Post/ABC News Telephone Survey, March 18, 2003, Polling the Nations, accessed September 20, 2018.

“inevitable” even if inspectors received more time.³²⁷ Public support for war surged in March, with polls showing approval ratings well into the 70% range for the pending war.³²⁸

Blair and Powell also did not defend inspections once they were under way. Blair wrote to Bush on January 24 that “If we delay, we risk Saddam messing us about, sucking us back into a game of hide and seek with the inspectors where...the thing drags on forever until we give up or get distracted.”³²⁹ Blair called for more time for inspections mainly to see if they would provide a clearer *casus belli* that might convince the Security Council to authorize force.³³⁰ Powell labored to preserve the coalition, but he soon turned on inspections, declaring in late January: “The question isn’t how much longer do you need for inspections to work. Inspections will not work.”³³¹ Blair and other members of this approach did not, however, endorse Blix’s argument that the inspections themselves acted as a form of containment. They also did not take seriously the fact that the inspectors had turned up little evidence of continuing WMD programs. Their arguments remained tactical and procedural, focusing on ensuring that the inspections box had been checked and as large a coalition as possible assembled.

³²⁷ For “will not cooperate,” see: Pew Telephone Survey, March 18, 2003, *Polling the Nations*, accessed September 20, 2018. For “inevitable,” see CBS News Telephone Survey, March 17, 2003, *Polling the Nations*, accessed September 20, 2018.

³²⁸ Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, “71% of Americans Support War, Poll Shows,” *Washington Post*, March 19, 2003, A14. For an extended study of prewar public opinion that put average approval ratings for major polls at 72%, see: Pew Research Center, “Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008,” March 19, 2008, [pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org), accessed September 21, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008/>,

³²⁹ Note, Tony Blair to George W. Bush, January 24, 2003, iraqinquiry.org.uk, accessed September 16, 2018, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123122510/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/244006/2003-01-24-note-blair-to-bush-undated-note.pdf>, 1.

³³⁰ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 296-297; Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 117.

³³¹ Glenn Kessler, “Moderate Powell Turns Hawkish on War With Iraq,” *Washington Post*, January 24, 2003, A1.

In late February and early March, Blix and el Baradei pleaded for more time as Bush openly abandoned inspections. The inspectors claimed that they were still inserting new teams and setting up new bases. Blix noted that since mid-February Iraq had increased its cooperation and accepted the inspectors' demands for private interviews with Iraqi personnel and aerial surveillance.³³² With this new "pro-active attitude" and the continued threat of war, Blix predicted that resolving outstanding issues "would not take years, nor weeks, but months."³³³ France, Germany, China, and Russia all supported the inspectors' appeals and devised plans to strengthen inspections.³³⁴ The United States and Great Britain, however, introduced a Security Council resolution on February 24 stating that "Iraq has failed to take the final opportunity afforded it in Resolution 1441."³³⁵ They accused Saddam of not cooperating and hiding weapons and information. Powell declared a few weeks later: "Nothing we have seen since the passage of 1441 indicates that Saddam Hussein has taken a strategic and political decision to disarm."³³⁶

The United States delayed the start of war in March 2003 only to let Tony Blair try to pass a second resolution authorizing the use of force, which Blair wanted before Parliament voted the war.³³⁷ This was a futile task because France, Russia, China, and Germany all believed inspections were making progress, and they openly pledged to veto any resolution that endorsed war.³³⁸ Chirac in particular believed, with justification, that Bush supported inspections only to

³³² El Baradei, "Report to the UN Security Council," March 7, 2003; El Baradei, "Let Us Inspect," *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2003; Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 177-178, 188-189.

³³³ Blix, "Briefing to the Security Council," March 7, 2003.

³³⁴ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 180-181.

³³⁵ "U.S.-British Draft Resolution Stating Position on Iraq," *New York Times*, February 25, 2003, A14.

³³⁶ Colin Powell, "Remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies," March 5, 2003, State.gov, accessed September 30, 2018, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/18307.htm>

³³⁷ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 341, 365.

legitimize what he saw as an inevitable war, and he refused to sanction this behavior with Security Council approval.³³⁹ Rather than worsen a diplomatic break with key allies, the United States and Great Britain decided to withdraw their resolution.³⁴⁰ On March 17, President Bush announced a 48-hour ultimatum for Saddam and his sons to leave Iraq or face war. On March 20, coalition forces launched the opening airstrikes of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Conclusion: The Path to the Iraq War

The United States invaded Iraq because the Bush administration believed the threat of Saddam's WMD programs and links to terrorist groups to be intolerable after 9/11. The decision to invade was shaped by manipulated intelligence, visions of democratic transformation, and the belief that U.S. power would lead to an easy war. For regime change advocates, containment had collapsed, but even if it could be restored to its earlier strength, it still could not address the nexus threat, or the hypothetical alliance between a WMD-armed dictator like Saddam and international terrorists like al-Qaeda. This assessment rested on a bedrock of ideas about Iraq that developed in the 1990s. It rested especially on the perceived lesson of the containment policy: no combination of incentives and pressures could either topple Saddam or force him to change his behavior given his individual psychology and the totalitarian nature of his regime.

The neoconservatives in the Bush administration played an indispensable role in bringing about the Iraq War. They put Iraq on the agenda after 9/11, ensured that it became the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy, and articulated a case for war. It seems doubtful that members of the Powell-Blair approach, including the U.S. public, would have otherwise recommended an

³³⁸ "In Delegates' Words: Hawks and Doves Debate at the Security Council," *New York Times*, March 8, 2003, A9.

³³⁹ Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 120; Bozo, *Iraq Crisis*, 197-199.

³⁴⁰ Stephen Weisman, "A Long, Winding Road to a Diplomatic Dead End," *New York Times*, March 17, 2003, A7.

invasion of Iraq, as their instincts directed them toward the struggle with al-Qaeda and the MEPP. Nevertheless, once the Bush administration put Iraq “on the table,” they found they were pushing on a half-open door with respect to the intellectual and political establishment and the public. Many proponents of the Powell-Blair approach tried to shape how Bush confronted Iraq, making sure he built a coalition and exhausted non-violent measures. To gain power to shape U.S. policy, they made major concessions to Bush in Congress and the United Nations. Once Bush had checked these boxes, however half-heartedly, they offered little significant opposition to the war.

