

Was the Decision to Invade Iraq and the Failure of Occupation Planning a
Case of Groupthink?

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the decision to invade Iraq and the failed planning for the occupation of Iraq. Since Janis introduced groupthink in 1972, the groupthink perspective has been used to explain foreign policy disasters such as the failure to anticipate the Pearl Harbor attack and the Bay of Pigs. However, the groupthink perspective is not universally useful for explaining foreign policy mishaps. While some have attributed the Iraq war to groupthink, the groupthink perspective has not been systematically applied to these events.

This thesis will examine Janis's original groupthink theory, and subsequent research that tested the effectiveness of the groupthink perspective. It will apply the groupthink perspective to the events leading up to the invasion of Iraq. It will also examine the failed planning for the occupation of Iraq. The application of the groupthink perspective to both the invasion decision and occupation planning suggests that groupthink was not the primary cause of either event. The thesis will conclude by describing alternative explanations for the decision to invade Iraq, such as ideological agenda setting, and other cognitive errors besides groupthink.

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Figure 1: Janis's Groupthink Theory Pg 20

Chapter 1: Introduction and Notes on Research

This chapter opens the thesis by providing a brief introduction, then examining the general problem statement, the research question to be examined, and the significance of the research. The discussion is intended to introduce the reader both to the historical context and theory the thesis examines.

Introduction

In 2003, the United States led a multinational coalition that invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. This action was highly controversial, both internationally and within the United States. The administration of President George W. Bush had provided several justifications for the war, such as Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), suspected Iraqi support for al-Qaeda, and Iraqi human rights violations.

The invasion itself went well. Despite being denied permission by Turkey to send the 4th Infantry Division overland into northern Iraq, the 3rd Infantry Division's push from the south was surprisingly successful, and American troops were in Baghdad within three weeks.

Soon after the initial invasion, however, problems began to appear. American soldiers and later, U.S. intelligence services were unable to find any evidence of an Iraqi WMD program. Despite a nationwide manhunt, Saddam evaded capture. And with the failure of American forces to step into the domestic security role, the dissolution of the Iraqi security services led to widespread looting and disorder.

What at first seemed to be a brief burst of rioting turned into widespread unrest, and eventually an organized insurgency, although the Pentagon refused to use that word for some time. As it became clear that the Iraq invasion would not turn out to be an easy victory but a long bloody slog, many commentators began to examine the process that led to the invasion decision. Like many foreign policy mishaps¹, the Iraq war was attributed to "groupthink".

¹ A note on terminology: I use the word "victory" to refer to the achievement of the Bush administration's strategic goals in invading Iraq. By "mishap" I mean failures of planning and execution that endangered the U.S. achieving its strategic goals, and "failure" refers to situations in which achieving these goals is rendered impossible. By "strategic goals" I refer to the Bush administration's stated aims in invading Iraq: a stable and democratic Iraqi government, an end to Iraq's WMD program and support for terrorism, and an Iraq that posed no threat to regional peace. Although I sometimes use the phrase "post-invasion" in relation to the occupation, this is not the same as "postwar", as the occupation turned out to be another phase of the war, one for which the U.S. proved to

Yet, as flawed as the decision process was, the Iraq mission did not have to become a strategic disaster. The Iraq war could have been less costly for Iraq and the United States if it had been better executed. The causal link between disaster and groupthink is not always firm. As Janis wrote: “Simply because the outcome of a group decision has turned out to be a fiasco, I do not assume that it must have been the result of groupthink or even that it was the result of faulty decision-making.”² Showing the link in this case is difficult, as the invasion and occupation of Iraq was a complex operation, planned and executed by multiple government agencies, and subject to the individual executive authority of officials such as Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and General Tommy Franks.

Groupthink is an often mentioned phenomenon that has been linked with bad decision making in foreign policy. First described by Irving Janis in 1972, groupthink has been applied to incidents such as the Bay of Pigs invasion and the escalation of the Vietnam War in the 1960’s. The theory is often cited, but rarely methodically examined.

This thesis will begin by examining the original groupthink theory, and subsequent research. It will then disaggregate groupthink theory into its component parts and use it to systematically examine journalistic and scholarly accounts of the process that led to the Iraq invasion in order to ascertain whether the Bush administration suffered from groupthink.

The evidence is ambiguous. Janis described three antecedent conditions that make groupthink more likely.³ The presence of the first, group cohesiveness is uncertain. The second, structural faults, is definite, and the third, a provocative context is also definite.

Bush’s national security team undoubtedly displayed some of the eight symptoms of groupthink. Its members seemed to operate under an illusion of invulnerability, they had an unquestioned belief in their group’s morality, and they had a stereotyped view of their enemy as too evil to negotiate with.

However, the fundamental definition of groupthink is that striving for unanimity overrides the motivation to appraise alternative causes of action,⁴ and my hypothesis was that this case does not fit that

be unprepared. When using the word “ideology” to describe Bush administration foreign policy, I refer to a series of interrelated ideas, objectives and values that policy makers use to analyze and evaluate events and form the optimal response.

² Janis, Irving. 1972. *Victims of Groupthink*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 11.

³ Janis 1972, 197.

⁴ Janis 1972, 9.

definition. This is a case of correlation not equaling causation. Several conditions were present that frequently are the result of groupthink, such as an illusion of invulnerability and stereotyping of outgroups. Yet these conditions were present *before* the group formed.

The illusion of invulnerability, belief in the group's morality, and view of Saddam's regime as too evil to negotiate with were not the result of the group dynamic. These factors were present among individual participants at the beginning. Had the decision making process been different, it is unlikely the final result would have changed. Had President Bush insisted on all views being aired, the most likely outcome would have been Secretary of State Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Armitage airing their doubts and advising caution, Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld would have argued the WMD threat and Iraq-al Qaeda linkage required war, and President Bush most likely would have ordered the invasion anyway.⁵

General Problem Statement

Groupthink theory has become part of understanding foreign policy disasters since its introduction almost 40 years ago. Groupthink theory originally was applied to some of the greatest disasters in U.S. foreign policy of the 20th century: MacArthur's drive into North Korea and the resulting Chinese entry into the war, the Bay of Pigs, and the decision to escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam in July 1965. Such disasters were not only preventable but also predictable. While foreign policy analysis will never be an exact science, studying past disasters can help future decision makers prevent future ones. This study sought to examine not only what decisions were made, but *how* they were made.

In order to better understand and prevent such mishaps, we must improve properly apply theoretical tools, including groupthink theory. Since its introduction, groupthink has been an important part of both scholarly and popular analysis of foreign policy decision-making. Groupthink theory's apparent simplicity led to its common use in explaining foreign policy mishaps, whether or not the theory fits. The application of the theory to two more recent U.S. decisions may enhance both our understanding of groupthink theory and the war itself.

⁵ This study excludes some elements of the Iraq case, such as the Bush administration's political strategy in gaining public support for the war, and what led to the widely-held belief that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. The thesis focuses on the decision making process in the Bush National Security Council, and on why the planning for the occupation fell so short.

Research Question

This thesis examines whether both the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq and its apparent failure to plan for the postwar occupation of Iraq were primarily caused by groupthink. Based on preliminary research, my initial expectation was that neither instance closely conforms to the circumstances spelled out in groupthink theory. Based on journalistic and first-person accounts of the Bush administration's decision-making process, there does not seem to have been an opportunity for groupthink to take hold. The fundamental tenet of groupthink theory is that members of a cohesive group either give in to external censorship ("mindguards") or self-censor in order to maintain group cohesiveness. All accounts of this period suggest that no one who advocated for war did so because they buckled to pressure. Instead, the advocates for war (often referred to as "neocons" or "Vulcans", notably Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz) had all agreed on the need to remove Saddam before joining the administration. The doubters, primarily Powell and Armitage, were not given the opportunity as part of the NSC process to argue against war before the decision was made.

Significance of Research

This thesis seeks to combine examination of two of the most significant foreign policy decisions of recent years, the invasion of Iraq and the failed planning for occupation, with one of the most significant additions to foreign policy decision-making theory of recent decades, groupthink. A systematic application of groupthink theory to these cases increases our understanding of President Bush's decision to invade Iraq; and of the administration's failure to plan for the occupation. In addition, closer examination of the process leading up to these decisions may better prepare future decision makers to avoid making similar mistakes, whether they were caused by groupthink, other cognitive errors, ideological commitments, or other mistakes.

Thesis Organization

This thesis will begin by examining the research design, followed by a review of scholarly literature on groupthink, the ideological basis of the Bush administration's foreign policy, and alternative explanations for the Iraq invasion and failure of occupation planning. The thesis will then examine the Bush administration's foreign policy, first by studying the ideology behind the decision to invade Iraq. It will then examine the chronology of events leading up to the invasion, and the planning for the occupation of Iraq. The thesis will apply the groupthink perspective to events, judging whether the decision to invade and the failure of occupation planning showed the antecedent conditions and symptoms

of groupthink. It will examine alternative explanations for the Iraq war, and argue that other perspectives better explain the decision to invade.

Chapter 2: Research Design

This chapter will describe the methodology used in this thesis. It will discuss how this study relied on a combination of scholarly literature, journalistic accounts, and public statements by administration officials to examine the Bush administration's decision-making process. It concludes by examining the study's limitations.

Methodology

Examination of these decisions traces the events leading up to the Iraq invasion, and the occupation. The study first analyzed these events for evidence of the antecedent conditions of groupthink that Janis identified. It also examined journalistic accounts and scholarly literature for the symptoms of groupthink. Groupthink is a complex theory, and whether groupthink is a cause of a decision does not produce a simple yes or no answer. Therefore, I do not judge a decision to have been caused by groupthink unless it meets all three antecedent conditions and a definitive majority of symptoms, meaning at least six of the eight symptoms.

As Chapter 3 elaborates, groupthink has three antecedent conditions: a cohesive group, a provocative situational context, and structural flaws in the group. In defining a cohesive group, this thesis uses Cartwright's research, as t'Hart described. Simply, a cohesive group is one whose members perceive it to have the quality of cohesiveness. Cohesiveness emerges in the presence of factors that make members want to become or remain members of the group. These factors are too many to list. Cohesiveness may come from feelings of friendship or mutual respect among members; it may flow from the rewards of membership, such as prestige or financial rewards, or because group membership enhances a member's ability to promote policy goals. Cartwright condenses group attraction into four factors: personal motives, the group's incentive properties, the members' expectation of reward, and the members' comparison level, personal evaluations of the potential benefits versus the costs. I will define a cohesive group as one showing either strong personal bonds between members or significant rewards for membership.

Janis describes the second condition, a provocative situational context, in detail. He defines such a context as containing high stress from external threats, members' low self esteem, recent failures, excessive complexity or moral dilemmas. This study employs Janis's criteria to determine the presence of provocative situational context.

Janis also further breaks down the third condition, structural faults. He describes structural faults as including the sub-factors of group insulation, a lack of tradition of impartial leadership, a lack of norms for methodical procedures, and the homogeneity of the group, reflected in social background, worldview, and ideology. This thesis employs Janis's criteria to determine the presence of structural faults in the Bush administration's decision-making process. It compares the groupthink conditions Janis laid out in his case studies to journalistic accounts of the Bush administration. Terms such as group insulation and group norms are drawn from Janis's original work and subsequent literature, and applied, as best as possible, to those accounts.

This study also examines political science research on the ideology behind many of the Bush administration's foreign policy decisions, social psychology research on groupthink, and historical accounts of the Bush administration's foreign policy. It looks as well at public statements of top administration officials as a way of measuring the administration's ideological posture, and that of individual officials. The research sought, as much as possible, to examine primary source documents such as executive orders and memoranda. Although memoirs of top Bush administration officials would also be useful, the only high level decision makers to have published memoirs, as of this writing, are General Tommy Franks and Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith.

The secondary sources dealing with the Bush administration have inherent uncertainties. Insider accounts, or those based on leaks to journalists, are susceptible to personal or ideological ax grinding. Therefore, the thesis made maximum use of primary sources, although this faced the obstacle that many of the relevant internal documents are still classified. Public statements such as speeches and statements to the press provided some insight into individual officials' public positions on Iraq. A change in certain officials' public position from anti-invasion or neutral to pro-invasion may be a sign of compliance with groupthink, either through internalization or coercion.

Like most research, this study faced sampling issues. In order to avoid the problem of ideologically biased accounts, or of journalists being "spun" by self-serving sources, I relied primarily on books written after the fact, instead of on daily newspaper articles, especially those based on interviews with key decision makers. Scholarly literature was divided into two camps. In order to illustrate the ideological basis of Bush administration foreign policy, ideological advocacy articles in non peer reviewed journals that promoted certain persuasions were used. For analytical purposes, I relied on more objective articles from peer reviewed scholarly journals such as Foreign Policy Analysis.

The analysis here depended on proper employment of specialized cognitive psychological terms not in common usage, but found in the scholarly literature such as “misuse of analogies” or “group cohesiveness.” I rely on the definitions provided in the original scholarly literature.

Data Analysis

Although being cautious about the shortcomings of participant and observer accounts of the Bush administration, I examined accounts of the decision-making processes for evidence of both the antecedent conditions and the symptoms of groupthink. Given the ambivalence in the theoretical literature about the effectiveness of groupthink theory, I set a high evidentiary standard for declaring groupthink to be the cause of the invasion or the failure to plan for occupation. The research also examined the historical record for evidence supporting alternative hypotheses, such as cognitive errors that did not involve groupthink and ideological agenda setting.

Limitations of Research

The research behind this thesis is limited by two factors. The first is that its information on the decision to invade Iraq is limited. The decision-making group was very small, and most of the decision makers have not written memoirs, and have given few interviews. Most of the information available on the decision to invade Iraq comes from journalistic accounts, which presents a different problem. These journalistic accounts of the Bush administration’s decision-making process are largely based on anonymous sources, who often have incentives to present less than completely accurate information, such as avoiding blame for failures or shifting blame on to their opponents. As a result, the information in these journalistic accounts is unverifiable. The only protection against biased or self-serving accounts is to rely on as many accounts as possible, yet some necessary information is available in few or even only one account.

The other limitation is based on the fact that groupthink is an ambiguously defined theory. Although Janis defined three antecedent conditions and eight symptoms of groupthink, the majority of his work consists of historical case studies. Yet Janis did not systematically apply the elements of groupthink perspective to the facts in each case. As a result, there is no objective standard for what constitutes a case of groupthink, i.e. how many symptoms must be present? Can a higher number of symptoms compensate for a lower number of antecedent conditions? Although this thesis makes use of Janis’s original work on groupthink and subsequent research, there is no consensus as to whether groupthink was the primary cause of a foreign policy mishap.

There are other limitations to the groupthink perspective. Janis listed several conditions that make a group more cohesive and therefore more susceptible to groupthink, such as social and ethnic homogeneity, and personal friendships. Yet Janis never examined the role ideology plays in the group dynamic. This is a significant limitation, as shared ideology became one of the most important factors behind the decision to invade Iraq.

Chapter 3: Overview of Relevant Literature

The thesis is grounded in works in three areas: the study of the formulation, revision and application of the groupthink perspective, social and political psychological research that examines alternative explanations for the events studied, and journalistic accounts and scholarly analyses of the Bush administration's decision-making process regarding Iraq. This chapter begins by examining Janis's original groupthink research, followed by discussion of subsequent research on groupthink. The chapter will then provide an overview of scholarly literature that examines the ideological basis of the Bush administration's foreign policy, especially its decision to invade Iraq. Finally, this chapter reviews scholarly literature that offers alternative explanations for the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq, and for the failure of occupation planning.

Introduction to Janis's Original Groupthink Research

My examination of Janis's groupthink theory is based both on Janis's original work, which spells out the theory and applies it to the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, and several other foreign policy mishaps, and on subsequent groupthink research. In 1972, Irving Janis examined several military and foreign policy disasters in 20th century American history and gleaned a set of commonalities that he grouped into a theory he called groupthink. In his initial book, he examined the U.S. escalation in Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs operation, the U.S. invasion of North Korea in 1950 that led to China's involvement in the war, and the U.S. Navy's failure to prepare for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.⁶

Groupthink itself is a phenomenon that emerges when group members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to appraise differing courses of action.⁷ Janis listed three antecedent conditions that are necessary for groupthink: group cohesiveness, specific structural flaws in the group, and a provocative situational context.⁸ The groupthink phenomenon leads to eight observable consequences: an illusion of invulnerability, belief in the inherent morality of the group, collective rationalization,

⁶ Janis 1972, 11.

⁷ Janis 1972, 9.

⁸ t'Hart Paul. 1990. *Groupthink in Government: A Study of Small Groups and Policy Failures*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. pp 7-9.

stereotyping of outgroups, self-censorship, illusion of unanimity, direct pressure on dissenters, and self-appointed “mindguards” who take it upon themselves to silence dissent.⁹

Groupthink is a difficult concept to apply for several reasons. It has not only political but social psychological aspects, yet its most famous cases require study of groups that are unobservable in real time, and whose after-the-fact accounts can sometimes be self-serving and not completely reliable. Subsequent studies of groupthink have created similar conditions in the laboratory and achieved results somewhat consistent with the theory, but classifying the actions of test subjects behind a two-way mirror involves much more certitude than classifying actions that happened behind closed doors with only memoirs and quotes from prominent journalists to depend on.