Journalist Thomas Ricks has called this failure to halt the march to war or propose meaningful alternatives the “silence of the lambs.”³⁴¹ This phrase, however, ignores the deeper convictions that drove the behavior of those in the Powell-Blair approach. They believed that containment was discredited and mostly agreed with the necessity of regime change. In the post-9/11 environment, they were far more willing to use drastic means to remove this threat. This combination of a passionate, highly-placed minority and a supportive if hardly enthusiastic majority created a narrow prewar debate that marginalized alternatives to war.

³⁴¹ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 85-90.

CONCLUSION: CONTAINMENT, LIBERALISM, AND THE SEARCH FOR LIMITS

“It’s the regime, stupid.” R. James Woolsey, March 11, 1999.¹

By the time R. James Woolsey addressed the House Armed Services Committee in 1999, Americans had been debating for almost a decade whether Saddam Hussein’s Iraq could be successfully contained. Woolsey had been the Director of the CIA from 1993-1994, but he had little influence with Clinton and resigned in frustration.² He then joined an ascendant chorus of policy-makers, politicians, and intellectuals who over the course of the 1990s built a consensus in U.S. politics that Saddam could not be contained. By 1999, such a statement had become unremarkable, a form of common sense about the nature of the enemy. Woolsey and the political movement he participated in established a dominant public interpretation of the Iraqi regime as totalitarian, fanatical, fixated on acquiring WMD and achieving regional dominance, and obsessed with revenge against the United States.

Herein lies the double significance of the term regime change consensus: it suggests a widely shared belief that the Iraqi regime, or its system of government and ideology, was both the heart of the Iraqi problem and the core of the solution. By defining the Iraqi regime as uncontainable and the ultimate source of Iraq’s threatening behavior, supporters of the regime change consensus primed a wide range of Americans to believe that even a resuscitated containment policy could not prevent Saddam from acquiring nuclear weapons. This belief

¹ R. James Woolsey, House Armed Services Committee, *United States Policy Toward Iraq*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., March 10, 1999, 4.

² For more on Woolsey’s brief and frustrating tenure at the CIA, see: David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 191-192, 233-234.

became an important precondition for two key phenomena of the Iraq debate from 2001-2003. First, it helps explain why Bush's argument for regime change, rooted largely in the idea that containment could not handle the "nexus" threat, succeeded in creating political momentum for war. Second, it helps explain the actions and ideas of members of the Powell-Blair approach, who tried to alter the way Bush sought to remove Saddam, but who largely accepted that regime change was necessary, ethical, and prudent.

Containment Strategies as Theories of Social and Political Change

This study of the containment of Iraq as a policy and as a subject of political debate opens up new insights into containment strategies in general. When policy-makers and theorists describe a policy as containment, they usually mean that the United States will try to limit the geopolitical control, ideological influence, and power of a rival state. However, containment rarely means that United States will simply box in the target indefinitely. Because containment strategies do not directly seek the overthrow of the target state, they must create an atmosphere conducive to the target changing either its behavior or its ruling regime. Embedded within any containment strategy, therefore, is what I call a theory of change about that society.

The theory of change is a prediction of how the pressures, constraints, and incentives of containment will cause the target state to change its strategic behavior and/or its governing political system, either through reform or collapse. Strategists of containment try to give their policies an exit strategy, a theory that explains how containment will not go on forever. The theory of change addresses the question: "What is the nature of this leader, this political system, and this society, and how can the United States change them, within certain limits of action to further its foreign policy goals?" This suggests that containment strategies are useful historical lenses into evolving conversations about the forces that drive social and political change and the

capacity of other societies for change. Whenever we study containment, we are examining those conceptions and debates in a specific context.

For George Kennan, Paul Nitze, and other Cold War strategists, the basic theory of change was that the United States needed to limit Soviet expansion, isolate it economically, maintain the robustness of its own political system and economy, and build up the strength and autonomy of key allies. These steps would “increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate” by exacerbating pre-existing problems in the Soviet system, eventually compelling its accommodation to the U.S.-led international order.³ They also spelled specifically what these problems were and how containment would influence them, as I will explore momentarily. There was significant variation between different presidencies on how they pursued these ends, but these basic ideas about how containment might end successfully remained consistent throughout the Cold War.⁴

³ This quote is from Kennan’s essay, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” which was originally published in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947 under a pseudonym. I accessed this document in: George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” in *American Diplomacy*, 2nd edition, ed. George Kennan, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 127. The Truman administration adopted a similar perspective in NSC 20/4 in November 1948, which declared that the United States sought “to create situations which will compel the Soviet Government to reconcile the practical undesirability of acting on the basis of its present concepts and the necessity of behaving in accordance with precepts of international conduct, as set forth in the purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter.” This document was drafted by Kennan’s Policy Planning Office at the State Department. For more discussion of Kennan’s containment, especially the idea of straining the Soviet system, see: John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security during the Cold War*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 35-40; John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 18-46; Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War* 5th edition (New York: Knopf, 1985), 58-65; Glenn Anthony May, “Introduction: NSC-68: The Theory and Politics of Strategy,” in *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC-68* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 5-7; Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, The Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 108-109, 179-181; Frederik Logevall, “A Critique of Containment,” *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 4 (Sept. 2004), 473-499.

⁴ As an example of such variations in containment, Gaddis develops the concepts of symmetrical and asymmetrical containment, both of which sought to prevent Soviet advances and impose stress on the Soviet system. In the former, the United States tried to match the Soviet Union at all levels of geopolitical and military competition, including economic, technological, nuclear, conventional, and unconventional. An example of symmetrical containment was John F. Kennedy’s flexible response policy, which aimed to increase conventional military spending, close the fictional “missile gap,” and develop a counterinsurgency capacity to deal with communist and nationalist revolutions in the developing world. In asymmetrical containment, the United States aimed to apply “strengths against adversary weaknesses, rather than attempting to match the adversary in all of his capabilities.” Dwight Eisenhower’s massive

Did Kennan, Nitze, and other Cold War strategists believe that the Soviet Union had to change its behavior or its regime in order for these nations to reach a *modus vivendi*? As the historian John Lewis Gaddis argues, Kennan viewed the goal of containment primarily as “behavior modification” that required countering Soviet aggression while responding positively to Soviet offers of negotiation.⁵ Kennan portrayed the Soviet Union as driven both by an ideological conviction that there could be no legitimate opposition to its creation of utopia as well as the need for “explaining away the maintenance of dictatorial authority at home” by conjuring foreign threats.⁶ These traits rested on a deeper historical bedrock of Russian despotism and suspicion of the outside world.⁷ Soviet ideology and behavior precluded any “permanent peaceful co-existence” or compromise with the United States.⁸ Rather, the Soviets believed it was “desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life destroyed, and the international authority of our state be broken.”⁹

However, because of the Soviet leadership’s conviction that the sweep of history remained in their favor, Kennan claimed they had no fixed plan for effecting capitalism’s demise.¹⁰ Where the Soviet Union met “unassailable barriers in its path,” it usually backed

retaliation policy, for instance, aimed to restrain defense spending and rely on the U.S. strength in nuclear armaments to counter Soviet advantages such as the balance of conventional forces in Europe. See: Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 60-61, 125-161, 197-234, 342-343.

⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 71.

⁶ Quote is from: Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 112-113. See also: George Kennan, “The Long Telegram,” February 22, 1946, National Security Archives, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>, 9-10; George Kennan, “America and the Russian Future,” in *American Diplomacy*, 2nd edition, ed. George Kennan, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 138-139.

⁷ Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 3-4; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 32-33.

⁸ Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 1.

⁹ Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 10.

down.¹¹ The United States thus should impose “the vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points.”¹² Soviet flexibility created space for containment to frustrate their designs and exacerbate tensions in their system. Changing Soviet behavior would nonetheless require a paradigmatic change in “the internal nature of Soviet power” from which its behavior emanated.¹³ This did not necessarily mean that the Soviet regime had to collapse. The regime might suddenly “break-up,” or a “gradual mellowing” could occur wherein repeated frustrations drove the Soviets to moderate their ambitions.¹⁴

Kennan further maintained that in order for the Soviet Union and the United States to coexist it was not necessary for the Soviet Union to become like the United States. Kennan held that “forms of government are forged mainly in the fire of practice, not in the vacuum of theory. They respond to national character and to national realities.”¹⁵ It was no use aiming for a capitalist or liberal democratic Russia. These traits were foreign to their historical experience before the rise of communism, and the Soviets stamped out any of their remnants.¹⁶ In 1951, he said plainly: “we could not expect to see the emergence of a liberal-democratic Russia along American patterns. This cannot be too strongly emphasized.”¹⁷ Moreover, the Soviet Union did not have to be capitalist or democratic for the United States to achieve its foreign policy

¹⁰ For variations on this argument in Kennan’s thought, see: Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 10; Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 116-118.”

¹¹ Quote is from: Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 118. See also: Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 10.

¹² Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 120.

¹³ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 115.

¹⁴ Quote is from Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 127. See also: Kennan, “Russian Future,” 151.

¹⁵ Kennan, “Russian Future,” 136.

¹⁶ Kennan, “Russian Future,” 131, 135; Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 4.

¹⁷ Kennan, “Russian Future,” 134.

objectives. To believe that U.S. security depended on all nations adopting American values and institutions would define U.S. interests far too broadly and exceed its resources.¹⁸ In fact, one of the core reasons why the Soviets were a threat was that they did not accept any “diversity” in global politics, or the legitimacy of non-Marxist political system.¹⁹ Part of the point of containment was to shift the Soviet view of foreign affairs from this “universalistic” approach to a “particularistic” outlook that tolerated diverse political systems in the international arena.²⁰

On most aspects of internal politics, Kennan instead prescribed: “Let them be Russians.”²¹ The Soviet outlook simply had to change enough for it to abandoned certain goals and perspectives: “imperialist expansion” and destruction of competing types of government, “paranoiac suspiciousness,” and the totalitarian control of the Russian people. Inversely, it would have to be “resocialized,” in political scientist Alexander George’s words, into basic norms of international relations: tolerance of alternative political systems, openness and honesty in its communications with other states, the “moderation” of policy objectives, and the release of the captive nations of Eastern Europe.²²

¹⁸ Kennan called this the “universalistic” approach to foreign affairs. He defined it as the hope that geopolitical competition would fall away if “all countries could be induced to subscribe to certain standard rules of behavior.” For more discussion of this concept in Kennan’s thought, see: Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 26-27; John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: A Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 298-299; Robert Frazier, “Kennan, Universalism, and the Truman Doctrine,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2009), 3-34.

¹⁹ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 110-112; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 41.

²⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 46-47.

²¹ Kennan, “Russian Future,” 136.

²² Kennan, “Russian Future,” 132-143. For more theoretical treatments of the concepts of resocialization by behavior or regime change, see: Alexander George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993), 49; Robert Litwak, *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000), 9, 91.