Another danger, one that Janis himself identified, is the possibility that every foreign policy disaster will be described *post hoc* as groupthink whether it was or not. “Simply because the outcome of a group decision has turned out to be a fiasco, I do not assume that it must have been the result of groupthink or even that it was the result of defective decision making”.¹⁰ Such a foreign policy mishap Janis discussed in his 1982 book was the attempted rescue of the hostages in Iran. Yet that mission was not inherently doomed from the start. If the pilots had had better equipment, better training, and better luck, that mission would have been remembered as a classic case of the right way to conduct foreign policy.

Three Antecedent Factors of Groupthink

As Figure 1 indicates, in Janis’s framework, three factors increase the likelihood that groupthink will emerge: a cohesive group, structural faults, and a provocative situational context.

Group Cohesiveness

Janis lists group cohesiveness as the single most important independent variable producing groupthink.¹¹ t’Hart describes Janis’s groupthink as brilliant in its counter-intuitiveness. Where previous thinkers had assumed a cohesive group would make for better decision making, Janis instead theorized that strong ties among group members produce a disincentive to jeopardize those ties. Individual group

⁹ t’Hart 1990, 8.

¹⁰ Janis 1972, 11.

¹¹ t’Hart 1990, 31.

members would be less likely to criticize the views of fellow members, or more likely to yield upon encountering any resistance.¹²

Yet there is ambiguity even on something as seemingly simple as this. t'Hart quotes both Janis and a subsequent review by Steiner which suggests that the desire for cohesion may have the same effect on the group as actual cohesion.¹³ Meanwhile, Cartwright's review of early research lists reasons for joining groups including perceived similarities among members, and the goals and activities of the group.¹⁴ He cites several possible alternative sources of group cohesion, such as leader-centeredness, conflict with out-groups, rituals and symbolism, external adversity and stress, and the interdependence of members.¹⁵

Research has identified several effects that group cohesiveness can have on group members. The presence or absence of these effects can be used to measure group cohesiveness. These effects include an enhanced group atmosphere, group influence on individuals, and more effective problem solving abilities

Structural Faults

Janis listed four structural faults that contribute to groupthink, the intellectual insulation of the group, a lack of a tradition of impartial leadership, a lack of norms for impartial decision-making procedures, and a homogeneous group.

Group Insulation:

Janis discusses this variable only very briefly. He hypothesizes that the more insulated a group of decision makers is from outside opinion, the more vulnerable it is to groupthink. The only laboratory test of this was conducted by Moorhead and Montanari. Esser reports that this test confirmed that insulated groups consider fewer alternatives and make poorer decisions than non-insulated groups. However,

¹² Ibid.

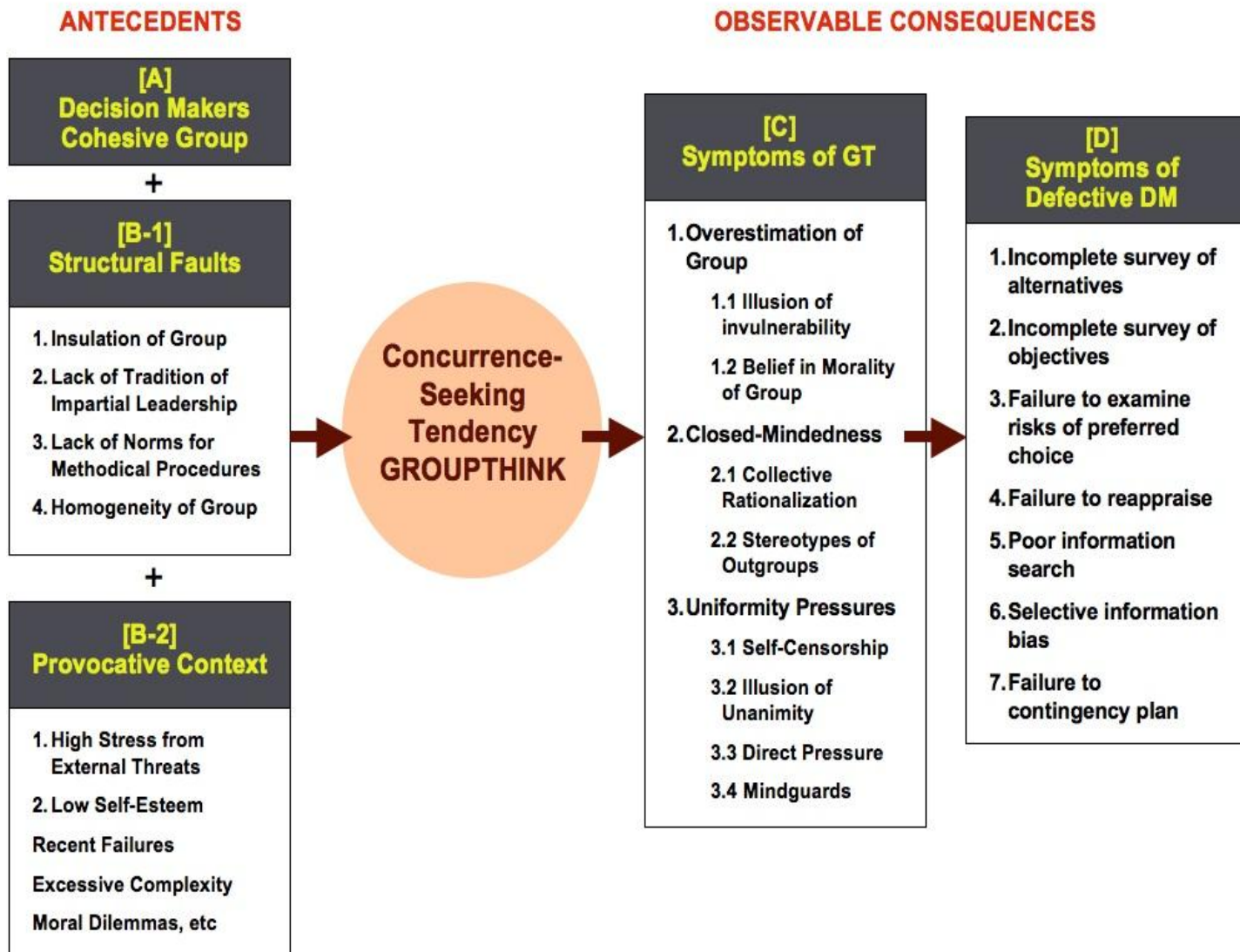
¹³ t'Hart 1990, 40.

¹⁴ t'Hart 1990, 34.

¹⁵ t'Hart 1990, 35.

contrary to the theory, insulated groups feel less self-confident and consult with experts more than non-insulated groups.¹⁶

Figure 1: Janis's Groupthink Theory



Source: <http://choo.fis.utoronto.ca/FIS/courses/LIS2149/Groupthink.html> Accessed 25 April 2010.

¹⁶ Esser, James K. 1998. "Alive and Well after 25 Years: A Review of Groupthink Research." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 73(2/3): 131.

Lack of Impartial Leadership

While cohesiveness probably has been the most studied variable in groupthink, and Janis believed it to be the key influence, other research suggests that leadership style also is critical to the group's finding optimal solutions. In 1977, Flowers tested the specific hypothesis that groupthink is most likely to occur in groups with high cohesiveness and closed leadership.¹⁷ Analysis of variance tests showed that groups with open leaders introduced significantly more facts into the discussion, and proposed significantly more solutions.¹⁸ Teams with open leaders introduced significantly more facts into the discussion before reaching a decision.¹⁹

Flowers's study had groups of both high and low cohesiveness. Although Janis named group cohesiveness as the key independent variable in producing groupthink, Flowers's research showed groupthink was equally possible in groups with high or low cohesiveness. This research suggests that leadership style may be a more important influence on groupthink than group cohesiveness.²⁰

Lack of Norms for Methodical Procedures

In *Victims of Groupthink* Janis contrasts two crises, and how they were handled by the same group of leaders. The first, the Bay of Pigs decision, became a classic case of groupthink. But Janis uses the second, the Cuban Missile crisis, to illustrate how sound process can lead to sound policy. Following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, President John Kennedy's National Security Council instituted new norms to improve the process: new definitions of the participants' roles, changes in group atmosphere, subgroup meetings, and leaderless group meetings.²¹

¹⁷ Flowers, Matie. "A Laboratory Test of Some Implications of Janis's Groupthink Hypothesis." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35(12): 890.

¹⁸ Flowers 1977, 893.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Flowers 1997, 895.

²¹ Janis 1972, 147-148.

Homogeneity of the Group

Finally, Janis theorized that groups were more susceptible to groupthink if their members were homogeneous in terms of social background and ideology. This homogeneity makes group cohesiveness more likely.

Provocative Context

The third antecedent condition of groupthink is a provocative context. Janis's model describes a provocative context as a combination of an external threat, and low self-esteem from a previous failure.

In her survey, Chapman cites research by Whyte, which questions Janis's original hypothesis that stress leads to groupthink, and instead proposes that groupthink comes from excessive self-confidence.²² Chapman comments on the relationship between anxiety and decision-making by citing three connections: anxiety has a detrimental effect on information processing, it may cause a tendency toward excessive risk taking, and it deflects attention from the problem at hand, as decision makers become more concerned with reducing anxiety than finding the optimal solution.²³

Subsequent Groupthink Research

In *Groupthink and Government*, Paul t'Hart undertakes a thorough examination of the theory. He examines the theory from social-psychological and political perspectives. He also applies groupthink theory to the Iran-contra scandal of the late 1980's. In "Groupthink, Bay of Pigs and Watergate Reconsidered" Bertram Raven used groupthink theory to examine the decisions leading to the Watergate scandal. He concluded that while groupthink was a factor, other factors, such as Nixon's influence and political considerations, also weighed on the group dynamic. Raven uses the Watergate example as evidence that groupthink does not necessarily lead to failure, which is the converse of the argument that failure is not necessarily caused by groupthink²⁴. In "Revisiting the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam Decisions 25 Years Later: How Well Has Groupthink Theory Stood the Test of Time?" Kramer contends that new historical information regarding Presidents Kennedy's and Johnson's decision-making processes shows

²² Chapman, Judith. "Anxiety and Defective Decision Making: An Elaboration of the Groupthink Model." *Management Decision* 44(10): 1395.

²³ Chapman 2006, 1396.

²⁴ Raven, Bertram H. 1998. "Groupthink, Bay of Pigs, and Watergate Reconsidered." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* Vol 73 (2/3): 352-361.

that their decisions were less the result of group dynamics than Janis suggested, casting doubt on the fundamental tenets of groupthink theory²⁵.

In “Recasting Janis’s Groupthink Model: The Key Role of Collective Efficacy in Decision Fiascoes” Whyte states that perceived self-efficacy should replace group cohesiveness as the key feature of groupthink theory²⁶. In “Beyond Fiasco: A Reappraisal of the Groupthink Phenomenon and a New Model of Group Decision Processes” Aldag and Fuller maintain that groupthink theory is not supported by empirical research, and seek to replace it with an alternative called the general group problem solving model. In contrast, Chapman’s article “Anxiety and Defective Decision Making: An Elaboration of the Groupthink Model” finds support for the part of groupthink theory that states that the probability of groupthink is increased by an environment of high stress or anxiety.²⁷

Ideological Basis of Bush Iraq Policy

Other scholarship describes the ideological foundations of the Bush administration’s Iraq policy. In “Understanding the Bush Doctrine” Jervis breaks down the Bush administration’s foreign policy orientation into four primary elements: the belief that the nature of a regime determines its international behavior; the perception that threats can only be defeated by vigorous action; including preventive war, a willingness to act unilaterally; and a belief that global peace depends on American action.²⁸ In “Bush’s Middle East Vision,” Gordon describes the four assumptions that he says laid behind Bush’s Middle East strategy: the assumptions that the status quo in the Middle East was untenable, that Iraq’s pursuit of weapons of mass destruction made long-term peace impossible in the Middle East, that peace between Israel and the Palestinians would be impossible without a change in Palestinian leadership, and that long-term peace and stability in the region would be impossible until the Middle East became more democratic.²⁹ In “Neocons vs. Realists: The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War” Schmidt and Williams link

²⁵ Kramer, Roderick M 1998. “Revisiting the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam Decisions 25 Years Later: How Well Has the Groupthink Hypothesis Stood the Test of Time?” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* Vol 73(2/3): 236-271.

²⁶ Whyte, Glen 1998. “Recasting Janis’s Groupthink Model: The Key Role of Collective Efficacy in Decision Fiascoes.” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* Vol 73 (2/3): 185-209.

²⁷ Chapman 2006. 1391-1404.

²⁸ Jervis, Robert 2003. “Understanding the Bush Doctrine.” *Political Science Quarterly* 118(3): 365-388.

²⁹ Gordon, Phillip H. 2003. “Bush’s Middle East Vision.” *Survival* 45(1): 155-165.

neoconservative foreign policy theory with arguments for the Iraq invasion, and contrast these arguments with realist arguments against the invasion.³⁰

In “The Iraq War and Agenda Setting” Mazarr applies the scholarly literature on agenda setting to the Iraq war decision, and finds many concepts of agenda setting consistent with the case³¹. In “Origins of Regime Change: ‘Ideapolitik’ on the Long Road to Baghdad 1993-2000” Burgos argues that the idea of the necessity of regime change was embedded in the thinking of neoconservative foreign policy elites by the time President Bush came into office.³² In “The Road to Baghdad: Ideas and Intellectuals in Explanations of the Iraq War” Flibbert uses constructivist theory to argue that a group of like-minded policy makers took powerful positions in the Bush administration and influenced administration policy. He examines alternative explanations for the invasion, such as personal/first Image reasons on the part of President Bush, domestic political motivations, and realist balance of power considerations.³³ He describes how these neoconservative policy makers laid down specific ideas about American national security, and how the invasion would have been inconceivable without these ideas.³⁴

Alternative Explanations for Iraq War Decisions

This thesis also examines literature that suggests alternative explanations for the Bush administration’s decisions. The imperfect applicability of groupthink theory to those decisions leads me to hypothesize that the decision to invade and the failure to plan the occupation were the results of other

³⁰ Schmidt Brian C. and Williams Michael C. 2008. “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists.” *Security Studies* 17: 191-220.

³¹ Mazarr Michael J. 2007. “The Iraq War and Agenda Setting.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3(1): 1-23.

³² Burgos Russell A. 2008. “Origins of Regime Change: ‘Ideapolitik’ on the Long Road to Baghdad, 1993-2000.” *Security Studies* 17: 221-256.

³³ “First image” explanations refer to the psychological motivations of individual decision makers. Flibbert speculated that President Bush could have been motivated to invade Iraq by his father’s failure to resolve the Saddam problem, and by Saddam’s link to a plot to assassinate his father. Flibbert rejects this hypothesis, saying that Bush showed no sign of planning to invade Iraq before 9/11. Flibbert also rejects the hypothesis that the war was driven by domestic political considerations, given that President Bush was at the height of his popularity before the Iraq war, which brought his approval ratings down. Finally he dismisses realist or balance of power considerations, as the balance of power was overwhelmingly in the U.S.’s favor before the invasion. See Andrew Flibbert.

³⁴ Flibbert, Andrew 2006. “The Road To Baghdad: Ideas and Intellectuals in Explanations of the Iraq War.” *Security Studies* 15(2): 310-352.

types of cognitive error, combined with ideological agenda setting. In “Invading and Occupying Iraq: Some Insights from Political Psychology” Houghton uses the non-theoretical literature on the Iraq war to examine the cognitive errors present in the decision process. Groupthink was only one error in a list that included the drunkard’s search, impulse decisions, improper use of analogy and the prominence of denial and wishful thinking, among others. Houghton finds evidence pointing to the presence of groupthink in some of the behavior of President Bush and top officials, and especially in places such as the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans³⁵.

In “Decision Making during International Crises,” Janis and Herek test the hypothesis that high-quality decision-making procedures during crises are associated with better results than poor decision-making procedures. To differentiate high quality from low quality, the authors judge each process using seven symptoms of defective decision-making. These criteria are: gross omission in surveying alternatives, gross omissions in surveying objectives, failure to examine major costs and risks of preferred choice, poor information search, selective bias in processing information at hand, failure to reconsider originally rejected alternatives, failure to work out detailed implementation, monitoring, and contingency plans. When applying these criteria to a series of international crises since World War II, Janis and Herek found sizable relationships between positive outcomes and decision-making processes that avoided the seven symptoms.³⁶

In “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy,” Alexander George prescribes a foreign policy decision-making process where the decision maker institutes a structured competition among differing viewpoints that results in a mixed system that combines a centralized management system with a pluralistic system.³⁷ In “The Transformation of Policy Ideas” and *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order*, Legro maintains that collective ideas, especially those regarding foreign policy, change as a result of a process of collapse and consolidation. A significant

³⁵ Houghton, David Patrick 2008. “Invading and Occupying Iraq: Some Insights from Political Psychology.” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 14(2): 169-192.

³⁶ Herek, Gregory M, Janis, Irving L. and Huth, Paul 1987. “Decision Making during International Crises: Is Quality of Process Related to Outcome?” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31(2): 203-226.

³⁷ George, Alexander L. 1972. “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy.” *The American Political Science Review* 66(3): 751-785.

external shock is not sufficient to change collective ideas, but must be followed by social coordination around the new idea.³⁸

³⁸ Legro, Jeffrey L. 2000. "The Transformation of Policy Ideas." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(3): 419-432.

Chapter 4: Overview of Bush Administration Decision Making Process

This chapter will begin by using scholarly literature as the basis for an in depth examination of the ideology behind much of the foreign policy of the Bush administration, especially the decision to invade Iraq. The chapter will then use memoirs, journalistic accounts, and administration officials' public statements to examine the chronology of the events that led up to the invasion of Iraq. A more detailed chronology appears in Appendix One. Finally, drawing on scholarly literature, memoirs and journalistic accounts, the chapter examines the planning for the occupation of Iraq.

Foreign Policy Ideologies at Work in the Bush Administration

Although few considered George Bush a neoconservative, many key members of his administration were either prominent neoconservative intellectuals, such as Richard Perle, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, or political appointees who advocated neoconservative policy ideas, such as Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and speechwriters David Frum and Michael Gerson. While George Bush did not campaign as a neoconservative, his foreign policy reflected elements of neoconservative thought even before 9/11, namely a preference for unilateralism and a mistrust of multilateral institutions.

Neoconservatism is an ideological perspective that promotes an appreciation of republican virtue and national greatness, which tend to conflict with contemporary liberalism. Neoconservatives see the erosion of public virtue as a threat, one that is partially addressed by an emphasis on an ideologically based, forward-looking "American exceptionalism." In neoconservative thought, patriotism is not merely affection for country, but loyalty to a set of ideals. This is often referred to as "national greatness" conservatism, wherein America's duty to history is the promotion of heroic ideals. In this vision, American national interest lies in the application of traditional heroic ideals in domestic and foreign policy. This translates to a policy of "benevolent hegemony" based upon "freedom and greatness" in which Americans work to promote universal ideals around the world. In foreign affairs, neoconservatives view the world in Manichean terms, with the globe divided not among nations pursuing their own interests, but between forces of good and evil.

Michael Williams's description of the intellectual basis of neoconservatism begins by examining its attitude toward the place of self-interest in politics, at both the individual and the national levels. Although so-called "neocons" recognize the pursuit of interest as an inherent part of life, the lack of anything transcendent leads to an empty and meaningless life. At the national level, when the state is nothing but a vehicle for the pursuit of national interest, cynicism festers, and leads to an unwillingness by individual citizens to defend the state from its enemies. This makes decadence the primary threat to

the state, not a foreign enemy. The neocons' answer to this threat is a commitment to republican virtue, both among individuals and the nation. At the national level, neoconservatism advocates incorporating the founding ideals of the United States into a forward-looking nationalism. The U.S. requires a commitment to national ideals in both domestic and foreign policy. In the neoconservative school of thought, commitment to American exceptionalism or national greatness is not a luxury, it is a necessity for long-term survival.³⁹

This leads directly into neoconservative foreign policy. When the national interest is expanded to include nonmaterial interests, a successful foreign policy must promote a set of shared national principles in order to further a healthy polity.⁴⁰ In this view, a realist foreign policy will detract from American national security by promoting division between policy and morality and encouraging cynicism and social decay.⁴¹

Jervis describes the Bush doctrine as almost identical to what is widely recognized as neoconservatism. According to Jervis, the Bush doctrine has four central elements: the belief that the nature of a regime determines its international behavior, the perception that threats can only be defeated by vigorous action, up to and including preventive war, a willingness to have the United States act unilaterally to address these threats, and the belief that global peace and stability depend on U.S. hegemony.⁴²

All of these elements are found in neoconservative foreign policy theory that predates the Bush administration. The belief that the internal nature of regimes determines foreign policy is most clearly laid out by Kristol and Kagan, who write that nondemocratic regimes will eventually need to resort to provocative action to bolster their legitimacy. As provocative behavior is necessary for the regime's survival, no amount of diplomacy will persuade them to behave in a less aggressive manner.⁴³ As a result, global security can only be guaranteed by the U.S. actively promoting regime change in dictatorial

³⁹ Williams, Michael. 2005. "What is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory." *European Journal of International Relations*. 11(3): 312-318.

⁴⁰ Williams 2005, 322.

⁴¹ Williams 2005, 322-323.

⁴² Jervis 2003, 366.

⁴³ Kristol, William and Kagan, Robert. 2004. "National Interest and Global Responsibility." In *The Neocon Reader* Irwin Stelzer ed. New York: Grove Press: 68.

regimes. Kristol and Kagan call it “perverse” to declare the impossibility of democratic change after nation-states such as the Philippines, South Korea, Nicaragua and Chile transitioned to democracy.⁴⁴

Although many elements of the Bush foreign policy conflicted with realism, there was one similarity. The Bush team had a strongly stated preference for pursuing the national interest, as they defined it. Candidate Bush explained that, when deciding whether to use force, his first question would be: “What’s in the best interests of the United States?”⁴⁵ This pursuit of the national interest did not imply a complete disregard for the global good, national security advisor Rice claimed, as, “national interest has been defined instead by a desire to foster the spread of freedom, prosperity, and peace.”⁴⁶ That desire, combined with other nations’ desire to follow strong American leadership, meant that strong pursuit of broadly defined U.S. national interest would be the best way of promoting peace and democracy around the world.

Military Transformation and Nation Building

From the neoconservative perspective, foreign policy is linked to military technology. Neoconservatives consider recent technological innovations, especially high-speed communications, precision munitions, and real-time data imaging to have changed the nature of warfare. Secretary Rumsfeld spoke of the need for a transformed military when he said: “We need rapidly deployable, fully integrated joint forces capable of reaching distant theaters quickly and working with our air and sea forces to strike adversaries swiftly, successfully and with devastating effect.”⁴⁷

The U.S. had successfully used this style of high-tech, precision, heavily networked warfare Secretary Rumsfeld described in recent engagements, such as Operation Desert Storm, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Following the Bosnian Serbs’ quick capitulation after U.S. bombing, neoconservatives viewed NATO’s victory not only as vindication of their public recommendation of U.S. military action,

⁴⁴ Kristol and Kagan 2004, 70.

⁴⁵ Daalder, Ivo and Lindsay, James. 2003. *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press: 49.

⁴⁶ Daalder and Lindsay 2003, 45.

⁴⁷ Rumsfeld, Donald “21st Century Transformation” remarks delivered at National Defense University Washington DC on 31 January 2002.

but as the harbinger of a new age of warfare.⁴⁸ With this new age of warfare, the U.S. would be able to apply military force, either alone or as part of an alliance, with minimal time commitment and casualties. This belief was confirmed by the seemingly quick U.S. victory over the Taliban in Afghanistan. The perception of increased military efficacy contributed to the belief that the U.S. could implement regime change through military means quickly and at a low cost in casualties.

The neoconservatives were always skeptical of what came to be known as “nation building”, the practice of long-term humanitarian intervention and reconstruction aid. The George W. Bush campaign freely expressed this skepticism. Bush’s foreign policy adviser Condoleezza Rice wrote in 2000 that the U.S. military “is not a civilian police force. It is not a political referee. And it is most certainly not designed to build a civilian society.”⁴⁹ This disdain for long-term reconstruction would later have consequences in Iraq, as the Bush administration’s reluctance to be committed to nation building led to the assumption that American forces would quickly withdraw after Saddam’s fall, thus making occupation planning unnecessary. As late as February 2003, Secretary Rumsfeld delivered a speech entitled “Beyond Nation Building”, in which he described the adverse effects of a long-term foreign presence and promised, “Iraq belongs to the Iraqis—we do not aspire to own it or run it”. He emphasized that the U.S. goal was not to impose an American template on Iraqi government, but to see an Iraqi government stand up as soon as possible, conceivably through a *loya jirga* style process.⁵⁰

Chronology of Events Leading to U.S. Invasion of Iraq

Although Iraq had been a strategic challenge for the United States since 1990, the thought of using the American military to depose Saddam’s regime was not widely advocated in the U.S. government, even immediately after 9/11. In the months before 9/11, there were no active plans afoot to invade Iraq. Although a few foreign policy thinkers affiliated with the administration had called for invasion, their ideas gained no traction until after the 9/11 attacks. At that time, the notion of Iraq presenting a strategic threat gained a new immediacy with the prospect of Saddam aiding terrorist groups, especially by providing them with weapons of mass destruction.

⁴⁸ Halper, Stefan and Clarke, Jonathan. 2004. *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press: 92.

⁴⁹ Daalder and Lindsay 2003, 47.

⁵⁰ Rumsfeld, Donald “Beyond Nation Building” (Remarks as prepared for delivery at 11th Annual Salute to Freedom, Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum New York City, February 14th, 2003).

Journalistic and first-person sources describe how Iraq began as one strategic issue among many before 9/11, then later grew to overshadow all other foreign policy questions, including the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

President-elect Bush met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon before his inauguration, a meeting that included a discussion of Iraq and the enforcement of sanctions and the no-fly zones.⁵¹ After the inauguration, National Security Assistant Rice chaired NSC Principals' meetings on Iraq in February and March of 2001. On August 1st, the NSC Deputies' Committee presented a plan for regime change in Iraq called "A Liberation Strategy", which did not include an American invasion.⁵²

This relatively relaxed attitude toward Iraq (and even more toward al-Qaeda) changed on 9/11. While responsibility for the attacks was assigned to al-Qaeda almost immediately, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was reported to have speculated on the possibility of hitting both al-Qaeda and Iraq.⁵³ The next day, September 12, President Bush met with DOD officials at the Pentagon, where he spoke of achieving important results, saying, "We won't just pound sand."⁵⁴ At this same meeting, Rumsfeld speculated about whether 9/11 did not provide "an opportunity" to attack Iraq⁵⁵, and pointed out that an attack on Iraq would inflict damage that would cause other state sponsors of terrorism to rethink their policies⁵⁶.

The first week after 9/11 saw the beginnings of what was called the Global War on Terror. While the consensus in the Bush administration was for concentrating on Afghanistan, this was not unanimous. President Bush met with the National Security Council at Camp David on September 15th, the weekend after 9/11. At that meeting, Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz vocally advocated an attack on Iraq, reportedly at Rumsfeld's urging.⁵⁷ Secretary Powell strongly disagreed, saying an attack on Iraq would jeopardize the coalition the U.S. was building. The vote of the principals was 4 to 0 against attacking

⁵¹ Woodward, Robert. 2004. *Plan of Attack*. New York: Simon & Schuster: 10.

⁵² Woodward 2004, 21.

⁵³ Woodward 2004, 24.

⁵⁴ Feith, Douglas. 2008. *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*. New York: HarperCollins: 15.

⁵⁵ Woodward 2004, 25.

⁵⁶ Feith 2008, 15.

⁵⁷ Gordon, Michael E and Trainor, Bernard E. 2007. *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* New York: Vintage Books: 18.

Iraq, with Rumsfeld abstaining.⁵⁸ Later, in a private conversation with Wolfowitz, President Bush remarked that the military options for Iraq were “unimaginative”. Wolfowitz presented him the option known as the “southern enclave” strategy, where the U.S. would seize the southern oilfields in the Shia area near Basra, creating a base for future anti-Saddam operations and strangling the Iraqi economy by depriving it of the oil revenue⁵⁹. Rumsfeld had ordered the Third Army to begin planning for this option two days before, on September 13th⁶⁰.

Despite his advisers’ advocacy for attacking Iraq, President Bush made Afghanistan the first theater in the War on Terror, telling Rice that Iraq would be “put off”.⁶¹ He ordered military strikes against terrorist targets worldwide on September 17th.

On September 19th, the Defense Policy Board, under neoconservative stalwart Richard Perle met at the Pentagon, where the one subject on the agenda was Iraq. The Board received two briefings. The first was from Princeton professor Bernard Lewis, who told the board that Iraq needed to be liberated, and that Middle Eastern nations would respect the use of force. The second was from controversial Iraqi exile leader Ahmed Chalabi. Chalabi, who had been charged with embezzlement in Jordan, was mistrusted by the CIA and State Department, but highly regarded by Perle, Wolfowitz and staffers in Vice President Cheney’s office. Chalabi told the board that Saddam was isolated even inside Iraq. He was surrounded by bodyguards, and had no control over the north and little over the south. The Iraqi military was weak and could be toppled easily. Iraqi insurgents aided by U.S. airpower could turn Iraq into a pro-Western free market democracy.⁶²

After Lewis and Chalabi spoke, Rumsfeld addressed the group. Toppling the Taliban would not be enough, he said. Instead, the United States needed to show that it would not tolerate unsavory governments affiliated with terrorists. He did not mention democracy, human rights or WMD.⁶³

⁵⁸ Woodward 2004, 25.

⁵⁹ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 18.

⁶⁰ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 22.

⁶¹ Woodward 2004, 26.

⁶² Gordon and Trainor 2007, 20-21.

⁶³ Ibid.

The ideas behind supporting the Iraq invasion were beginning to emerge. Deputy Defense Secretary Feith authored a paper entitled “Strategic Thoughts”, which was revised with input from Wolfowitz, Joint Chiefs head of Plans General Abizaid, and JCS Chairman Myers, and went to the President on September 30th. In this paper, Feith argued that the U.S. should be concentrating on state sponsors of terrorism, which could provide terrorist groups with weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. could disrupt terrorism by pressuring their state sponsors, either through military action or diplomatic pressures. But even diplomatic pressure would depend on the success of military force for credibility.⁶⁴ Success in the war on terror, Feith argued in the paper, required geopolitical change that would cause all state sponsors to give up their support. “If the war does not significantly change the world’s political map, the U.S. will not achieve its aim”, the paper advised Bush.⁶⁵

As the campaign in Afghanistan began, Iraq was pushed to the back burner. With the fall of the Taliban, the administration began to focus on Iraq. President Bush asked Secretary Rumsfeld to update the Iraq war plan on November 21.⁶⁶ On November 26th, at a ceremony honoring two aid workers rescued in Afghanistan, President Bush took a question on Iraq, inquiring what he would say about Iraq as he looked at the next steps in the war on terror. Bush replied: “Well, my message is, is that if you harbor a terrorist, you’re a terrorist. If you feed a terrorist, you’re a terrorist. If you develop weapons of mass destruction that you want to terrorize the world, you’ll be held accountable. And I also have said, as I recall at the White House, we’re going to make sure that we accomplish each mission that we tackle. First things first.”⁶⁷ In an answer to a follow-up question on Iraq, Bush stated, “Afghanistan is still just the beginning”.⁶⁸

Secretary Rumsfeld began to push the military forward on Iraq. On November 27th, he ordered General Franks to prepare a briefing on the Commander’s concept of the Iraq war plan.⁶⁹ Despite the workload on Franks’s staff from the Afghanistan campaign, Rumsfeld pressured Franks for quick results

⁶⁴ Feith 2008, 81.

⁶⁵ Feith 2008, 82.

⁶⁶ Woodward 2004, 1.

⁶⁷ Bush, George W. “President Welcomes Aid Workers Rescued from Afghanistan” Accessed April 16, 2010. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011126-1.htm>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Franks, Tommy. 2004. *American Soldier*. New York: Harper Collins: 329.

on the Iraq plan. Franks briefed Rumsfeld and General Meyers by videoconference on December 4,⁷⁰ then followed up with a second videoconference on December 12th.⁷¹ Franks and Rumsfeld met on Iraq approximately weekly through December, with a phone conversation on the 19th,⁷² and a videoconference on the 27th.⁷³ It was on the 27th that Rumsfeld ordered Franks to Crawford, Texas to brief the President on Iraq at his ranch.⁷⁴

Franks continued to meet with Rumsfeld on the Iraq plan in the new year. In January 2002, President Bush gave his most public warning on the perceived Iraq threat, in his 2002 State of the Union. In that speech, Bush described the dangers posed by the “axis of evil”, North Korea, Iran and Iraq. Iraq, Bush stated, supported terrorism and was plotting to develop anthrax, nerve gas and nuclear weapons. In response to these threats, Bush promised, “I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer.”⁷⁵

Although the Bush administration was discussing the Iraq threat, and planning for war, it still maintained the public stance that it wanted to avoid war. In a joint press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi, President Bush insisted, “We want to resolve all issues peacefully, whether it be Iraq, Iran or North Korea, for that matter.”⁷⁶ The previous week, Secretary of State Powell told the Senate Budget Committee that: “I think most people understand that the President is not looking for a war; we’re looking for peace.”⁷⁷

Despite protests that he wanted a peaceful solution, Bush continued to promote the threat. At a press event in March, without mentioning Iraq by name, he stated unequivocally, “Some states that

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Franks 2004, 341.

⁷² Franks 2004, 345.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Franks 2004, 346.

⁷⁵ Bush, George W. “President Delivers State of the Union Address” Accessed April 24, 2010. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

⁷⁶ Bush, George W. “President Bush, Prime Minister Koizumi Hold Press Conference” Accessed April 25, 2010. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/02/20020218.html>.

⁷⁷ Powell, Colin L. “Statement on President Bush’s Budget Request for the State Department for 2003” Accessed April 24, 2010. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2002/7957.htm>

sponsor terror are seeking or already possess weapons of mass destruction; terrorist groups are hungry for these weapons and would use them without a hint of conscience...These facts cannot be denied, and must be confronted.”⁷⁸

Vice President Cheney traveled to the Middle East in March, seeking support for U.S. military operations against Saddam. Cheney’s efforts met with mixed success: the smaller Arab nations like Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates pledged support, while Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey were less enthusiastic.⁷⁹

Other preparations were ongoing. General Franks continued shuttling to Washington, holding regular meetings with Secretary Rumsfeld and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On March 23rd, the Joint Chiefs held an exercise called Prominent Hammer, which examined Franks’ revised Iraq war plan. The exercise suggested an invasion of Iraq would cause a strain on personnel and select weapons systems.⁸⁰ It also raised the possibility that a U.S. focus on Iraq would encourage the North Koreans to act more aggressively.⁸¹

In addition to preparations at the Defense Department, President Bush did his part to build a coalition for war. He hosted British Prime Minister Tony Blair at Camp David the weekend of April 6-7th,⁸² and traveled to Europe to meet with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac in the last week of May.⁸³

During the spring and summer of 2002, there seem to have been few opportunities to have presented President Bush with differing views. Various sources list only two meetings of President Bush with the entire National Security Council during these months. The first was in May 2002, where General Franks briefed the NSC on the updated Iraq war plan. At that meeting, according to Franks, Secretary Powell struck a discordant note, telling the President that, given the changes in the world since 1991,

⁷⁸ Bush, George W. “President Thanks World Coalition for Anti-Terrorism Efforts” Accessed April 25, 2010. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020311-1.html>.