Although Paul Nitze promulgated a far more militarized version of containment, he spelled out a similar theory of change in his influential 1950 policy paper, NSC-68.²³ He agreed with Kennan that the Soviet Union under its present outlook could not tolerate the freedom and prosperity of the U.S. system and would try to destroy it.²⁴ Compelling the Soviets to cease this quest would require a “fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet system.”²⁵ The Soviet Union depended on forward momentum in international politics to justify oppression at home. Thus, the imposition of “maximum strain” and the frustration of this “dynamism” abroad would force it to confront “the rot within its system.”²⁶

Like Kennan, Nitze was vague on whether United States needed the Soviet regime to collapse outright, although he doubted that coexistence was possible without “a genuine and drastic change in Soviet policies” and ideology.²⁷ At the minimum, containment had to compel the regime toward “modifying its behavior to conform to generally accepted international standards.”²⁸ The United States still needed to remain open to negotiation with the Soviets. Nonetheless, Nitze agreed with Kennan that no reliable settlement would be possible until the

²³ Nitze believed that without a significant military buildup to enable the United States to counter the armed might of Communist forces throughout the world, containment was “no more than a policy of bluff.” Moreover, the allied centers of power and prosperity that were needed to counter Soviet penetration and offer a successful counter-model to the Soviet system could not develop without a viable “military shield.” Nitze, of course, wrote in a very different context from Kennan’s Long Telegram or Sources of Soviet Conduct. Mao Zedong’s Communist Party had finished its conquest of China in 1949, and in the same year the Soviets successfully tested an atomic bomb. The North Korean invasion of South Korea further legitimized Nitze’s claims that the Cold War had taken a militarized turn. See: Paul Nitze, “NSC-68,” *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC-68* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 71; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 88-107.

²⁴ Nitze, “NSC-68,” 28-29, 52.

²⁵ Nitze, “NSC-68,” 36, 79.

²⁶ Nitze, “NSC-68,” 36, 79.

²⁷ Nitze, “NSC-68,” 60.

²⁸ Nitze, “NSC-68,” 41.

Soviets had been so repeatedly frustrated in their global ambitions and so delegitimized at home that essential aspects of the Soviet system and ideology were transformed.²⁹

The theories of change developed by Kennan, Nitze, and other early strategists of containment were sophisticated in that they specifically spelled out how the United States would “influence by its actions the internal developments” of the Soviet Union. They believed the Soviet system held “the seeds of its own decay” and that containment should identify and stress those pressure points.³⁰ One seed was the Soviet people, which Kennan portrayed as “physically and spiritually tired...disillusioned, skeptical” after decades of brutal Soviet rule.³¹ By exacerbating economic disfunction within the Soviet system, the United States could help discredit the official ideology and turn the people against the regime, especially as new generations took the helm.³² Nitze echoed this assessment by claiming that the “Soviet monolith” was held together by force and fear, rather than any “natural cohesion” or legitimacy, making it vulnerable to stress and repeated frustration.³³

The health, freedom, and productivity of the American economic and political system relative to that of the Soviet Union formed another seed of decay. Kennan portrayed the Soviet system as fundamentally weaker than the United States. Communist ideology, moreover, was an illegitimate imposition on the Russian people.³⁴ Kennan envisioned containment as “a test of the

²⁹ Nitze, “NSC-68,” 41, 60-65.

³⁰ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 125. Nitze used the same exact phrase, saying that the Soviet system has several inherent “seeds of decay.” See Nitze, “NSC-68,” 36.

³¹ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 121

³² Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 121-124; Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 3, 10. Kennan particularly stressed that human beings inevitably tire of totalitarian governance as they seek to express themselves as individuals and hang on to autonomy and traditional ways of life. See: Kennan, “Russian People,” 149-153.

³³ Nitze, “NSC 68,” 35.

³⁴ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 126-127; Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 11.

overall worth of the United States as a nation among nations” in which the United States could defeat the Soviets in part by more effectively ensuring basic human needs and liberties.³⁵ Nitze similarly envisioned that “developing the moral and material strength of the free world” would “hasten the decay of the Soviet system” by convincing the Soviets of the futility of global revolution.³⁶ If the United States could offer a vibrant counter-example of a free and prosperous society, it could accelerate the Soviet people’s abandonment of the regime.

A third seed was the desire of nations within the post-World War II Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe to escape the communist yoke. The United States could facilitate these divisions by building up the strength and unity of Western Europe. Kennan reasoned: “the spectacle of a happier and more successful life just across the fence... would be bound in the end to have a disintegrating and eroding effect on the communist world.”³⁷ In 1948, when Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito declared that he would follow an independent foreign policy from the Soviet Union, Kennan seized on this divide to assert that over time Eastern European nationalism and resentment at Soviet domination would break up the Eastern Bloc.³⁸ Nitze also contended that nationalism was a more “potent emotional-political force” than communism and that the Soviets would have to expend resources and prestige to keep these states in their orbit.³⁹ Nitze

³⁵ Quote is from Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 127-128. See also: Kennan, “Russian People,” 153-154.

³⁶ Nitze develops this line of thinking in several parts of NSC-68. See: Nitze, “NSC 68,” 30, 32, 41, 80.

³⁷ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 44.

³⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 35, 41-46, 64-69. Kennan did briefly support covert operations in Eastern Bloc to encourage resistance to Communist rule and Soviet influence, although these efforts amounted to little. The encouragement of “Titoism” in other parts of the Communist world became official U.S. policy in 1949 through a series of National Security Council directives stating that wherever a Communist party has seized power largely by its own efforts, has a large and nationalistic following, and may be resentful of Soviet interference, “there at least a presumption of the possibility of Titoism may exist.” These directives identified newly Communist China as one possible case in point. See: Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America’s Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000); Laszlo Borhi, “Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction? U.S. Policy and Eastern Europe in the 1950’s,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 3, (Fall, 1999).

identified a fourth seed of decay in the “problem of succession” in the Soviet system. In a government where “supreme power is acquired and held through violence and intimidation,” the transfer of power was a distinct moment of weakness that the United States could exploit.⁴⁰

Despite some variations, containment remained the basic U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War.⁴¹ Containment nonetheless faced several domestic political challenges. In the early 1950s, many Republicans embraced a strategy of rollback that recommended extensive covert operations in the Eastern Bloc to foment rebellions that would break off these states from Soviet control.⁴² In the 1970s and 1980s, neoconservatives advocated for a far more aggressive, militarized version of containment. They opposed strategic arms limitation talks, embraced the Reagan Doctrine, and called on the United States to more openly shame the Soviets on human rights issues.⁴³ Many human rights activists similarly wanted more

³⁹ Nitze, “NSC 68,” 35, 73.