⁷⁹ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 49.

⁸⁰ Woodward 2004, 114-115.

⁸¹ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 54.

⁸² Woodward 2004, 119.

⁸³ Woodward 2004, 129.

building an anti-Saddam coalition would be much more difficult, as would getting a vote in the UN Security Council for military action. Franks recalls that Powell's message was not an attempt to dissuade Bush from going to war, but merely to inform him that the diplomacy might be more difficult than anticipated.⁸⁴

All throughout the spring, President Bush insisted publicly that the United States was not planning for war. Despite this, the administration continued making the case for invading Iraq. In April, in an interview with the United Kingdom's ITV Network, Bush stated, "I made up my mind that Saddam needs to go."⁸⁵ When asked about the lack of an Iraq al-Qaeda link, Bush declared, "The worst thing that could happen would be to allow a nation like Iraq, run by Saddam Hussein, to develop weapons of mass destruction, and then team up with terrorist organizations so they can blackmail the world."⁸⁶

The administration continued making its case in interviews, but President Bush did not make a detailed case in a speech until his June 1st commencement address at West Point. In that speech, Bush continued to argue that the United States was threatened by the possibility that rogue states would provide terrorists with weapons of mass destruction. He not only restated the threat, but contended that the threat required direct action, saying: "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."⁸⁷ Couching his arguments in military terms, Bush stated, "We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act."⁸⁸

Despite public protestations to the contrary, President Bush had almost certainly decided to invade Iraq by summer of 2002. In a discussion with National Security Assistant Rice, Richard Haass expressed reservations about invading Iraq, and wanted an opportunity to make a case to the President.

⁸⁴ Franks 2004, 386.

⁸⁵ Woodward 2004, 119.

⁸⁶ Woodward 2004, 120.

⁸⁷ Bush, George W. "Graduation Speech at West Point" (Speech delivered at the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. June 1st 2002). Accessed April 25, 2010 <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Rice's response was reportedly to tell Haass that the president's mind was already made up on Iraq.⁸⁹ Another window into the administration's thinking at this time comes from a high level British document that became known as the Downing Street memo. This memorandum was the minutes of a meeting of Prime Minister Blair's national security advisers on July 23rd of 2002. In this meeting, the head of MI-6, identified only as "C", reported that after a trip to Washington: "There was a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD".⁹⁰

The next NSC meeting on Iraq took place on August 5th. At that meeting, Franks gave another briefing on the evolving Iraq war plan. Powell had dinner with President Bush and Rice in the White House residence that evening in order to lay out his concerns about Iraq. The Secretary of State was concerned with the lack of planning for the occupation. When the Iraqi army cracked, Powell warned, Iraqi government would crack with it, leaving the United States as the Iraqi government. Putting the danger in political terms, Powell told Bush Iraq would suck all the oxygen out of the administration, and would define the second term. Powell also made the case for going to the UN, which he argued would provide diplomatic cover for the invasion and would cement any possible alliances, including with the British.⁹¹ At a meeting of the NSC Principals on August 14th, Powell reiterated the importance of building a coalition, yet again did not question the wisdom of the operation itself.⁹²

In the late summer and fall of 2002, Vice President Cheney began to heighten his public profile by making a series of speeches that argued the case for invasion. In the first of these speeches, to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Nashville, Cheney questioned the effectiveness of weapons inspections, at the exact time the administration was planning its strategy at the UN.⁹³

By September 2002, the administration was beginning to court congressional leaders for a vote to authorize the invasion. In White House meetings and committee testimony, administration officials made

⁸⁹ Haass, Richard N. 2009. *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars*. New York: Simon & Schuster: 213.

⁹⁰ Rycroft, Matthew. 2003. Downing Street memo.

⁹¹ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 81-82.

⁹² Woodward 2004, 156.

⁹³ Cheney, Richard B. "Vice President Speaks at VFW 103rd National Convention" (speech delivered at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention August 26 2002).

the case for war, culminating in votes approving military action against Iraq in October. Secretary Powell's efforts led to the United Nations' passage of Resolution 1441 in November, requiring Saddam to accept new weapons inspections.

After an unusually high frequency of National Security Council meetings during August, (two with the President, one with Rice chairing the principals) the NSC increased its frequency, meeting three times the weekend of September 6th-7th. Franks briefed the principals on the morning of September 6th at the White House on the updated war plan.⁹⁴ The principals met again that evening at Camp David, in preparation for Saturday's meeting with the President, and his summit with Prime Minister Blair.⁹⁵ The Friday evening meeting reportedly featured open disagreement between Powell and Cheney, with the Vice President arguing against going through the UN, and Powell stressing the importance of the diplomatic option.⁹⁶ The two made the same arguments the next morning with the president.⁹⁷

The first major troop deployment orders were issued in November and December. At the same time Bush held more meetings with key allies, meeting with Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar on November 15th, and with Spanish Prime Minister Aznar on December 18th.

President Bush kept a busy schedule of meetings with his national security team, congressional leaders, and allies throughout the early months of 2003. Franks presented the final version of his plan to Secretary Rumsfeld on January 24th,⁹⁸ and Powell made his WMD presentation to the UN Security Council on February 5th. The National Security Council met twice more in this period, on January 15th to discuss humanitarian aid in Iraq,⁹⁹ and on February 14th, just weeks before the war began.

⁹⁴ Franks 2004, 395.

⁹⁵ Woodward 2004, 174.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Woodward 2004, 176.

⁹⁸ Woodward 2004, 287.

⁹⁹ Woodward 2004, 276.

Examination of Planning for the Occupation of Iraq

Postwar occupation planning took place in both military and civilian venues, on several different levels in the military, and in several different civilian agencies. Yet, many of these planners shared the same assumptions, despite working separately. The historical record shows that there was not a lack of planning for the occupation. Instead, much of the high level planning began too late to be effective, and was kept too far from the highest level leaders, preventing them from integrating postwar planning into the combat plan.

Central Command

At Central Command, serious planning for the combat phase of the war predated planning for the occupation by many months. The Iraq war plan Franks presented to the NSC on December 27th, 2001 in Crawford contained a section for Phase IV, which described the desired endstate for Iraq, and listed its duration as “UNKNOWN”.¹⁰⁰

The plan went through continuous change. The February 1st, 2002 version of the Phase IV plan called for an increased deployment of troops in the post-combat phase, up to 250,000.¹⁰¹ When Franks briefed his plan to the NSC on August 5th, he discussed his Phase IV plan in detail. Making it clear that his plan still called for 250,000 American troops, Franks described the challenges the U.S. military would face in postwar Iraq, such as setting up a new army, new police force, and “well-designed and well-funded reconstruction projects that put large numbers of Iraqis to work.”¹⁰² Franks also cautioned the NSC that U.S. troop withdrawals would parallel deployment of new Iraqi security forces, and that the exit strategy would be tied to Iraqi governance, not a fixed timeline.¹⁰³

Franks reports that he and his staff held extensive discussions about what a postwar Iraq would require: security, public works projects, and civilian governance. He recognized the challenges of rebuilding a civil society hobbled by decades of dictatorship, and the importance of quickly addressing humanitarian needs and unemployment. Franks and his staff operated under certain assumptions while

¹⁰⁰ Franks 2004, 351.

¹⁰¹ Franks 2004, 366.

¹⁰² Franks 2004, 393.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

planning, chief among them that there would be sufficient troops to maintain security, both 250,000 Americans and units of a mostly intact Iraqi army.

Once Franks's final war plan was finished in February 2003, the CENTCOM staff began to develop a detailed Phase IV plan called OPPLAN IRAQI RECONSTRUCTION. Bensahel et al list three key shortcomings of this plan. It was not completed until April 2003, by which point events had rendered it obsolete. It did not have any additional resources devoted to it; only forces that were used in combat were left for reconstruction. Finally, the plan had always included the military playing a supporting role in reconstruction, not the lead.¹⁰⁴ These shortcomings were combined with the fact that postwar planning inevitably suffered from a shortage of time and personnel. With Franks constantly revising plans for the combat phase and fighting Rumsfeld to maintain troop levels, he was too ready to let other government agencies take the lead on Phase IV planning. An officer on Franks's staff who worked on Phase IV planning told an Army historian, "Our main focus was on the first three phases and Phase IV was something we were planning but there were many intangibles and we didn't focus as much time on it as we should have".¹⁰⁵ Another of CENTCOM's main planners claimed they had been told other government agencies would take the lead, though it never became clear who that was. It wasn't until August that CENTCOM learned it would be responsible for civil support. This late start, combined with the demands of combat plans, meant, "There wasn't a whole lot of intellectual energy being focused on Phase IV."¹⁰⁶ By early 2003, outsiders were beginning to worry about CENTCOM's occupation planning. Former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, a member of the Defense Policy Board, was concerned enough to fly to Tampa to meet with Franks and his staff, who assured him that they had thought everything through.¹⁰⁷ Other Pentagon officials became worried, eventually including Rumsfeld. He reportedly recognized that CENTCOM was "behind the power curve" on occupation planning, due to its preoccupation with combat planning and friction with Feith's Office of Special Plans. The Secretary

¹⁰⁴ Bensahel, Nora Olikier, Olga Crane, Keith Brennan, Richard A. Jr. Gregg, Heather S. Sullivan, Thomas Rathmell, Andrew. 2008 *After Saddam: Prewar Planning and the Occupation of Iraq*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

¹⁰⁵ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 159.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 159-160.

¹⁰⁷ Graham, Bradley. 2009. *By His Own Rules: The Ambitions, Successes, and Ultimate Failures of Donald Rumsfeld* New York: Public Affairs 380.

began pressing CENTCOM, reportedly asking things like, “I’ve had twenty-seven briefings on the war but I’ve had one on the postwar. What’s going on?”¹⁰⁸

Joint Chiefs of Staff

By law, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) act as advisors and administrators, not commanders. Thus, the Joint Chiefs had no direct responsibility for the Iraq war plan. Nevertheless, they inserted themselves in postwar planning. In fall 2002, the Joint Staff conducted a war game called Prominent Hammer II. Based on the results of this study, the Joint Staff recommended that postwar Iraq be administered by a separate headquarters, run by a three star general and staffed with experts in 21 areas. Once Rumsfeld was briefed on this plan, he implemented several changes. He declared that the postwar headquarters would be divided, with a civilian administrator for reconstruction, and a military commander for security and security assistance.¹⁰⁹

Task Force IV

Based on the results of CENTCOM’s Iraq wargame called Internal Look, the JCS decided that additional Phase IV planning was necessary, and created a postwar planning cell called Task Force IV, under the command of a brigadier general. This unit was deployed to Kuwait in January 2003, and placed under the command of Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC). Up to that point, most CFLCC staffers did not know the unit had existed, and few knew what it was intended to do. CFLCC had already done a great deal of postwar planning, and many viewed Task Force IV with distrust. General McKiernan, the CFLCC commander, declined to fuse Task Force IV with his staff, and instead disbanded the unit.¹¹⁰

Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC)

Under the Iraq war plan (OPPLAN 1003V, later known as OPPLAN COBRA II), the Third Army was designated as the Combined Forces Land Component Command, which had responsibility for executing the invasion of Iraq and the postwar occupation. In January 2002, soon after Franks’s post-Christmas meeting with the President at Crawford, CFLCC was formally tasked to begin planning ground operations. For the first time, CFLCC planners were allowed access to Franks’s war plan, and their chief

¹⁰⁸ Graham 2009, 381.

¹⁰⁹ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 160-161.

¹¹⁰ Bensahel et al 2008, 11.

planner, Colonel Benson, immediately decided more emphasis on Phase IV would be needed. At that time, Benson was the only non-general officer given access to the plan, something that did not change until October 2002 when the plan's classification was downgraded to SECRET, which restricted the staff's ability to formulate a plan.¹¹¹ This is not to say that planning was given a low priority at CFLCC. Many of its top planners were graduates of the Army's elite School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), and many other SAMS graduates were moved from other assignments to work at CFLCC,¹¹² a sign of the importance planning was given, including postwar planning.

At least one former CFLCC planner recounts that, a month before the war began, the Phase IV planning group concluded that, "the campaign would produce conditions at odds with meeting strategic objectives".¹¹³ The combat phases of the plan envisioned an all-out effort to destroy Saddam's regime. However, the planners decided, the resulting power vacuum would allow a window of opportunity for opposition forces that would jeopardize the U.S.' strategic goals, forces such as an influx of foreign fighters, increased criminal activity, freedom of action for former Iraqi regime members, and a lack of control over WMD's.¹¹⁴ When the planners reported their concerns to General McKiernan, he refused to change the plan, believing that Iraqi forces would present a greater threat to the strategic objectives of the United States than any possible future anarchy.¹¹⁵

Although McKiernan did not change the combat phase of the plan, he did authorize CFLCC to issue a follow-up plan called OPPLAN ECLIPSE II, the final version of which was released on April 12th. Before its release, however, draft versions of the plan were shared with subordinate units, helping them with their own plans.¹¹⁶ Even after planners had shared their concerns with McKiernan, ECLIPSE II remained based on the assumption that there would be functioning Iraqi institutions, such as a central government and an army that would be active partners in reconstruction.

Civilian Postwar Planning

¹¹¹ Bensahel et al 2008, 10-11.

¹¹² Peterson, Steven W. 2004. "Central but Inadequate: The Application of Theory in Operation Iraqi Freedom." Unpublished Educational Paper, National Defense University 4.

¹¹³ Peterson 2004, 10.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Bensahel 2008, 13.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Interagency

Following the Joint Staff's Prominent Hammer exercise in 2002, General Casey, the head of the Joint Staff, decided that the level of interagency coordination was inadequate, and set up a structure to remedy that. This structure was known as the Iraq Political Military Committee (IPMC), made up of representatives of State, CIA, NSC staff, the Defense Department, and the Vice President's office.¹¹⁷ The IPMC was a staff officer level unit, and the Executive Steering Group was soon formed above it, which was chaired by an NSC staffer, and sent policy recommendations to the Deputies' Committee. The ESG/IPMC structure later formed several working groups including an Interagency Humanitarian/Reconstruction Group, which, "prepared plans for immediate relief and longer term reconstruction in Iraq" and also included representatives from the Justice Department and USAID.¹¹⁸

The ESG/IPMC's postwar planning was limited in its effectiveness for several reasons. Its meetings suffered from inconsistent attendance by agency representatives, especially CIA and DOD. DOD attendees also came with inconsistent positions, or with insufficient seniority to make decisions. Second, at least one NSC official claims that while the IPMC's Reconstruction Group studied postwar issues, the ESG concentrated primarily on war plans, to the detriment of postwar planning.¹¹⁹

Defense Department

Much of the Pentagon's planning for Iraq was centered in the office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Douglas Feith. Serving under Feith was an Assistant Secretary of Defense, whose office had issue specific and regional desks. With Iraq becoming a greater concern by summer of 2002, Feith decided to expand the Northern Gulf desk of the Near East South Asia office. Feith was concerned that an expanded Iraq desk in his office would create the perception that President Bush had decided on war. He sought to prevent that by calling his expanded Iraq desk The Office of Special Plans (OSP).¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Feith 2008, 276.

¹¹⁸ "Prewar Planning for Postwar Iraq" information paper published by the Office of Near East and South Asian Affairs within the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. Accessed April 24, 2010. http://policy.defense.gov/sections/policy_offices/isa/nesa/postwar_iraq.html.

¹¹⁹ Bensahel 2008, 23.

¹²⁰ Feith 2008, 293-294.

Some non-DOD officials have reported frustration with the DOD's role in the interagency process. Some officials believed that DOD representatives were dictating policy, and thought that the Defense Department's practice of presenting OSP guidance papers without prior coordination was not helpful to the interagency process.¹²¹ Following President Bush's decision to place Defense in sole charge of Iraqi reconstruction in October 2002, the perception that DOD was first among equals grew even more.¹²² However, there was a delay between the President's decision, and its announcement in January 2003, which contributed to the confusion.¹²³

ORHA

On July 27th, 2002, the NSC Deputies Committee had discussed the need for the appointment of a single coordinator for civilian reconstruction planning, where Armitage reportedly argued for a delay.¹²⁴ By October, Rumsfeld was holding extensive discussions with Feith, Wolfowitz, JCS chair Meyers, and vice chairman Pace on the issue. Rumsfeld concluded that reconstruction should be under a single individual, as all areas, economic, political and security, as these areas were mutually dependent. Feith put these ideas into a memo to the NSC, calling for one cabinet official, the Secretary of Defense to have sole responsibility. On October 18th, Rumsfeld ordered Feith to appoint a coordinator, an order which he immediately reversed, due to the fear of the perception that the administration had decided on war.¹²⁵

This concern gradually disappeared. In late December, Rumsfeld ordered Feith to draft a charter for the new agency.¹²⁶ On January 4th, Feith contacted deputy National Security Assistant Stephen Hadley to revisit the issue, and the issue was approved at the White House. Feith contacted retired three star general Jay Garner and asked him to serve as head of what would become the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA). Garner agreed, but told Feith he could only give the job four months.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Bensahel 2008, 28.

¹²² Bensahel 2008, 29.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Feith 2008, 316.

¹²⁵ Feith 2008, 316-317.

¹²⁶ Feith 2008, 347.

¹²⁷ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 168-171.

The first major challenge Garner faced was staffing his new organization. He quickly filled the most senior positions with old friends, other retired Army generals. Garner managed to build a core staff of military officers after a few weeks. After that, however, he depended on other agencies to provide staff, which they resisted doing. In mid-February, ORHA had to ask NSC staff to again press the other agencies to detail personnel. This eventually happened, but slowly. Many staffers did not join ORHA until the organization had moved to Baghdad.¹²⁸

The Defense Department, in particular, was uncooperative in assigning civilian personnel to ORHA, despite the fact that ORHA answered to Secretary Rumsfeld. In at least one case, DOD not only refused to provide its own personnel, it blocked the appointment of others. Garner wanted to hire Tom Warrick of the State Department, who had headed the Future of Iraq project, and Meghan O'Sullivan, from the State Department's Policy Planning Office. Powell also proposed to add seven more ambassador level personnel to ORHA, three of whom were Arabists. Rumsfeld vetoed all these appointments. He relented once Powell threatened to pull all State Department personnel from ORHA, but Warrick was still out. Rumsfeld claimed opposition to Warrick came from the highest levels, which many interpreted as the Vice President's office.¹²⁹ Feith recalled that Warrick antagonized the Pentagon by inserting himself into factional fighting among Iraqi exile groups, at one point telling some Iraqi exiles not to meet with Wolfowitz or risk being excluded from the Future of Iraq project. Feith also reports that Rumsfeld recalled "urging" Garner to un-hire Warrick.¹³⁰ Without devoting too much space to "he said/she said" questions, this incident illustrates the level of mistrust between the State and Defense Departments, which adversely affected reconstruction planning.

During its already hurried preparations for war, ORHA was hamstrung by the need to accommodate the constant flow of new staff, straining its limited capacity of office space and computer capability. The need to build the organization was combined with the preparations for deployment, with the inevitable weapons training, immunizations and medical exams. Many ORHA staffers believed that administrative and personnel issues detracted from the organization's ability to plan the reconstruction.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Bensahel 2008, 54.

¹²⁹ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 182.

¹³⁰ Feith 2008, 377.

¹³¹ Bensahel 2008, 56.

Garner began his planning with the same focus as much of the government's other planning. Most planning assumed the greatest challenges would come in the immediate aftermath of the fighting, including refugee outflows, disease, starvation, oil fields set afire.¹³² ORHA's other key assumption was that Iraq's ministries would remain intact under new, non-Ba'athist leadership. ORHA had designated advisors who would partner with each Iraqi ministry to prepare for transition, but made no contingency plans for total collapse of the ministries. Nor did ORHA plan for the ministries having to replace any more than just the senior, high ranking Ba'athist leaders¹³³. Although these were not unreasonable assumptions at the time, events on the ground made ORHA's planning useless.

In late February 2003, just weeks before the war began, ORHA hosted a meeting (called the "rock drill")¹³⁴ at the National Defense University in Washington DC, which for the first time, brought together representatives of ORHA, CENTCOM, CFLCC, State, DOD and the Vice President's office. It was basically a brainstorming session, which was a less than ideal situation for weeks before the war. "There is a misconception that we were rehearsing a plan" recalled one Army officer on ORHA's senior staff. "There was no plan."¹³⁵

The discussion at the rock drill focused mostly on large-scale humanitarian emergencies and not long-term reconstruction, reflecting ORHA's and most of the other planners' assumptions. A great deal of discussion also reportedly focused on ORHA's plan to rebuild the ministries.¹³⁶ But the key issue discussed in the meeting that remained unresolved was security. CENTCOM's representative claimed the U.S. military would not be responsible for security, only overthrowing Saddam.¹³⁷ DOD representatives gasped at the estimated \$38 million price tag of beginning a program of importing 5,000 police advisers to train the Iraqi police.¹³⁸ The issue was left unresolved at the close of the meeting.

¹³² Bensahel 2008, 58.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The phrase "rock drill" refers to a rehearsal of an assault. It originates in the acronym ROC, Rehearsal of Concept. Some say the phrase originated in the Civil War, when officers used rocks to simulate enemy units.

¹³⁵ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 175.

¹³⁶ Bensahel 2008, 59.

¹³⁷ Bensahel 2008, 64.

¹³⁸ Gordon and Trainor 178.

In early March, shortly after the rock drill, ORHA was told to deploy to Kuwait. The Office had grown from 90 staffers to 151, out of an authorized 300, but many of these new staff members were not prepared to deploy. The deployment was complete by March 16th. Upon arrival, however, ORHA learned it had no place to stay. McKiernan did not want ORHA collocated with CFLCC, and ORHA was forced to set up shop in the Kuwait Hilton. In addition to the difficult start to the deployment, conditions were made worse by the need to rewrite the ORHA plan. Garner had planned on starting work in Basra, the extreme south of Iraq. Only after the rock drill did Garner learn that McKiernan planned on bypassing Basra to head straight to Baghdad¹³⁹. This late revision would have been unnecessary if ORHA had been integrated into CENTCOM and CFLCC war plans earlier.

¹³⁹ Bensahel 2008, 67.

Chapter 5: Application of the Groupthink Perspective

This chapter will examine the applicability of the groupthink perspective to the decision to invade Iraq and to occupation planning. It will begin by exploring whether the Bush administration's decision-making process displayed the three antecedent conditions of groupthink. It then will examine whether the Bush administration displayed the eight symptoms of groupthink. Finally, the chapter will conduct a similar application of groupthink to the failure of Iraq occupation planning, by examining whether occupation planning displayed the three antecedent conditions and the eight symptoms of groupthink.

Examination of Whether the Bush Administration's Decision Making Process Displayed Three Antecedent Conditions of Groupthink

There are various interpretations on the applicability of groupthink theory. The "strict" interpretation holds that groupthink theory applies only when *all* antecedent conditions apply. According to an "additive" interpretation the groupthink theory becomes more relevant as more antecedent conditions apply. Finally, a "liberal" or "particularistic" view holds that the applicability of groupthink theory depends on the particular set of antecedent conditions found in each situation.¹⁴⁰ The three antecedent conditions of groupthink-- group cohesiveness, structural faults, and a provocative context-- applied in varying levels to the Bush foreign policy team.

Group Cohesiveness

One of the problems of applying groupthink to this case is the difficulty of defining exactly who comprised the decision-making group. The formal National Security Council is a good place to start, yet it does not seem so simple. Many influential policy advocates, such as Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith were at the Deputy level, and did not belong to the NSC. Some staff members, especially in the Vice President's office seem to have had more influence on policy than some statutory NSC members. Some members of the NSC, such as Secretary of State Powell and National Security Assistant Rice seem to have had little influence on the final decision. In examining the decision to invade Iraq, this thesis will treat the NSC as the decision-making group in studying the role of groupthink, and will include the role played by outside actors in examining other explanations.

¹⁴⁰ Turner, Marlene and Pratkanis, Anthony. 1998. "Twenty-five Years of Groupthink Theory and Research: Lessons from the Evaluation of a Theory." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 73(2/3): 107-108.

Janis considered group cohesiveness to be the primary variable of groupthink. A strong argument can be made that the National Security Council was a cohesive group. It had a great deal of group attraction, that is, group characteristics that made members want to become and remain as members of the group. These characteristics include personal bonds with the other members, the ability of the group to do things an individual cannot, and the prestige associated with being a member of the group.

There is ambiguous evidence that members of the group had personal bonds. Most of them had known each other for decades while serving in and out of government. Rumsfeld and Cheney had worked together in the Ford administration, and Powell had served under Cheney in the Pentagon in the first Bush administration. Lewis “Scooter” Libby had been a student and later an aide of Wolfowitz before working for Cheney¹⁴¹. Wolfowitz and Armitage had worked together on Asian issues in the Reagan administration.¹⁴² All but two were white males. While not good friends, the members were reportedly on good terms and usually disagreed amicably. In addition, as Mann writes, most members of the foreign policy team had spent some of their early years in government working in the Pentagon or on defense issues. Bush’s NSC included two former secretaries of defense and one former chairman of the Joint Chiefs, with no one who had spent their career in diplomacy, suggesting a higher level of comfort with the use of military options.¹⁴³

If one is to consider the National Security Council to be the focal group, the reasons for joining are obvious. In addition to the prestige and the opportunity to serve one’s country, most senior members of the Bush administration had served in government for decades, and saw this as the pinnacle of their careers. Taking a position in the senior foreign policy leadership gave members the ability to influence policy they would not have had outside government.

Cartwright cites several possible alternative sources of group cohesion, such as leader-centeredness, conflict with out-groups, rituals and symbolism, external adversity and stress, and the interdependence of its members¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴¹ Mann, James. 2004. *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet*. New York: Penguin Books xi.

¹⁴² Mann 2004, x.

¹⁴³ Mann 2004, 274.

¹⁴⁴ t’Hart 1990, 35.

Most of these alternative sources do not apply to the Bush NSC. There was no massing around a strong leader. While most members of this group had served together in the administration of the first President Bush, they were not bound by loyalty to or admiration for the second President Bush.

There was conflict with out-groups in that, in the post-9/11 atmosphere, the Bush administration considered the nation to be at war with, and under constant threat from a global terrorist insurgency, one with possible access to weapons of mass destruction. There was little ritual or symbolism in the NSC. Whether the Bush NSC was an interdependent group depends on whether the group considered itself consensual or symbiotic. A group would be considered interdependent only if the members considered themselves symbiotic; that is, group members believed they needed each other to function most effectively. There is little evidence of that in the Bush NSC.

t'Hart lists several effects of group cohesiveness on group members: enhanced group atmosphere, group influence on individuals, and according to some research, enhanced problem solving abilities.

Enhanced group atmosphere means more frequent, more intense, and more positive interactions among group members, which results in greater efforts to coordinate efforts within the group, and enhanced satisfaction with the group.¹⁴⁵

Group influence on individuals has been demonstrated in empirical research. The more attractive a group is, the more likely it is that a member will internalize that group's norms and mores. Shaw observed, "Groups characterized by friendliness, cooperation, interpersonal attraction, and similar indications of group cohesiveness exert strong influence upon members to act in accordance with group expectations."¹⁴⁶

Groupthink theory is an interesting hybrid of social psychology and political science. Groupthink research is most often conducted by social psychologists who do not have access to high level decision makers. As a result, most empirical groupthink research is conducted with subjects in a laboratory setting who can be assigned a common goal. Outside the laboratory, however, things are more complex. High level decision makers may have very different goals, some of them conflicting. Group members may only pay lip service to the group leader's goals, while being more concerned with individual goals such as enhancing their personal prestige, downgrading another group member's public standing, or furthering an

¹⁴⁵ t'Hart 1990, 37.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

individual policy preference. These differences make groupthink theory even more difficult to apply to real world situations.

Empirical studies have shown that cohesive groups solve problems more effectively, mainly through the quality of information retrieval, and examination of a wider range of alternatives. Janis, however, claimed that cohesiveness is likely to lead to less effective decision making, due to the pressure toward uniformity, a position which t'Hart claims gets little support from group dynamics research.¹⁴⁷

There is little evidence of these effects in the Bush NSC. While many of the members had worked together and known each other for years, there evidently were few real friendships, with the possible exceptions of Powell and Armitage, and Bush and Rice. A positive group environment would be evidenced by more frequent meetings. The Bush NSC however, met relatively infrequently, other than in limited bursts of numerous meetings.¹⁴⁸ The NSC reportedly only met twice before 9/11, both times to discuss Iraq. The NSC met frequently during the week of 9/11, then its meeting frequency dropped off again. Had the external adversity and stress of 9/11 made the NSC into a more cohesive group, the meeting frequency would have increased. Instead, the NSC met only twice in the first half of 2002, in February and May, both times to receive briefings on the Iraq war plan from General Franks. The NSC met several times in August, after both the Downing Street memo and Rice's suggestion that Bush's mind was made up. It met more frequently in September, as both the congressional votes and the first UN resolution were coming up for debate. The frequency dropped off again after September; the NSC did not meet again during 2002, and it met only twice in 2003 before the Iraq invasion began. In addition to their relatively infrequent meetings, there are numerous accounts of the NSC not being a collegial environment, characterized mainly by distrust and lack of cooperation between State and Defense.

There also is little evidence of group influence on individual members. The accounts of participants do not indicate it was characterized by friendliness and cooperation. In fact, the historical record suggests the opposite, that it was characterized by distrust and a lack of cooperation. General Wayne Downing, who served on the NSC staff as an adviser on terrorism observed that Rumsfeld often said or did things to deliberately provoke Powell before meetings. "He'd talk about something that he knew was a hot button for Colin... just something to get Colin pissed off. Then the meeting would start,

¹⁴⁷ t'Hart 1990, 38.

¹⁴⁸ I use "NSC" to refer both to formal meetings of the National Security Council, chaired by the president, and to the Principals' Committee, which includes the same attendees, except the president, and is chaired by the National Security Assistant.

and Colin, who is usually a cool head, would lose his cool.”¹⁴⁹ It is also unclear what group norms would have been adopted. The only people who expressed doubt about invading Iraq, Powell and Armitage continued to back the President’s policy. Those who favored invading Iraq did so before it became official policy.

In addition, little evidence indicates that the group’s cohesiveness, (or lack thereof) affected the group’s problem solving capacity. If one believes the research that suggests that cohesiveness enhances problem-solving capacity, then this was not the case, as both the Iraq invasion and occupation were fraught with cognitive errors. Even if one accepts Janis’s hypothesis that cohesiveness can be detrimental to problem solving, there is no evidence that the cognitive errors at work were caused by excessive consensus seeking.

Despite factors that superficially suggest cohesiveness, such as personal bonds, similar experience, and shared familiarity with military issues, the Bush NSC does not fit the criteria of a cohesive organization. Unquestionably, there was attraction in being a member of the group, such as prestige and the ability to accomplish things as a member of the group. Nevertheless, it lacked the alternative sources of cohesiveness, such as leader-centeredness, rituals and symbolism, and interdependence. It did confront external adversity and conflict with out-groups; yet these seem to have had little impact. The group also showed few of the effects of cohesiveness: enhanced group atmosphere, group effect on individuals, and enhanced problem solving abilities.

Structural Faults

Group Isolation

Janis describes the first sub-condition of the second antecedent condition as “insulation of the decision making group from the judgments of qualified associates, who as outsiders, are not permitted to know about the new policies under discussion until after a final decision has been made”.¹⁵⁰ There is no question the decision making core was isolated. The push to attack Iraq started within days of 9/11, if not sooner.¹⁵¹ Postwar histories recount that the war planning began in secret, with Secretary Rumsfeld

¹⁴⁹ Graham 2009, 341-342.

¹⁵⁰ Janis 1972, 197.

¹⁵¹ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 19.

placing extreme pressure on the uniformed military to limit troop levels.¹⁵² Before the Afghanistan campaign was resolved, Bush asked Rumsfeld to update the Iraq war plan, even though Rumsfeld had ordered the Third Army to prepare the Southern Enclave option days after 9/11.

The few documented examples of high-level dissent had no effect on the final war decision. Congressman Ike Skelton, Democrat of Missouri, wrote President Bush a long letter in September 2002, detailing with great prescience the risks that occupying Iraq entailed. Skelton received no official response from the White House, but a member of the White House legislative liaison staff later told him, “Well, Congressman, we really don’t need your vote. We’ve got the votes.”¹⁵³

Ricks writes: “What is remarkable is that again and again during the crucial months before the invasion, such warnings from experts weren’t heeded-or even welcomed. Almost no Middle Eastern experts inside the military were consulted on the war plan, in part because the plan was produced on a very close hold basis that involved very few people.”¹⁵⁴

However, the issue of group isolation will remain open for the time being, as no one knows exactly when President Bush decided to invade Iraq. His public comments suggest he may have favored action against Iraq as early as November 2001. His 2002 State of the Union address with its strong language on the “Axis of Evil” also indicates his mind was made up. There is much stronger evidence that he had decided by summer of 2002, with Rice’s telling Haass not to bother trying to dissuade Bush from war, and the Downing Street memo that claimed “Military action is inevitable.”¹⁵⁵

That President Bush probably made his decision before there was significant public debate about invading Iraq, adds strength to the hypothesis that the Bush NSC was isolated from dissenting views before the decision. Although a great deal of public debate took place later in 2002, the decision was already made and President Bush was unlikely to reverse it.

¹⁵² Gordon and Trainor 2007, 4.

¹⁵³ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 59-60.

¹⁵⁴ Ricks, Thomas. 2006. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press 2007

¹⁵⁵ See Section 4b for a chronology of the preparation for the Iraq invasion.