⁴⁰ Nitze, “NSC 68,” 36. Later Cold War policy documents developed these ideas about the seeds of decay in the Soviet system. NSC 162/2, for instance, listed several pressure points: “the slackening of revolutionary zeal, the growth of vested managerial and bureaucratic interests, and popular pressures for consumer goods. Such changes, combined with the growing strength of the free world...and the possible aggravation of weaknesses within the Soviet bloc through U.S. or allied action...might induce a willingness to negotiate.” See: Robert Bowie, “Bowie’s Commentary,” in *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC-68*, ed. Glenn Anthony May (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 113.

⁴¹ The basic continuity of the containment framework is nicely demonstrated by a passage from a letter from Secretary of State George Shultz to Ronald Reagan in 1982: “While recognizing the adversarial nature of our relationship with Moscow, we must not rule out the possibility that firm U.S. policies could help induce the kind of changes in Soviet behavior that would make an improvement in relations possible.” National Security Decision Directive 75, endorsed by Reagan in January 1983, also echoed the basic framework of containment. See: Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 85-87; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 388.

⁴² The Eisenhower administration quickly backed off the rollback rhetoric that figures like John Foster Dulles had embraced during the campaign. See: Grose, *Rollback*, 206-208, 214-218; Borhi, “Rollback, Liberation, Containment,” 91-93.

⁴³ For more on neoconservatives during the Cold War, see: Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); John Ehrman, *The Rise of the Neoconservatives, Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

moral pressure on the Soviet Union, in contrast to Kennan and Nitze's emphasis on avoiding putting Soviet prestige on the line in a public manner.⁴⁴

Of course, the massive conventional and nuclear power of the Soviet Union made direct regime change strategies unrealistic and helped sustain political support for containment. Nonetheless, certain aspects of the early formulations of containment seem to have played an important role in maintaining the strategy's legitimacy through four decades of political change. Kennan, Nitze, and others prepared Americans for a long-term struggle in which the unity and health of the U.S. system was the country's greatest geopolitical asset. They carefully portrayed the Soviets as threatening and devious but mostly rational and amenable to pressures and counter-forces. They kept the door open for negotiation and avoided perspectives that would make war inevitable. Most importantly, they defined goals in a limited way. The Soviet government did not have to be overthrown to make a *modus vivendi* possible, but important aspects of its behavior and ideology had to change. This might require the collapse of the regime, but it might not: changes in leadership, frustration over time, or domestic political crisis might also lead to Soviet "behavioral modification." The enduring political legitimacy of the containment of Soviet Union remains understudied, but these aspects of the policy appeared to have played an important role.

What then made the containment of Iraq different? Why did it become so widely discredited in American politics, despite Iraq's relative weakness? I will offer four observations on these questions. First, the defenders of the containment of Iraq, especially the first Bush

⁴⁴ On the rise of human rights activism as a political force in the late 20th century, see: Sarah Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Michael Morgan, "The Seventies and the Rebirth of Human Rights," in *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, eds. Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 237-250; Paul Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 241-274.

administration, did not articulate a complex theory of change beyond the hope that the pressure of containment, especially sanctions, would compel the Iraqi elite to remove Saddam. This theory of change failed adapt to events that undermined key pillars of containment, especially the crushing of the opposition from 1995-1996. Unlike Kennan and Nitze, theorists of the containment of Iraq developed few ideas about the role the Iraqi people might play in the fomenting of pressure on the regime besides their suffering under sanctions. This proved to be a dubious approach as the sanctions made the Iraqi people more dependent on the regime for survival and Saddam managed to insulate himself from their effects. They also rarely discussed how containment might exacerbate other possible “seeds of decay,” including ethnic separatism and power transitions upon Saddam’s death.⁴⁵

At the same time, the containment of Iraq offered none of the flexibility of Cold War containment. All three relevant presidencies declared that no negotiation or normalization with Iraq under its current regime was possible even if Iraq complied with the weapons inspectors. This rigidity, which I argue largely emerged from domestic political pressures, gave Iraq little reason to comply with the United Nations and reduced the cooperation of key members of the coalition. The ensuing stalemate with Iraq made the containment policy vulnerable to domestic political criticism.

Second, comparing these containment strategies hints at a paradox of containing small states. The very weakness of the Iraqi state, in contrast to the Soviet Union, created the temptation to simply crush the foe rather than continue the irritating tasks of containment. The vagueness about containment’s end point and the lack of a superpower rival to deter such interventions compounded the shift to regime change. Containment in the Cold War was

⁴⁵ Saddam was 65 when the United States invaded Iraq.

predicated on the idea that a war with the Soviet Union would lead to unacceptable losses on both sides. Such fears were drastically lower in the Iraq case, especially with an all-volunteer military that lightened the burdens of war on the average U.S. citizen and newfound belief in a “Revolution in Military Affairs” that would make wars fast, easy, and low-cost. Furthermore, the belief that Iraq probably had not yet acquired nuclear weapons decreased the perceived costs of a war in the near future compared to a hypothetical conflict with a nuclear-armed Iraq.⁴⁶

Third, the Iraq case suggests that containment strategies may have a fundamental disadvantage in a democratic political system. Kennan warned that containment should have “nothing to do with outward histrionics: with threats or blustering or superfluous gestures of outward ‘toughness.’”⁴⁷ Kennan envisioned a “cool and collected” policy that ignored public opinion, avoided putting Russian prestige on the line, and responded flexibly to Russian signals.⁴⁸ Kennan also wanted a clear distinction between essential areas like Western Europe and more peripheral interests like Southeast Asia.⁴⁹

To Kennan’s chagrin, however, exaggerated portrayals of foreign menaces and tough-guy blustering often play well in domestic politics. Democratic politics often does not allow fine distinctions of the national interest when politicians and intellectuals can declare, for example, that if the United States allows a country like Vietnam to fall into the communist orbit, alliances in more important areas will be undermined. As Gaddis argues, the perception that communism

⁴⁶ David A. Lake, “Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War,” *International Security* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/2011), 7-52.