Leadership

The question of leadership in this case is a strange one. No accounts suggest President Bush pushed for war, or that his subordinates' enthusiasm for war was a result of his influence. It seems just the opposite, that President Bush's advisers pushed him to invade Iraq. Wolfowitz had been advocating an invasion of Iraq since the late 1990's.¹⁵⁶ During a meeting at the White House on the night of 9/11, Cheney reportedly pointed out the difficulty of bombing a country that was already ravaged by war (Afghanistan), and Rumsfeld claimed the problem was not limited to non-state actors, but also included state sponsors of terrorism, like Iraq.¹⁵⁷ At the Camp David meeting the weekend after 9/11, Wolfowitz again pushed for action against Iraq, and was countered by Powell.¹⁵⁸ Although President Bush seemed to favor concentrating on Afghanistan, planning for an invasion of Iraq began soon after.¹⁵⁹

Janis describes how certain leadership practices can help prevent groupthink by creating an atmosphere that fosters skepticism and the airing of conflicting views. A major factor behind these practices, Janis writes, is the leader's capacity to refrain from pushing his or her view and instead promote debate.¹⁶⁰ This was not the case in the Bush administration. Although President Bush was never the voice pushing his subordinates to favor war, neither did he insist on an impartial airing of conflicting views. Instead, he suggested that his preference was to make a decision first, then make sure the discussion did not threaten unanimity. "...One of the things that I know that can happen is, if everybody is not on the same page, then you're going to have people peeling off and second guessing...there won't be honest discussion."¹⁶¹ Bush's idea of "honest discussion" seemed to be one that lacked disagreement. While this suggests that members of the Bush NSC were discouraged from arguing against invasion, it is far from certain that anyone ever would have anyway.

¹⁵⁶ Mann 2004, 236.

¹⁵⁷ Daalder & Lindsay 2003, 99.

¹⁵⁸ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 18.

¹⁵⁹ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 22.

¹⁶⁰ Janis 1972, 179.

¹⁶¹ Woodward, Robert. 2002. *Bush at War*. New York: Simon & Schuster 244.

Lack of Norms for Methodical Procedures

There is no historical record of sound decision processes in the Bush national security team. There was never a meeting that laid out the pros and cons of invading Iraq, which meant there was never a forum for exploring opposing viewpoints or alternative options. It remains an open question exactly when President Bush made the decision to go to war, whether it was in late 2001, early in 2002, when Bush made his “axis of evil” State of the Union address, or that summer when the WMD rhetoric began to heat up.¹⁶² We may never know whether the rhetoric about Saddam’s WMD or ties to al-Qaeda were factors in a yet unmade decision or talking points to justify a war Bush had already decided was coming. But no high level administration official can cite a meeting of principals where pros and cons, and alternatives were carefully weighed.

Political scientist James Pfiffner examined Bush 43’s NSC process. “Bush was impatient with formal structures and processes, but that did not mean he did not hear alternative perspectives on major issues. But the presentation of these alternatives was dependent on the people he chose, not a formal process of deliberation.”¹⁶³ Even when the principals did present alternatives, Bush was not always encouraging. During the Afghanistan campaign, Rumsfeld complained about the CIA dominating war planning, to which the President replied, “That’s the kind of discussion that frustrates me, because I like clarity.”¹⁶⁴

Even though there was no formal process in place for the airing of opposing viewpoints, that does not mean there was never an opportunity for them to be expressed. Powell was able to react strongly to Wolfowitz’s suggesting striking Iraq at the Camp David meetings immediately after 9/11. At Powell’s insistence, he got two hours alone with President Bush in August 2002. This is famously known as the “Pottery Barn” meeting, where Powell warned Bush of the consequences of invading Iraq. Yet Powell never advised Bush against invading Iraq. Instead, when asked for his recommendation, Powell gave Bush a better way to reach his goal, “Take it to the UN.”¹⁶⁵ Feith made the same point in his account, saying, “Powell came to be seen by some commentators as opposing regime change or war. But he never

¹⁶² Gordon and Trainor 2007, 58.

¹⁶³ Pfiffner, James. 2003. “President George W. Bush and His War Cabinet” (Prepared for presentation at the conference on “The Presidency, Congress and the War on Terrorism” University of Florida February 7, 2003) 14.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ DeYoung, Karen. 2006. *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell*. New York: Random House 402.

actually stated such opposition.”¹⁶⁶ Powell’s friend and deputy, Richard Armitage recalled, “Powell and I did not object to the prospect of taking out Saddam Hussein, but we had real questions about the timing”. Armitage explained that he and Powell preferred that Bush consolidate his victory in Afghanistan and build a broader coalition before turning to Iraq. Armitage said that his preferred timing would have been January 2005, after the election.¹⁶⁷

Homogeneity of the Group

Bush’s national security team was quite homogeneous in terms of race and economic background. While they were homogeneous, what is notable is not the similarity of their racial or economic status, but the homogeneity of their ideas. Although Powell and Rice were solidly in the realist camp, the subgroup known as the Vulcans were united in an idealistic foreign policy worldview that saw unilateral American military power as a means of overthrowing the status quo and spreading democracy.¹⁶⁸

Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay list three consequences of these beliefs: a preference for unilateral action, the use of preemptive military force, and the use of military force to change hostile regimes.¹⁶⁹ There can be no question this ideology was put into effect during the Bush administration. All offers of assistance from NATO in Afghanistan were rebuffed, partially to avoid repeating the “targeting by committee” headaches of the Kosovo campaign.¹⁷⁰ The Bush administration publicly embraced preemption in 2002, first in the President’s commencement address at West Point,¹⁷¹ then in September with the release of the new National Security Strategy which stated: “The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction... To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”¹⁷² And many in the Bush team, including Rumsfeld, Armitage, and

¹⁶⁶ Feith 2008, 245.

¹⁶⁷ Gordon and Trainor 2007, 82.

¹⁶⁸ Daalder and Lindsay 2003, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Daalder and Lindsay 2003, 14.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ricks 2006, 38.

¹⁷² The National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2002 15

Wolfowitz signed a letter from the Project for a New American Century to President Clinton in 1998 calling for a new American policy of “removing Saddam Hussein from power”.¹⁷³

Political scientists have not extensively studied ideology as a factor of groupthink. Yet in this case there appeared to be a great deal of concurrence among group members as a result of a shared political worldview.

Provocative Context

As t’Hart explains, groupthink is more likely to take place in stressful situations, when decision makers are forced to make decisions with great moral or material consequences.¹⁷⁴ This provocative context can have one or many elements, including high stress from external threats, low self-esteem among members of the group, and an excessively complex decision.

The days immediately following 9/11 were unquestionably a high stress situation. Although many members of Bush’s team had favored regime change in Iraq for years, the push for an invasion of Iraq began on 9/11 or a few days after. The psychological shock of the 9/11 attack was intensified by the threat of subsequent attack. The threat contained the prospect of the next attack involving nuclear, biological or chemical weapons instead of airplanes. The external threat met ideology when the Vulcans were able to connect the very real threat of al-Qaeda with the uncertain prospect of Iraq’s providing al-Qaeda with WMD.

Yet, there was no lack of self-esteem among the Bush team. Many of its members shared a foreign policy ideology that emphasized American dominance and recognized few limits on the country’s ability to reshape the world. This self-confidence grew as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan fell much more quickly than expected. This easy victory was seen as an affirmation of Secretary Rumsfeld’s “transformation” strategy, and as a sign that an Iraq victory would be equally easy.

Although the decision to invade Iraq was a complex one, that does not seem to have deterred the decision makers. Rumsfeld advocated attacking Iraq within hours of the 9/11 attacks, and Wolfowitz proposed an attack to the NSC that weekend. This does not mean the possible disadvantages of war were not considered. Powell warned Bush in great detail of the immense responsibilities the United States

¹⁷³ Mann 2004, 238.

¹⁷⁴ t’Hart 1990, 10.

would face in Iraq after invasion. The U.S. military warned of other risks, such as humanitarian crisis, oilfields set afire, possible use of WMD against U.S. troops, and house-to-house fighting in Baghdad.

Even those who favored invasion considered the risks. In October 2002, Undersecretary Feith, one of the most vocal advocates for war, published what became known as the “Parade of Horribles” memo. This memo, which was an expansion of a list Rumsfeld wrote, proved surprisingly prescient. Among the risks it laid out were: the damage to U.S. prestige from attacking without UN approval, regional instability, other U.S. adversaries taking advantage of a strategic preoccupation with Iraq, that stabilization could take 8 to 10 years and cost more than estimated, that the invasion would spur terrorist recruiting, and that Iraq could experience internal ethnic strife among Kurds, Sunni and Shia.¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

Groupthink is a complex theory, and it does not lend itself to yes or no answers on its applicability to specific decisions. However, the question this section seeks to answer, “Did the Bush administration’s invasion decision show the three antecedent conditions of groupthink?” can be answered in the qualified affirmative. The Bush NSC did not form a cohesive team, despite an attraction to the group, and its homogeneity. Janis identified cohesiveness as the most important variable of groupthink theory. The second condition, structural flaws, was undoubtedly present, given the group’s insulation, the administration’s lack of methodical decision procedures, and President Bush’s failure to place a priority on airing dissenting views. The third condition, a provocative context, also was present. The months after 9/11 were undoubtedly a stressful time, and decision makers were preoccupied with not allowing the U.S. homeland to be struck again. However, in this case, the group’s high self-esteem after the fall of the Taliban may have contributed to groupthink, as they were less likely to consider the dangers of their plan.

Did the Bush Administration’s Decision to Invade Iraq show the Eight Symptoms of Groupthink?

In chapter eight of his original work, Janis listed the eight symptoms of groupthink in decision making groups: an illusion of invulnerability, collective efforts to rationalize away warnings, unquestioned belief in the group’s morality, stereotyped views of enemy leaders, direct pressure on dissenters, self-censorship of dissenting thoughts, a shared illusion of unanimity, and the emergence of self-appointed mindguards who protect the group from adverse information.

¹⁷⁵ Feith 2008, 333.

Some of these conditions undoubtedly were present. The operative question is whether these conditions were caused by groupthink. The decision makers most in favor of the war believed invading Iraq was the less risky option, and that the greater danger was in doing nothing.

There was no collective effort to rationalize away warnings; they were simply ignored. When General Shinseki testified to Congress that the U.S. would need 500,000 troops to properly occupy Iraq, Wolfowitz merely told Congress he was wrong. Powell and Rumsfeld were aware of the risks inherent in the operation. Rumsfeld had Feith put his concerns into a memo, and Powell brought his concerns to the President. The President and senior leaders believed the risks were acceptable.

There was an unquestioned belief in the group's morality, but there is no causal link between this belief and any group dynamic. Many of the key participants shared a neoconservative perspective, a Manichean view of the world that held both the United States and democracy were unquestioned forces for good, and that actions that spread democracy were consistent with that goodness. These views predated their service in the Bush administration. The same can be said for their stereotypical view of Saddam Hussein. They considered him too evil to negotiate with, and highly irrational. Yet no evidence suggests that groupthink helped produce these views.

Nor is there significant evidence of pressure on dissenters. The one member of the NSC who did not favor attacking Iraq in 2002 or 2003, Secretary of State Powell, was never told to keep quiet or openly warned of consequences of not being part of the team. The best example of direct pressure the case of Army Chief of Staff Shinseki, who testified to Congress that reconstruction would require 500,000 troops. Wolfowitz denied that was true, and the Pentagon soon announced the name of Shinseki's successor, making the general, who had a year left in his term, a lame duck. While this may have discouraged senior military officers from speaking out on the record, Shinseki was not a member of the decision making group, and any pressure for his compliance would not have been intended to maintain consensus among the group. In addition, this move may have been misinterpreted. Rumsfeld had been disappointed with his relationship with Shinseki for other reasons. Shinseki showed no signs of sharing Rumsfeld's enthusiasm for military transformation, and he had stopped attending Rumsfeld's meetings on the subject.¹⁷⁶ In addition, Rumsfeld had begun the practice of deciding personnel changes much further in

¹⁷⁶ Graham 2009, 329.

advance than his predecessors. As a result, the leaking of Shinseki's replacement was probably not solely caused by his testimony, although Rumsfeld did nothing to dispel that belief.¹⁷⁷

Similarly, there is little evidence of any self-censorship among the decision making group. Despite what many outsiders believed, there is no evidence Powell and Armitage opposed invading Iraq; Armitage's own statement contradicts that. Armitage repeated this statement in 2009, telling *Prism* magazine, "I was not opposed to attacking Iraq-I was opposed to the timing."¹⁷⁸ Although State and Defense officials disagreed about how to proceed with the war, the conflicts often involved subsidiary issues, like the role of exile groups in the postwar government and whether to seek a new weapons inspection regime from the UN. In the NSC, there were often vocal disagreements between Powell on one side, and Cheney or Rumsfeld on the other side. At the Deputies level, Armitage was similarly unabashed about opposing Wolfowitz and Feith on the issues.¹⁷⁹

There was no shared illusion of unanimity. Both the NSC and the Deputies committee featured open disagreement on tactical issues, and if anything, the conflicts were exaggerated rather than downplayed. With less disagreement than was commonly believed, there was no need for mindguards. As Armitage said, "So it wasn't that we were marginalized. We were allowed our voice, but no one wanted to hear it".¹⁸⁰

Was the Failure of Occupation Planning Caused by Groupthink?

The examination of postwar planning necessarily will differ from discussion of the invasion decision. While the decision to go to war is made by the president and a very small group of advisers, operational planning for occupation takes place on multiple levels simultaneously. This thesis has examined postwar planning at several military and civilian organizations. The planning it describes disproves the common misconception that there was no postwar planning.

That postwar planning occurred on so many different levels suggests that the failure of planning probably was not a result of group dynamics. The groups may have had several common characteristics, but it is unlikely they shared enough antecedent conditions to suggest groupthink. While the NSC was

¹⁷⁷ Graham 2009, 330.

¹⁷⁸ An Interview with Richard L. Armitage. *Prism* 1(1): 104.

¹⁷⁹ See DeYoung, Feith, Gordon & Trainor, and Woodward.

¹⁸⁰ *Prism* 104.

not a cohesive group, there are insufficient data to know if the various military and civilian agency planners operated in cohesive groups. It is unlikely such planning groups were sufficiently structurally flawed. Although there may have been some insulation in the Defense Department, especially at Feith's OSD, the military planning staffs, CENTCOM and CFLCC were less insulated. In fact, CFLCC took steps to reduce insulation by bringing in so many elite SAMS-trained war planners. The lack of impartial leadership was not a problem across the board. While Secretary Rumsfeld and Undersecretary Feith were not impartial leaders, others were. There is no evidence that Garner lacked impartiality or attempted to influence planning. Accounts suggest General Franks was too preoccupied with the combat plan to have pushed for consensus in occupation planning. At CFLCC, the fact that General McKiernan was open to hearing his planners' suggestion that the plan be redrawn also indicates he was a more impartial leader.

The presence of norms for methodical planning varied. The Defense Department's occupation planning was centered in OSP under Feith, which was understaffed and inexperienced. Nevertheless, it managed to produce the "Parade of Horribles" memo that accurately assessed the operational risks, but without taking any steps to mitigate those risks. ORHA was created too hastily to have any methodical planning procedures. CENTCOM and CFLCC, however, operated in accordance with military planning procedures, which military training materials clearly define. The senior officers who performed this planning were both highly trained and experienced in military planning.

The groups, both military and civilian were largely homogeneous. Most came from the military or academia. While some had served in other reconstruction missions in the Balkans, most had limited experience in diplomacy or development. While many of the military planners had served in Operation Desert Storm, few had lived or studied in the Middle East for any length of time.

The planners undoubtedly operated in a provocative context. In addition to the perceived Iraqi threat, the military was already fighting a war in Afghanistan. However, there was no evidence of low self-esteem or any recent failures. The planners did recognize the immense complexity of the mission. Even Rumsfeld, who usually receives a lion's share of the blame for failures, recognized many of the risks and had Feith expand upon them.

Symptoms of Groupthink

The symptoms of groupthink are similarly uneven in the case of preparation for invasion. There was no illusion of invulnerability, as planners at all levels recognized the risks, even if leaders did not always act to mitigate them. There was, however, no evidence of any doubt at any level of the morality of the group and of invading Iraq.

There was little evidence of closed mindedness. There also was little or no collective rationalization of risks. The risks were recognized at multiple levels, as has been previously discussed. If anything, there was too much recognition of risks, as planners tended to concentrate on handling large scale humanitarian disaster such as refugee flows and starvation, instead of the more mundane matters of unemployment and electricity. There was also little stereotyping of outgroups. Instead, planners recognized the potential for ethnic and sectarian conflict in Iraq, and realized the need for provision of social services.

There is also little evidence of uniformity pressure, such as self-censorship, illusions of unanimity, or mindguards. On numerous occasions on multiple levels, planners or the leaders themselves presented risks without consequence or pressure to conform to optimistic illusions.

The fact that planning occurred in so many different groups, the ambiguous existence of antecedent conditions, and the mixed record of the effects of groupthink, all lead me to conclude that groupthink was not the primary cause of the failure of occupation planning.

Chapter 6: Alternative Explanations for the Iraq War Decision

This chapter will use scholarly literature to examine alternative explanations for the decision to invade Iraq and the failure of occupation planning. It begins by examining the works of Kingdon and Mazarr on ideological agenda setting. It then looks at Houghton's study of cognitive errors related to the Iraq invasion, which included groupthink.