⁴⁷ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 119.

⁴⁸ Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 119; H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 167.

⁴⁹ For instance, Kennan argued that there were regions “where you could perfectly well let people fall prey to totalitarian domination without any tragic consequences for world peace.” Quote is from Gaddis, *Kennan: A Life*, 256. See also: Kennan, *Strategies of Containment*, 57-62.

was on the march, even if that progress was in peripheral areas, created powerful political and psychological imperatives to stop that momentum. Part of the reason why Nitze deviated from Kennan in recommending a massive military buildup was his belief that the perception of communist momentum and U.S. weakness was as important as the material balance of power.⁵⁰ Leaving the door open for negotiations, moreover, made sense in the policy realm, but talking with the hated communist foe would open any president up to accusations of weakness. Even though containment retained bipartisan support in the Cold War, domestic politics tended to expand the definition of U.S. interests, homogenize different communist movements as a Soviet-led conspiracy, and create pressures for armed intervention in peripheral areas.

The containment of Iraq suffered from similar difficulties related to domestic politics. Richard Haass, Richard Clarke, and other early designers of containment privately envisioned a strategy in which the United States could mix punishments and incentives to compel Iraq to comply with the United Nations. This approach proved politically unsustainable. Shock and outrage at the invasion of Iraq in 1990 caused the U.S. political establishment to over-learn the lesson that Iraq could not be negotiated with or positively incentivized. The incomplete victory in Desert Storm and the messy, tragic aftermath of the conflict created a powerful political bias for tougher measures against Saddam, particularly before he attained nuclear weapons. The desire of George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and many politicians to look tough on foreign affairs further worsened the rigidity of containment. The 1998 Iraq Liberation Act capped off this process by declaring the Iraqi regime to be illegitimate, something the United States did not assert about the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The post-Cold War perception of a unipolar international

⁵⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 83-84.

system and a global trend toward liberalism, democracy, and capitalism further exacerbated dissatisfaction with containment.

Fourth, while Kennan avoided portraying the Soviet leadership as implacable zealots, knowing that this could make conflict an inevitability, the successful framing of Iraq as a fanatical, inflexible totalitarian state garnered widespread political currency and undermined containment. Containment's defenders tried to convey a messy, complicated portrait of Iraq as a belligerent but manageable autocracy that mainly wanted survival and enrichment. The totalitarian framing, however, was more morally clear and politically marketable. It explained the appalling villainy of Saddam, and it appealed to a cultural narrative of the United States as a heroic force defying totalitarianism in its many historical forms. Regime change advocates contended that in a society where the state controlled everything, containment could not generate sufficient internal pressures to change the behavior or ruling regime of the state. They thus concluded that only significant outside intervention could oust the regime.

Containment strategies have relied on the assumption of the target's simultaneous hostility and its basic rationality and risk acceptance. The concept of totalitarianism, however, can undermine this balancing act, creating rigidity in policy-making and paving the way for conflict. Kennan and Nitze, in contrast, did not deploy the concept of totalitarianism in a deterministic way. For them, the fact of Soviet totalitarianism did not make the regime's foreign policy necessarily reckless, irrational, or completely unchangeable. Kennan, Nitze, and other Cold War strategists identified ways in which containment could exacerbate pre-existing Soviet weaknesses in order to facilitate the mellowing or collapse of the regime.⁵¹

⁵¹ Many crucial texts on the formation of the Cold War strategy of containment offer little or no discussion of the significance of ideas about totalitarianism in this process. Nonetheless, key documents like the Sources of Soviet Conduct and NSC-68 discuss totalitarianism frequently. Nitze in particular stresses the importance of totalitarianism in understanding the Soviet Union. See: Nitze, "NSC-68," 27-28, 32-35, 43-44. Kennan uses the term more

Robust theories of change are vital for containment strategies both in terms of maintaining strategic coherence and political credibility. This conclusion should prompt some rethinking of containment as a category of strategy. Containment has a reputation as a classic realist strategy. Many of its major theorists and practitioners have identified as realist, and scholars also portray the policy as such. They tend to argue that containment is about shaping the international environment to limit another state's ability to act against the U.S. national interest and eventually to alter that state's behavior. Realists often treat the internal traits of a state as secondary in importance.⁵² We will not worry about what goes on inside a society, containment's realist boosters argue, we will just contain its external behavior. As Richard Haass once described the containment of the Soviet Union: "Containment became a triumph of narrow realism, of carrying out a foreign policy largely based on the external rather than the internal behavior of government and other forces."⁵³

In contrast, this dissertation suggests that containment strategies are inherently concerned with what goes on inside a state, making them far less realist than realists might claim. Theories of change in containment strategies are not just about external behavior but the nature and evolution of societies, ideas, political systems. Thus, the interpretation of those internal forces

sparingly, but the idea of a government seeking total control over its people played an important part in his thinking about the Soviet Union, as a later section of this conclusion explores. For limited discussions of the importance of totalitarianism in the development of containment in the Cold War, see: Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 34; Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 10-11.

⁵² The sub-field of realism known as "neo-realism" treats the structural aspects of the international system, including anarchy and the balance of power, as the primary determinant of state behavior. In its purest iterations, neo-realism treats the internal characteristics of states as virtually irrelevant to their behavior. For major texts in neo-realism, see: Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979); John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2nd edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014); Joseph Parent and Sebastian Rosato, "Balancing in Neorealism," *International Security* 61, no. 2 (March 2009), 51-86. A particularly brief and effective explanation of realism in general be found in: Richard Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1997), 67-68.

⁵³ Haass, *Reluctant Sheriff*, 14.

are crucially important for understanding how containment strategies are conceived, executed, and criticized. The Iraq story suggests that contemporary practitioners of containment strategies against regional powers like Iran or North Korea need to think about how a strategy based on long-term, indirect change can remain politically sustainable, especially if these states have asymmetrical means of retaliation. Strategists of containment can remain focused primarily on changing the external behavior of states, as Kennan and Haass suggested, but to do so effectively they must think seriously about the internal traits of those states.

The Concept of the Regime in American Foreign Relations

There were also deeper forces in the history of American political thought that undermined the containment of Iraq and bolstered the regime change consensus. In particular, this dissertation speaks to the importance of ideas about regime type in U.S. foreign relations. Historians in the last several decades have been skeptical of the idea that the United States has consistently sought to spread democracy, pointing to interventions to destabilize elected leaders and/or install or prop up friendly autocrats.⁵⁴

As valid as these observations are, the importance of ideas about regime type should be differentiated from democracy promotion. As Kennan and Nitze argued about the Soviet Union, a state's ideologies, internal power dynamics, and social and economic structures can shape foreign policy as much as external forces like the balance of power.⁵⁵ States are Janus-faced, and

⁵⁴ For texts that embrace this critique to varying degrees, see: Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America* (New York: Viking, 2005); Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001); Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁵⁵ In the Long Telegram, Kennan claims: "The Soviet party line is not based on any objective analysis of the situation beyond Russia's borders; that it has, indeed little to do with conditions outside of Russia; that it arises mainly from basic inner-Russian necessities." Kennan, "Long Telegram, 3.

their foreign policies are almost always part of an attempt to preserve a certain internal arrangement of power, resources, and ideas.⁵⁶ American leaders have frequently understood the external behavior of states as stemming in large part from these internal traits and imperatives; in short, from nature of different regimes.⁵⁷ This perspective has fueled an inclination toward what Kennan called “universalistic” thinking: the belief that until the internal makeup of another state becomes more like the United States, it will continue to challenge U.S. values and interests.⁵⁸ Such universalism, at times, has morphed into what historian H.W. Brands calls the “vindicationist” tradition in which Americans believe they must “move beyond example and vindicate the right” by defeating tyranny and spreading freedom and democracy.⁵⁹

The pro-regime change argument on Iraq in the 1990s and early 2000s represented not just the universalistic approach but the more active vindicationism. Regime change advocates rarely said that Iraq had to adopt American values and institutions, but they adamantly believed that Iraq would continue to menace the region and the U.S. homeland until it became open and

⁵⁶ Robert Jervis also echoes this point in: Robert Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 365-388.

⁵⁷ One exception to this trend could be the foreign policy of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who more consciously embraced the realist tradition of focusing how the structure of the international political system shapes states’ behavior.

⁵⁸ Many scholars have tied this line of thinking in U.S. foreign relations to the American civil religion, or what the sociologist Philip Gorski describes as “prophetic republicanism.” By this he means a political culture and ideology wherein Americans believe they are carrying on a sacred and unique mission to ensure the worldwide flourishing of individual freedom and republican forms of government. Ideas in this tradition include John Winthrop’s City on a Hill, Woodrow Wilson’s efforts to make the world “safe for democracy,” Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Atlantic Charter, John F. Kennedy’s promise to “bear every burden” in countering the spread of communism, George H.W. Bush’s New World Order, Clinton’s “enlargement” of the sphere of democracy and capitalism, and George W. Bush’s Global War on Terrorism and transformative agenda in the Middle East. See: Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2017). Even if U.S. politicians do not fulfill these ideas in practice, they usually pay homage to them in the political sphere, which facilitates their survival from generation to generation. See: Brands, *America Owes the World*, vii-viii; Tony Smith, “Making the World Safe for Democracy in the American Century,” *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (April 1999), 173-188.

⁵⁹ Brands, *America Owes the World*, viii, 144-145.

democratic. Iraq's "resocialization," they imagined, would have to include far more internal change than Kennan envisaged for the Soviet Union. The Baathists would have to be rooted out, a national identity forged, a capitalist economy created, and a multiparty democracy with a free press conjured. "Let Iraqis be Iraqis," to paraphrase Kennan, was far more likely to be a pro-containment sentiment. Figures like Haass and John Mearsheimer contended that the United States could not remake Iraqi society and did not have to in order to achieve its goals. With a variety of universalistic claims circulating through the political atmosphere, the first decade after the Cold War was a brutal time for Kennan's "particularist" philosophy, and the containment of Iraq suffered as a result.

This discussion uncovers important points for historians of the United States and the world in the 20th century. It suggests the enduring centrality of ideas in U.S. foreign policy, especially ideas about regime type. Just because the United States has not consistently prioritized the spread of democracy does not reduce the importance of ideas in Americans' understanding of other states' behavior. More specifically, core tenets of liberalism may have driven the United States toward destabilizing, universalistic conceptions of international politics. Liberal thinkers from Immanuel Kant to John Rawls have argued that international peace and the survival of liberalism itself can only be achieved if the vast majority of states are liberalized.⁶⁰ Rawls, for instance, argued that liberal states have a responsibility "to leave the state of nature and to submit

⁶⁰ Michael Desch, "America's Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (December, 2007), 14-15. For more on Rawls, Kant, and liberalism's historical influence on U.S. foreign policy, see: Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 113-115; John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, no. 3 (July, 1983), 205-235; Robert Divine, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000). For critical accounts from a realist perspective on liberal thought's influence on foreign policy, see Kenneth Waltz, "Kant, Liberalism, and War," *The American Political Science Review* 56, no. 2 (June, 1962), 331-340; John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

themselves along with others to the rule of a reasonable and just law.”⁶¹ Sovereignty in the liberal conception, moreover, comes less from the recognition of other states than the internal social contract in which the state must protect the rights and property of its citizens.