Ideological Agenda Setting

An alternative theoretical framework to groupthink is agenda setting theory, which was applied to the Iraq invasion by Michael Mazarr. One of the major works of this theory John Kingdon's *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, although Kingdon's work was based in the decision theoretic work on the "garbage can" model first articulated by Michael Cohen, James March, and Johan Olsen.¹⁸¹

Kingdon describes the policy environment as a "primordial soup" in which policy communities generate alternatives, and attempt to turn their ideas into policy.¹⁸² Agenda setting paints a very different picture of the policy environment than do other views of policy-making. While some scholarly literature suggests that policymakers methodically craft solutions as problems come along, agenda setting describes a chaotic world where communities of specialists craft solutions to problems, then wait for an opportunity to bring that problem to the forefront, and to turn their solutions into policy.¹⁸³ Kingdon describes how organizations feature four separate streams: problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities.

Problems can exist for long periods of time without solutions being applied. As Kingdon writes, sometimes systematic indicators bring problems to leaders' attention. In other instances, more relevant here, a crisis or other dramatic event can push an issue to the forefront.¹⁸⁴

The primary actors in the policy environment are policy communities, specialists in a given policy area who work in the legislative and executive branches, and outside government in think tanks,

¹⁸¹ Cohen, Michael D., March, James G., and Olsen, Johan P. "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17 (March 1972):1-25.

¹⁸² Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. New York: Addison-Wesley: 117.

¹⁸³ Mazarr, Michael J. 2007. "The Iraq War and Agenda-Setting." *Foreign Policy Analysis*. 3(1): 9.

¹⁸⁴ Kingdon 1995, 90.

universities, and advocacy organizations. Members of policy communities often become policy entrepreneurs, who advocate for policy proposals or for the prominence of particular ideas.¹⁸⁵

Problems can linger for years without solution. Occasionally, events such as a key personnel change, a new president, or a crisis bring about an opportunity to apply solutions,. Such an opportunity is known as a policy window, similar to a launch window in space flight. Like a launch window, policy makers must take advantage of a policy window when it opens, as they may have to wait years or decades before such an opportunity comes again, if it ever does.

The decision to invade Iraq more closely conforms to an agenda setting framework than to groupthink. The decision to go to war with Iraq featured a persistent problem (Saddam's regime) to which no clear solutions existed, until a focusing event (9/11) took place. This event allowed a policy community (the neoconservatives), and more specifically, a few policy entrepreneurs within the Bush administration (Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Feith, and Perle), to take advantage of an opportunity and promote the idea of invading Iraq as a solution.

The neoconservatives, including those who joined the Bush administration, can be thought of as a policy community, although as Mazarr writes, it was a community that was less technically expert and more ideologically defined.¹⁸⁶ Throughout the 1990's, its members advocated their policy of regime change in Iraq through speeches, opinion pieces, and lobbying of the U.S. legislative and executive branches.¹⁸⁷

It was by no means certain that any of these policy entrepreneurs would ever occupy positions of power. First, George Bush's victory over Al Gore in 2000 was a narrow and controversial one. Even then, the rise of these policy entrepreneurs was still not assured. Instead, the catalyst seems to have been candidate Bush naming Dick Cheney as his running mate. President-elect Bush was renowned for his lack of attention to administrative details. This, combined with the abbreviated transition, left the new administration with a need for an experienced Washington insider. Cheney, a former White House chief of staff and defense secretary, took an active role in staffing the new administration. Cheney began by putting neoconservatives such as David Addington and Lewis Libby on his own expanded staff. The

¹⁸⁵ Kingdon 1995,122.

¹⁸⁶ Mazarr 2007, 11.

¹⁸⁷ See Mann and Halper & Clarke for a more complete description of neoconservative issue advocacy during the Clinton administration.

Vice President-elect saw to it that his national security advisor held the rank of special assistant to the president, giving him access to the highest deliberations.¹⁸⁸ He also suggested Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense, and even advised Powell to put prominent neoconservative John Bolton in a high level position at the State Department.¹⁸⁹ Rumsfeld then put even more members of this community in power by appointing Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Feith into high level positions in the Pentagon.¹⁹⁰

Mazarr argues that the most important policy entrepreneur may have been President Bush himself. Although his public statements before September 11th, 2001 suggest he did not favor invading Iraq when he came into office, he began to evidence sympathy for the idea of invading Iraq very soon after the attacks, suggesting that the idea matched his own inclinations.¹⁹¹ In his first year in office, he had already shown sympathy for bold, unilateral action in foreign policy, in policy actions such as moving to withdraw from the Kyoto treaty, U.S. opposition to the International Criminal Court, and U.S. pursuit of a Ballistic Missile Defense. Many observers also speculated that he was predisposed to attack Iraq due to his father's failure to depose Saddam, and Saddam's complicity with an assassination attempt on the first President Bush. Since the policy ideas that entered the window opened by 9/11 dealt with foreign and military policy, those areas most under direct presidential control, the policy change was much easier than a change in domestic policy would have been, which would require real congressional participation. Once Bush decided on invading Iraq, and set about making the case with the public, the question of consensus among members of his National Security Council became unimportant.

The solution the policy entrepreneurs started advocating in 2001, invading Iraq, was a relatively new one. Neoconservatives had long advocated U.S. action to promote regime change in Iraq, but such hypothetical action had always focused more on combining sanctions with covert action, such as promoting a palace coup or aiding an organized Shia insurgency. The Iraq problem had been around since 1991, and despite efforts to promote regime change, there was little momentum behind possible solutions.

In the primeval soup Kingdon describes, ideas evolve as living beings do, through fierce competition and survival of the fittest. He lists several criteria a policy must meet to be considered viable.

¹⁸⁸ Gellman, Barton *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency* 2008 Penguin Press New York: 44.

¹⁸⁹ Gellman 2008, 37.

¹⁹⁰ Graham 2009, 213.

¹⁹¹ Mazarr 2007, 17.

The first, technical feasibility, examines whether a given policy will accomplish its goals. The second, value acceptability, means that the solution must be compatible with the values of the policy community. The final standard is the idea's susceptibility to future constraints, such as budgetary pressures and public acceptance.¹⁹²

The idea of invading Iraq met all three of these criteria for adoption, although for the first and third standard, it did so only with the help of incomplete planning or wishful thinking. There was no question that the initial invasion was technically feasible. After 1991, Saddam's military was weakened and of questionable loyalty, while American military superiority had only grown. General Franks had over a year to prepare a war plan, and it very effectively used American military power to topple the regime. However, the policy community did not adequately include the demands of the occupation into its policy idea. This was partly due to a preexisting bias against "nation building" and partly due to several faulty assumptions.

The idea of invading Iraq most clearly met the second standard, value acceptability. It is probable that neoconservative policy entrepreneurs advocated the invasion so quickly and so vigorously after 9/11 because the solution fit their foreign policy ideology. As I have already discussed neoconservative ideology includes a belief in American primacy, a Manichean worldview, a preference for the application of military power, a belief in actively promoting democracy, and a comfort with unilateral military action.

That the "solution" of invading Iraq passed the third standard, anticipation of future constraints, was due in great part to the focusing event of 9/11. Had it not been for 9/11, and the public's determination never to be struck again, it is unlikely that Congress would have supported and picked up the hefty price tag of an invasion. It is similarly unlikely that the American public would have seen the necessity of invading Iraq without 9/11. Iraq was not a major security concern for most Americans, until they began to mistakenly believe that Saddam was involved in 9/11, and that he was likely to give WMD to al-Qaeda. Even with such congressional and public moods, the administration had to mollify budget concerns by predicting the occupation would be brief, and self-financed by Iraqi oil reserves.

As Kingdon wrote, sometimes a crisis comes along that simply bowls over every other item on the agenda.¹⁹³ In this case, 9/11 undoubtedly qualifies as such a crisis. As Donald Rumsfeld later told Congress, "the coalition did not act in Iraq because we had discovered dramatic new evidence... We acted

¹⁹² Kingdon 1995, 131-138.

¹⁹³ Kingdon 1995, 96.

because we saw the information in a new light, through the prism of our experience on September 11th.”¹⁹⁴ Crises sometimes lead to the opening of a policy window. Once such a window opens, entrepreneurs must make the most of the opportunity. They must have well-developed solutions that meet all three criteria, and advocate them vigorously. As one policy entrepreneur put it: “People who are trying to advocate change are like surfers waiting for the big wave. You get out there, you have to be ready to go, you have to be ready to paddle. If you’re not ready to paddle when the big wave comes along, you’re not going to ride it in.”¹⁹⁵

The invasion of Iraq does not perfectly fit the framework of agenda setting. The idea of a U.S. invasion of Iraq was not a premade solution sitting on a shelf, but rather was a quickly improvised adjustment of another policy idea. Mazarr writes that the lack of a preexisting plan to invade Iraq may have contributed to failures in postwar planning, claiming that there was no need to plan an occupation when the idea was for Iraqis to depose Saddam. Therefore the policy community could not “break out of the mental trap that told them the postwar phase would take care of itself.”¹⁹⁶

Agenda-setting theory is a much better framework for explaining the Iraq invasion and occupation than the groupthink perspective. The circumstances agenda-setting calls for-- an unsolved problem, a crisis, a policy community, policy entrepreneurs, and a policy window-- all were present in this case. This also highlights the shortcomings of groupthink theory to this case. Janis’s theory does not deal with ideologically homogeneous policy communities, or with what happens to the group dynamic when the outcome has already been decided.

Other Cognitive Errors

Impulse decision making

There is no evidence of President Bush engaging a systematic decision making process that carefully weighed the pros and cons of invading Iraq. While there is no way to be sure when Bush decided to invade, it was relatively soon after 9/11, and long before he announced it publicly. In addition, the President tended to make decisions quickly, and put great faith in his gut instincts. Then-Senator Joseph Biden recounted a discussion of Iraq in which Biden asked Bush, “How can you be so certain

¹⁹⁴ Rumsfeld, Donald “Testimony on Iraq” Testimony before Senate Armed Services Committee July 9, 2003.

¹⁹⁵ Kingdon 1995, 165.

¹⁹⁶ Mazarr 2007, 15.

when you don't know the facts?" Bush replied, "My instincts."¹⁹⁷ Snap decisions leave a policymaker vulnerable to what Herek identified as the seven symptoms of defective decision making: omissions in surveying objectives, omissions in surveying alternatives, failure to examine costs and risks of the preferred choice, poor information search, selective bias in processing information, failure to reconsider rejected alternatives, and failure to work out detailed implementation, monitoring and contingency plans.¹⁹⁸ In analyzing 19 foreign policy crises, Herek found that policymakers who use analytic decision making procedures better avoid these seven symptoms and are more likely to achieve their goals.¹⁹⁹

Drunkard's search

The expression "the drunkard's search" refers to the old joke about a drunk searching for his car keys under a streetlight. When a passerby offers help and asks the drunk where the keys were lost, he answers that he lost his keys in the dark alley. When the passerby asks why he's searching on the sidewalk, the drunk answers, "Because the light is better here." This story relates to how decision-makers can be cognitive misers, who search for the most convenient answers rather than the most likely.²⁰⁰

This seems to have been the case in the neoconservative policy community after 9/11. Neoconservative thought on terrorism considered it an interstate activity, and believed terrorism was a result of state sponsorship. This focus led them to believe that confronting a hostile state would lead other states to moderate their behavior and ease the terrorist threat. Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld both declared a preference for attacking Iraq immediately after 9/11, even though there was no solid evidentiary link between Saddam and al-Qaeda.

¹⁹⁷ Suskind, Ron "Faith, Certainty, and the Presidency of George W. Bush" *New York Times Magazine* October 14, 2004.

¹⁹⁸ Herek, Gregory M, Janis, Irving L., Huth, Paul. 1987. "Decision Making During International Crises Is Quality of Process Related to Outcome?" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31(2) pp 204-205.

¹⁹⁹ Herek 1987, 218.

²⁰⁰ Houghton, David Patrick. 2008. "Invading and Occupying Iraq: Some Insights from Political Psychology." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 14(2) 174.

Lack of Empathy

In describing empathy, Houghton quotes White, who defined empathy as the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes to better understand their actions or motives.²⁰¹ Houghton describes the belief that Iraqis would greet U.S. troops as liberators as a failure to empathize. Greater empathy with the Iraqi people would have led policymakers to consider the resentment Iraqi Shia had for the U.S. after the failed revolt of 1991.²⁰² Other sources of resentment, or at least wariness, that Houghton does not cite are the U.S. role in imposing sanctions that caused hardship for the Iraqi people, and Iraq's history of foreign occupation, from the Ottomans to the English. A better understanding of the history and culture would have given decision makers a better ability to foresee possible problems with the occupation.

Misuse of Analogies

Policymakers made liberal use of analogies, both in justifying the decision for war, and in planning the occupation. The historical template many policymakers used for the Iraq war was World War II. This became significant both in justifying the invasion itself, and in planning the occupation.

In the year leading up to the invasion, policymakers often compared the global situation to that of Europe in 1938, in this view Saddam was the modern Hitler, a genocidal dictator and growing threat to world peace. In that analogy, any action short of regime change would have been a modern reprisal of Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler, with similar results. Tellingly, in his televised address giving Saddam 48 hours to leave Iraq, President Bush used these words in justification: "In the 20th century, some chose to appease murderous dictators, whose threats were allowed to grow into genocide and global war."²⁰³ Other policymakers such as Perle and Rumsfeld made similar comparisons in interviews during 2002.²⁰⁴ Even Prime Minister Blair made such a comparison.²⁰⁵ There is reason to believe that these comparisons were not just talking points, but genuinely entered into the policy community's thinking. Undersecretary of Defense Feith, whose father was a Holocaust survivor, described in his memoir what

²⁰¹ Houghton 2008, 175.

²⁰² Houghton 2008, 177.

²⁰³ Bush, George W. "President says Saddam Hussein must leave Iraq Within 48 Hours" (Presidential Address to the nation, 17 March, 2003).

²⁰⁴ Record, Jeffrey. 2008. "Retiring Hitler and 'Appeasement' from the National Security Debate." *Parameters* Summer 2008 92.

²⁰⁵ Woodward 2004, 337.

effect this had on his political views. “I came to distrust the conventional wisdom, with its optimistic assumption that negotiations and treaty relations could produce peace and stability among deadly enemies. The failures of appeasement in the 1930’s made me skeptical about the promises of demonstrably bad actors.”²⁰⁶

Jeffrey Record suggests several reasons that Munich comparisons almost always mislead: they distort the nature of appeasement, ignore the rarity of the Nazi threat, falsely suggest Britain and France could have stopped Hitler before 1939, overstate threats, and encourage use of force when other alternatives would better serve U.S. interests.²⁰⁷

It bears noting, however, that given the closed nature of the Bush administration’s decision making process, it is impossible to know exactly how great a role analogy really played in the decision to invade, as opposed to merely being part of a public relations strategy. Since 1945, every U.S. president except Jimmy Carter has compared some dictator to Hitler, using the comparison to gain public support for military action against a supposed threat.²⁰⁸ It is possible, therefore, that the “Saddam as Hitler” analogies were part of a domestic political strategy and not a factor in the decision itself.

Improper analogies not only may have affected the decision to invade, but also hindered occupation planning. Here, policymakers depended on several inappropriate analogies, while neglecting arguably more relevant ones. The occupation of Iraq often was compared to the occupations of Germany and Japan after World War II. Even before the Iraq war, post-World War II was held up as an example of the relative ease of instilling democracy in non-democratic nations.²⁰⁹ In 2003, Frum and Perle quoted dispatches from 1947 Berlin to argue that there was nothing unique about Iraq.²¹⁰ A more specific parallel was drawn between the removal of high level Nazis from the German government and the de-Ba’athification that Paul Bremer carried out in Iraq, which had disastrous results.

²⁰⁶ Feith 2008, 24.

²⁰⁷ Record 2008, 93.

²⁰⁸ Record 91.

²⁰⁹ Kagan & Kristol 2004, 70.

²¹⁰ Frum, David and Perle, Richard. 2003. *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* New York: Random House: 12-13.

Improper use of analogy hampered postwar planning in other ways. As this thesis has discussed, much of the occupation planning that did take place dealt with preparing for large-scale humanitarian disasters, such as oilfield fires, refugee outflows, and starvation, things that took place at the end of the first Gulf war in 1991. This emphasis took limited planning capacity away from planning for more mundane long-term problems such as infrastructure and employment. While policymakers often used improper analogies, they also failed to use more appropriate ones. The reconstruction missions in Bosnia and Kosovo would have provided valuable insights into the necessary force levels. Lessons learned from the Balkans led General Shinseki to testify that a successful occupation of Iraq would require 500,000 troops, a statement that Wolfowitz immediately disputed.

Cognitive consistency

Social psychology describes cognitive consistency as a strong need for individuals to maintain a simplified and stable cognitive structure.²¹¹ One result of this need is that individuals often discount or ignore information that threatens their preferred cognitive structure. This certainly explains the discounting of evidence that suggested Saddam did not have WMD's. Many members of the neoconservative policy community also discounted the lack of a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda.

One way in which many decision makers showed their need for cognitive consistency was their fervent belief that international terrorism was completely dependent on state sponsorship. This belief allowed them to ignore other possible religious, social and economic causes of terrorism. It also led to a seemingly simple solution to terrorism. If terrorist networks depended on state sponsorship, terrorism could be controlled by intimidating sponsor states into ending their support. Reducing the problem of international terrorism to a question of interstate politics not only simplified it greatly, it led to a solution that played to one of America's strengths, conventional military force.