States that do not fulfill these burdens and/or threaten international peace do not “earn” their sovereignty and may be legitimately subjected to regime change. Kant called such states the “unjust enemy,” or combatants who are outside the international community or, in an earlier iteration, the civilized world.⁶² These ideas can create what one political theorist calls a “liberal illiberalism” in foreign affairs: the inability or unwillingness of liberal states to tolerate illiberal or non-democratic states. This inclination creates a problem for Kennan’s “particularistic” approach to international affairs, or the pursuit of consensus and co-existence among multiple systems of government, each of which evolved from vastly different national histories.⁶³

The historian Russell Weigley posited an “American Way of War” in which the United States deploys its overwhelming industrial productivity and technological acumen to crush foes in a “strategy of annihilation” that sought decisive victories. The expansion of means as the United States became an industrial power caused an expansion of ends, encouraging the pursuit of “unlimited aims in war.”⁶⁴ This study suggests a similar “American Way of Foreign Policy” in

⁶¹ Desch, “Liberal Illiberalism,” 15.

⁶² Desch, “Liberal Illiberalism,” 25; The historian Brett Bowden traces the evolution of these concepts in: Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Historian Wayne Lee traces a similar process in Anglo-American Warfare since 1500 in: Wayne Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 242-243.

⁶³ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 46-47; Frazier, “Kennan, ‘Universalism,’” 5. Kennan, “Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 110-112.

⁶⁴ Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), xxii. For the development of the strategy of annihilation, see chapters 7 and 14. On 132, Weigley suggests that democratic pressures on the Union to limit casualty rates may have influenced the formation of the strategy of annihilation.

which liberal ideology and democratic politics cultivate a desire for total victories and the transformation of recalcitrant, illiberal states into liberal democracies. Rather than accepting containment strategies premised on living with threats and evil, at least for a time, this mindset seems to drive the United States towards the eradication of threats, especially when there is no superpower rival to moderate U.S. actions.⁶⁵ Historians should ask whether containment strategies as well as “milieu” strategies that seek to shape the structural conditions in which other states operate are systematically disadvantaged in American thought, politics, and foreign policy by these uncompromising potentials in liberalism.⁶⁶ Moreover, it would be interesting to ask whether conservatives, who usually object to universalistic political ideologies, are more willing to tolerate particularism in the international system.⁶⁷

This dilemma is particularly acute in regard to totalitarian states. The success of the framing of Iraq as totalitarian reflects the resonance of the idea of the regime as a primary driver of a state’s external actions. Kennan can serve as a case in point. Although he was willing to let a reformed Soviet Union have its own political and economic systems even if they differed greatly from the United States, he drew the line at totalitarianism. For the Russian state to truly be resocialized into international norms, it could no longer cut its people off from the outside world,

⁶⁵ Desch, “Liberal Illiberalism,” 25-26; Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 153-160.

⁶⁶ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 67, 78.

⁶⁷ This aspect of conservative thought can be traced at least as far back as Edmund Burke’s critique of the French Revolution. This anti-universalism also runs through the thought of Russell Kirk, Daniel Boorstin, Samuel Huntington, George Will, and others. For more on this topic, see: Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 3rd Edition (New York: Avon, 1973); George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 2nd Edition (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006); George Will, “The Slow Undoing: The Assault on, and Underestimation of, Nationality,” in *The Neocon Reader*, ed. Irwin Stelzer (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 127-140. This is not an exclusively conservative position, as seen to some extent in the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. See: Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

enslave its own work force, and subject the people to hateful propaganda and atomization.

Kennan reasoned as such: “When a regime sets out to enslave its own working population in this way, it requires for the maintenance of the arrangement so vast an apparatus of coercion that the imposition of the Iron Curtain follows almost automatically.” To maintain this level of control, the Soviet state would always need to “justify internal oppression by pointing to the menacing iniquity of the outside world.” He concluded: “In this way, excess of internal authority leads inevitably to unsocial and aggressive conduct as a government among governments.”⁶⁸

Even Kennan, who assiduously tried to limit the means and objectives of containment, held that totalitarian states by their nature, by the necessity of maintaining total control over human beings, were driven to aggressive and disruptive external behavior.⁶⁹ He generally did not want the United States to concern itself with the internal composition of other states, but totalitarianism seems to have imposed a limit to this principle.⁷⁰ This dynamic was less about the ideology of Communism and more about the imperatives of totalitarian governance.⁷¹ There are striking parallels between this argument and a key plank of the regime change consensus on Iraq, namely the idea that the totalitarian nature of the Iraqi regime compelled it towards aggression and defiance of the international community .

⁶⁸ Kennan, “Russian Future” 138-139. When Nikita Khrushchev issued his “Secret Speech” in 1956 and began the process of de-Stalinization, Kennan contended that the Soviets were moving from “the most nightmarish sort of modern totalitarianism” to “something resembling a traditional authoritarian state,” a transition that he believed created opportunities for negotiation. See Brands, *America Owes the World*, 180-181.

⁶⁹ For more on Kennan’s attempts to limit the definition of U.S. interests, see: Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 39-40; Gaddis, *Kennan: A Life*, 591-592; Brands, *America Owes the World*, 171; May, “Theory and Politics of Strategy,” 12.

⁷⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 30-31.

⁷¹ Kennan, “Long Telegram,” 4-5. There are strong parallels here between Kennan’s argument and George Orwell’s *1984*, which portrays a totalitarian state that fights endless wars to justify absolute control at home.

The irony of this conclusion is that Kennan argued that even though the Soviet Union was totalitarian, it could still be contained. Advocates of regime change in Iraq made the opposite case: Iraqi totalitarianism meant that it would never cease its pursuit of total control at home, a WMD arsenal, regional power, and an apocalyptic showdown with the United States, Israel, and other enemies. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 hinged on this more deterministic understanding of totalitarianism, one that precluded any indirect changes in the Iraqi system and called for absolute regime change.

This tentative conclusion suggests shifting and competing understandings of totalitarianism in U.S. political thought. One interesting avenue of inquiry would be the role of conceptions of totalitarianism in 20th century U.S. foreign policy, especially in the formation of containment after World War II. Totalitarian states appear to be the one system of government that most U.S. leaders and thinkers have believed that no co-existence or cooperation is possible, the one type of state that the United States must defeat or transform. In the Iraqi case, this belief was taken to an extreme, imposing a self-fulfilling prophecy of unavoidable conflict on U.S. thinking about Iraq.

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