Another example of cognitive consistency was the Bush administration's approach to the formation of a new Iraqi government. In the days leading up to the invasion, the administration planned on a quick handover to a new government, one likely made up of pro-American exiles. This ignored all the possible complications, such as conflict between Sunnis and Shia, and Arabs and Kurds. It also failed to consider what would happen if Iraqis considered the exiles to be illegitimate, and possible Iranian interference. These oversimplifications not only led the United States to invade Iraq for dubious reasons, it prevented the U.S. from properly planning for the occupation.

²¹¹ Houghton 2008, 182.

Denial and wishful thinking

Similar to cognitive consistency is the two-sided error of denial and wishful thinking, denying inconvenient information, and latching on to good news, whether or not it is accurate. There is much evidence of policymakers denying the relevance of bad news coming from Baghdad in 2003 and beyond, such as reports of looting, or of the growing insurgency.

There were examples of wishful thinking behind both the decision to invade, and the planning for occupation. Houghton cites the belief that Chalabi and the Iraqi exiles would be able to fly into Baghdad and immediately set up a provisional government.²¹² When planning the invasion, many decision makers made the case that Saddam's regime was so unpopular that American soldiers would be greeted as liberators, and the occupation would face no security challenges. The neoconservative theory of power politics held that America acting forcefully in Iraq would cause other nations to ally themselves with the strongest power. Given their confidence that transnational terrorism was dependent on state sponsorship, they believed that a show of strength would lead to a diminishing of state sponsorship and a drop in terrorism. This did not turn out to be the case.

Wishful thinking also was involved in planning the occupation. Both military and civilian planners worked under the belief that the Iraqi ministries would remain largely intact, requiring only a replacement of the most high ranking Ba'athists. Planners at the highest levels believed that American forces would be turning over authority to a new Iraqi government within months, not years, which would allow for a quick withdrawal, and making extensive planning and troop levels unnecessary.

Numerous examples of denial took place after the invasion. For example, President Bush refused to believe he was in error in believing Saddam had WMD, and Rumsfeld insisted that widespread looting was caused by the fact that "freedom's untidy."²¹³ Meanwhile, Cheney stated in 2005 that the insurgency was in its "last throes."²¹⁴

²¹² Houghton 2008, 184.

²¹³ Graham 395.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Groupthink

Houghton contends that groupthink was the eighth cognitive error at work in the Bush administration. His main evidence for this is the presence of a tight group of like-minded policymakers who sealed the president off from conflicting opinions. Yet this thesis advances an alternative view, that the group's like-mindedness was not the result of concurrence seeking, and President Bush's confidence in his own decision made it unlikely he would have been swayed by any conflicting opinions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This concluding chapter reviews my initial hypothesis that groupthink is not the appropriate intellectual perspective to explain the decision to invade Iraq, and that the decision is better explained by a combination of agenda setting and other cognitive errors. It then turns to the expectation that groupthink also is not helpful for explaining the failure of occupation planning. The chapter concludes with some final comments.

This thesis has examined both groupthink theory and the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq. In the wake of the invasion and the insurgency, some commentators theorized that the Iraq invasion was a case of groupthink, like the Bay of Pigs, or the failure to anticipate the Pearl Harbor attack.

However, the evidence in this case does not support the hypothesis that groupthink was the primary cause. Although the decision making group showed some of the antecedent conditions and the symptoms of groupthink, groupthink theory does not explain the decision to invade. Groupthink's central proposition is that in a cohesive and insulated group that lacks methodical procedures, the desire for cohesion may override the desire for quality analysis and the search for alternatives.

Yet the decision to invade Iraq was not a group decision. President Bush evidently made the decision either alone or with only a few advisers. The NSC's decision making process was not only faulty, it was nonexistent. Although there was a great deal of discussion about Iraq in the NSC, the question of whether to invade Iraq was never discussed. It would be interesting speculate, whether Powell would have spoken against the war if such a discussion had ever been held.

As a result, many of the results predicted by groupthink theory never materialized. There was no explicit pressure on dissenters to conform, as there was no real dissent against the invasion. There was no need for a self-appointed mindguard, as President Bush kept his own mind very well guarded without help. In addition, many of the symptoms of groupthink Janis described, such as illusions of invulnerability and stereotyping of outgroups, although present, cannot be shown to have been caused by groupthink, rather than already present.

An alternative that better explains the decision to invade Iraq is ideological agenda setting, combined with other non-groupthink cognitive errors. With the application of an agenda setting perspective a much different picture emerges, one that better fits the facts. All the elements of agenda setting theory were present in this case. There was a problem (Iraq) and a policy community (the neoconservatives). Although the problem had been present for over a decade, the policy community's

solution (regime change) did not become policy until a crisis (9/11) opened a policy window. This window allowed policy entrepreneurs in the administration (Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Feith) to promote their solution to President Bush.

Bush administration decision makers, including the president, also committed several cognitive errors. President Bush evidently made a snap decision to invade Iraq, without any consultation with the NSC or outside experts. Bush and the neoconservatives engaged in the drunkard's search, in which they focused on an easy and convenient solution to terrorism, emphasizing state sponsors of terrorism. Many decision makers indulged in the improper use of analogies. The President and top administration officials often compared the Iraq situation to World War II. Top leaders, especially President Bush, often sought cognitive consistency by ignoring inconvenient facts, and they apparently engaged in denial and wishful thinking.

It also cannot be demonstrated that groupthink was the cause of the failure of occupation planning. The primary reason is the fact that occupation planning took place in so many different agencies that it is unlikely group dynamics produced the failure. There were numerous other reasons for the failure of occupation planning. Interagency planning was hampered by distrust and lack of cooperation between the State and Defense departments. The Defense Department delayed appointing a postwar coordinator or seriously planning out of fear that visible postwar planning would have diplomatic repercussions. ORHA's planning process was hindered by its late start, and by the constant need to address personnel and administrative issues, which plagued the unit even after it deployed to the Middle East.

All agencies planning for occupation, military and civilian alike, depended on certain assumptions that turned out to be false. Planners assumed that Iraq's central government and ministries would remain largely intact, needing only new management. Planners also assumed the Iraqi army would remain mostly intact and able to provide security, which led them to plan on a permissive environment for reconstruction. High level planners at the Defense Department, consistent with their bias against nation building, assumed the occupation would be short and that the U.S. would quickly turn over power to a new Iraqi government.

The use of improper analogies also hindered planning. Planners depended too much on the post World War II occupations of Japan and Germany as a template, ignoring the differences between these societies and Iraq. Planners also spent too much time planning for contingencies from the last Gulf War, such as large scale humanitarian disaster and oilfield fires.

Although groupthink theory provided persuasive explanations of other foreign policy disasters, it does not apply to every case. Given its poor conformity with the evidence in these decisions, I believe that groupthink is not the appropriate theoretical framework for explaining the Iraq invasion and the failure of occupation planning.

Appendix A: Timeline

2001

1/10: Bush briefed by Joint Chiefs of Staff on Iraq at Pentagon (Woodward pg 10)

1/20: Bush inaugurated

2/5: Rice chairs National Security Council (NSC) principals meeting on Iraq

2/9/: Cheney briefed on Al-Qaeda links to USS Cole, embassy bombings, 1993 World Trade Center attack

2/15: Memo from NSC on al-Qaeda responsibility for Cole

2/16: US & UK conduct airstrikes inside Iraq to enforce no-fly zone

3/1: NSC principals meeting on Iraq.

8/1: NSC deputies present plan for Iraq regime change “A Liberation Strategy” (Woodward pg 21)

8/6: Bush & Cheney receive Presidential Daily Brief warning of al Qaeda’s intention to strike US.

8/10: US & UK airstrike on Iraq

9/4: Principals approve multiyear plan to disrupt al-Qaeda

9/9: Rumsfeld threatens to advise veto of Defense App bill if Ballistic Missile Defense funds diverted to counterterrorism (Haass)

9/11: NY & Pentagon Attacks; Rumsfeld speculates on possibility of hitting both al Qaeda and Iraq (Woodward pg 24)

9/12: Bush holds meeting at Pentagon, talks about getting important results, “We won’t just pound sand” (Feith pg 12) Rumsfeld points out that in Iraq we could inflict damage that would cause state sponsors to rethink policies (Feith pg 15)/ Rumsfeld asks if 9/11 doesn’t provide “an opportunity” to attack Iraq (Woodward pg 25)

9/13: Rumsfeld orders 3rd Army to form plan to seize southern oilfields (Gordon pg 22)/ NSC Meeting

9/15: Camp David meeting; Wolfowitz pushes Iraq war, Rumsfeld abstains on vote (ibid)

9/16: Bush designates Afghanistan as primary target of Global War on Terror; says Iraq will be “put off” (Woodward pg 26)

9/17: Bush orders military strike against terrorists worldwide

9/19: Rumsfeld sends message to Regional Commander in Chief’s (Feith pg 55) Perle’s Defense Policy Board meets with Rumsfeld, Bernard Lewis, Chalabi (Gordon pg 20)

9/30: “Strategic Thoughts” paper sent to President by Defense department, written by Feith (Feith pg 81)

11/21: Bush asks Rumsfeld to update Iraq War Plan (Woodward pg 1)

11/26: Bush takes questions on Iraq (Woodward pg 36)

11/27: Rumsfeld requests commander’s concept of Iraq War Plan (Franks pg 329)

12/1: Rumsfeld sends memo thru Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to Franks requesting brief on commander’s concept for Iraq (Woodward, pg 38); New York Times runs story on Iraq inspections (Woodward pg 39)

12/4: Franks briefs Rumsfeld & Chairman of the JCS on commander’s concept (Franks pg 329)

12/12: 2nd Video teleconference (VTC) between Franks & Rumsfeld (Franks)

12/19: Phone conversation Franks & Rumsfeld, Rumsfeld asks for Iraq plan progress

12/27: VTC on Cdr’s Concept (Franks)

12/28: Franks goes to Crawford to brief President Bush, VTC w NSC (Cheney, Rice, Tenet, Card, Rumsfeld) (Franks)

12/31 Rumsfeld offers Franks 1 year extension as CENTCOM Commander (Franks pg 360)

2002

1/9: Franks phone conversation with Rumsfeld (Woodward pg 75)

1/29/02: State of the Union address

2/1: Franks briefing to Rumsfeld

2/7 Franks briefs President Bush & NSC at the White House (Franks pg 369)

2/12: Powell testifies to Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Woodward pg 103)

2/18: Bush Joint Press Conference with Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi

3/11: Press Release

3/21: Cheney Press Release after meeting with Bush after Cheney Middle East trip (Woodward pg 113)

3/23: JCS conducts Iraq wargame (Woodward pg 114) [Prominent Hammer]

3/29: Franks meets with JCS (Woodward pg 117)

4/6-7: Bushes host Blairs at Camp David (Woodward pg119)

4/11: Franks VTC with Rumsfeld (Woodward pg 120)

4/20: Franks briefs Bush at Camp David (Woodward pg 121)

4/24: Franks meets with major commanders in Qatar (Woodward pg 123)

5/02: Camp David Meeting of Franks & NSC; Powell tries to give reality check (Franks pg 386)

5/9: Franks asks his commanders to develop plan for northern front (Woodward pg 123)

5/10: Franks meets with Rumsfeld (Woodward pg 124)

5/11: Franks meets with Bush at Camp David (Woodward pg 126)

5/21 Franks press conference in Tampa (Woodward pg 130)

5/23 Bush meets with German Chancellor Schroeder (Woodward pg 129)

5/26 Bush meets with French President Chirac (Woodward pg 129)

6/1: President Bush gives West Point Commencement Speech

6/3: Franks briefs Rumsfeld on “Running Start” plan (Woodward pg 114)

6/19: Franks briefs Bush (Woodward pg 135)

6/27-28 Franks meets with senior commanders in Germany (Woodward pg 136) /At Deputies meeting, Armitage argues for delay of creating postwar planning coordinator (Feith pg 316)

7/02: Rice tells Haass President Bush’s mind is made up on Iraq (Haass pg 213)

7/02: CIA teams infiltrate northern Iraq

7/10: Casey forms “Iraq Political-Military Cell” interagency working group (Feith pg 276)

7/17: Franks briefs Rumsfeld (Woodward pg 136)

7/23/02: Downing St Memo

7/28-29: Front page stories on Iraq in Washington Post and New York Times

8/5/02: Franks briefs President Bush & NSC at White House; Powell’s “Pottery Barn” meeting with GWB (Woodward pg 149)

8/14: Rice chairs principals meeting on Iraq (Woodward pg 154) Franks meets with Rumsfeld (Woodward pg 157)

8/15/02: Scowcroft’s Wall Street Journal Op-Ed

8/16: Bush VTC with NSC (Woodward pg 161)

8/26: Cheney speech to Veterans of Foreign Wars

8/29: Cheney Speech to Korea Veterans

9/2: Powell meets with Bush & Rice at White House (Woodward pg 166)

9/3: Meeting of Iraq Coordination Group, chaired by Card (Woodward pg 168)

9/4: Bush meets with congressional leaders; Rumsfeld briefs senators (Woodward pg169)

9/5: Powell calls Franks with concerns & warns him of disagreement at upcoming meeting:
Franks calls Rumsfeld; Card's group meets (Woodward pg 172)

9/6: Franks briefs NSC at White House (Franks pg 394); Card's group meets (Woodward 172)
NSC principals meet at Camp David without Bush (Woodward pg 174)

9/7: Franks briefs Bush and NSC at Camp David (Franks pg 395); Blair meets with Bush at
Camp David (Woodward pg 177)

9/12: Bush addresses UN; Feith's "Case for War" memo

9/17: National Security Strategy Published

9/25: Bush Speech

9/26: Haass Nation-building memo; Bush meets w 18 House members (Woodward pg 188)

10/1: Bush meets with House International Affairs Committee (Woodward pg 190)

10/02: JCS meets with Bush & Cheney (Woodward pg 207)

10/2: Bush Cincinnati Speech

10/8: 47 senators briefed on latest Iraq NIE (Woodward pg 203)

10/10: House passes Iraq war resolution

10/11: Senate passes war resolution

10/15: Feith's Parade of Horribles memo

10/18: Rumsfeld orders Feith to set up postwar planning office (Feith 316)

11/8: UN passes Resolution 1441

11/15: Bush meets with Saudi Ambassador Bandar (Woodward pg 228) Rice meeting with think tank reps on reconstruction; won't go forward without AEI (Packer pg 112)

11/26: Franks sends Rumsfeld deployment order (Woodward pg 231)

12/2: White House press conference

12/6: 1st major deployment order issued (Woodward pg 234)

12/18 Meeting with Spanish Prime Minister Aznar (Woodward pg 240); meeting with NSC (Woodward pg 242) Bush says at this meeting "I think war is inevitable" (Feith 342)

12/19: Bush meets with Franks (Woodward pg 244)

12/21: Director of Central Intelligence Tenet & Deputy Director of Central Intelligence meet with Bush (Slam Dunk meeting) (Woodward pg 247)

2003

1/03: President Bush tells Rumsfeld "Look, we're going to have to do this." (Woodward pg 261)

1/03: Jay Garner appointed head of ORHA.

1/03: Feith meeting w Deputy National Security Assistant Hadley on reconstruction (Feith pg 348)

1/6: Cabinet meeting (Woodward pg 256)

1/8: Bush meeting with congressional leadership (Woodward pg 257)

1/9: Bush meets with Franks (Woodward pg 257)

- 1/10: Bush & Cheney meet with Iraqi dissidents (Woodward pg 258) Exiles explain difference between Sunni & Shia (Packer pg 96)
- 1/11: Cheney meets with Bandar, Rumsfeld & Myers (Woodward pg 263)
- 1/13 Bush & Rice meet with Bandar (Woodward pg 266); Bush meets with Powell (Put your war uniform on) (Woodward pg 269)
- 1/14: Bush meeting w Polish Prime Minister Kwasniewski (Woodward pg 265)
- 1/15: Bush meeting with NSC to discuss Iraqi humanitarian assistance (Woodward pg 276)
- 1/20 Powell meeting at UN Security Council
- 1/21: Bush press conference
- 1/24: Franks presents final OPPLAN to Rumsfeld (Woodward pg 287)
- 1/27: Blix report to UN
- 1/30: Bush meeting with Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi
- 1/31: Bush meeting with British Prime Minister Blair
- 2/03: Rumsfeld speech "Beyond Nation Building"
- 2/1 Powell & Armitage meet at CIA
- 2/5: Bush meeting w Congress (Woodward pg 307) Powell's WMD presentation to UN
- 2/7: Bush phone call from Chirac; meeting with Egyptian President Mubarak's son (Woodward pp 313-314)
- 2/10 Bush meets w Australian Prime Minister Howard (Woodward pg 314)
- 2/14: Bush meeting with NSC
- 2/22: Bush meets w Spanish Prime Minister Aznar at Crawford (Woodward pg 319)
- 2/24: Bush meets with NSC on Iraqi oil (Woodward pg 322)

2/26: Bush Speech to American Enterprise Institute

3/4: Feith briefs Bush & NSC (Woodward pg 328)

3/5: Franks meets with Bush (Woodward pg 329)

3/6: Bush press conference

3/10: Bush meets with Rice, Hadley, Gerson (Woodward pg 340)

3/11 Rice issues memo on Ph IV transition

3/12: Feith briefing to NSC on transition (Woodward pg 342)

3/17: NSC meeting (Woodward pg 365)

3/18: Bush prime-time speech/ultimatum to Saddam

3/19: Franks VTC with Bush from Qatar: Bush gives go order

3/22: Franks VTC with Bush

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