CONVERTING NATIONALISM INTO A REVISIONIST FOREIGN POLICY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION’S CASE FOR WAR AGAINST IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

Before September 11, 2001 (9/11), a minority of Americans supported the policy of ousting Saddam Hussein’s regime militarily. By late 2003, more than 60 percent of the public supported this policy. More importantly, the Bush administration was able to convince Americans of the need to support this policy without the United Nations Security Council’s authority or widespread support from the international community. With strong public backing, the White House was able to construct a ‘revisionist’ foreign policy that shattered America’s tradition of moderation and support for the status quo. Given that research in the discipline of international relation suggests that ‘revisionist’ foreign policies are not executed by democratic states or hegemonic powers, the execution of the Iraq War not only questions this literature, but also allows us to compare contemporary American foreign policy with other revisionist states’ strategies. Even though this paper is grounded in the international relations theory of neo-classical realism, it uses a constructivist approach to the study of nationalism to argue that the Bush administration heighten post-9/11 collective fears and feelings of vulnerability to construct a nationalist discourse that supported its policy of regime change in Iraq.

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FIRST DRAFT

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the 2000 presidential elections, Condoleezza Rice, acting as one of George W. Bush’s main foreign policy advisors, published an article in *Foreign Affairs* that described the People Republic of China’s foreign policy as revisionist, stressing that China was not a “status quo” state, but a revisionist state interested in reformulating “Asia’s balance of power to its own favor.”

This characterization put China in the company of other revisionist states, such as Wilhelmine Germany, Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and the Soviet Union. Rice’s description was echoed by other members of Bush’s foreign policy team, especially Wolfowitz’s work which compared China’s rise to the “German Problem” during the “Edwardian era (1901-1910), when a democratic England struggled with a rising authoritarian Germany.” Whether conscious or not, the team’s description of China as a revisionist state was a way to discredit Beijing’s views of world order and to stress the goodness of American interests and ideals.

Consequently, Bush’s advisors saw the United States (U.S.) as a protector of the international order, underscoring that non-democratic powers are a potential threat to global stability. In reaction to these views, Lanxin Xiang, in late 2001, questioned this comparison, making it clear that that the Wilhelmine analogy fitted the United States more than China. Though agreeing with Xiang’s criticisms of the Bush administration’s policies, David Shambaugh questioned his conclusion, pointing out that the U.S. was not a revisionist power and that China, while supportive of elements of the status quo, was searching for ways to change the international order according to its interests.

What characterizes a revisionist foreign policy? What factors drive states to adopt revisionist foreign policies? As Alistair Iain Johnston argues, this is an area of international relations research that is “vague” and “undertheorized.” Indeed, the literature in this discipline maintains that revisionist states tend to be aggressive, non-democratic polities. Moreover, hegemons are not treated as revisionist powers because the international order reflects their values and interests. However, recent research on post-9/11 American foreign policy is questioning the validity of these findings. Some recent studies demonstrate that the Bush administration’s strategies are influenced by

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4 Xiang, “Washington’s Misguided China Policy,” 7. It is important to note that Xiang’s analysis is also a response to Wolfowitz’s comparison on China’s rise with that of Germany in the early twentieth century. See: Paul Wolfowitz, “Bridging Centuries – Fin de Siècle All Over Again,” *The National Interest* (Spring 1997): 7-8.
5 Xiang, 11-12.
revisionist interests. The United States’ controversial strategies, especially its decision to invade and occupy Iraq, have raised important questions regarding the present nature of the international order and the value of American hegemony.

Why did the Bush administration break with his predecessors’ foreign policy based on moderation and support for the status quo? More to the point, how did it convince Americans of the significance of ousting Saddam Hussein’s regime from power, especially given that support for this goal was not widespread before the 9/11 terrorist attacks? This paper argues that these attacks had a dramatic impact on Americans’ perception of international affairs, directly influencing American self-awareness and fostering new nationalist discourses. Strong feelings of vulnerability also fostered new fears that the Bush administration harnessed to persuade Congress and the public of the need to change the policy towards Iraq. Backed by strong nationalist sentiments, fueled by the memory of the 9/11 attacks, the American public agreed with the president’s assessment that the nation’s security could be best assured by a revisionist foreign policy that expanded American hegemony and extended its values.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first presents the analytic framework. It explains that the study of the Bush administration’s policy needs to take into account both systemic and domestic variables. Thus, it argues that the theory of neoclassical realism and the constructivist approach to the study of nationalism are good tools to investigate the post-9/11 interests that shaped American foreign policy. Section two explores the connection between American nationalism and foreign policy. It argues that American nationalism is multifaceted and that shifts from one foreign policy approach to another are usually a consequence of changes in the nationalist discourses. Section three explores the Bush administration’s case for a revisionist foreign policy and it explains how its manipulation of public sentiments permitted it to oust Saddam Hussein from power.

THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

What factors influence a state’s foreign policy? What variables explain a state’s willingness to abandon certain policies and to construct new ones? Why do states go to war? The discipline of international relations has constructed a number of theories to help us answer these questions. Most of these theories have been developed by scholars working within the realist paradigm, which has been the dominant approach to the study of war in the discipline. For the sake of simplicity, realist theories can be grouped into two major groups: neo-realist and neo-classical realist.

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Neo-realist scholars tend to emphasize that the distribution of power in the international system determines the character of a state’s foreign policies. Most neo-realists treat the state as a unitary actor, operating rationally in an anarchic international system. They disregard the influence domestic politics may have on the state’s foreign policy, arguing that all states, regardless of their material capabilities or constitutional makeup, will react in similar fashion when faced with external challenges to their security and sovereignty. Therefore, states will build-up their military capabilities to either balance against other states or use these capabilities to expand their power and influence when international conditions are ripe. States may also decide to expand when they have clear technological advantages that enable them to establish hegemony over other states.11

How much power does a state need to feel secure? This has been a source of great debate in neo-realist circles. Defensive realists argue that states are interested in establishing and maintaining a balance of power between major states. Trying to avoid a security dilemma,12 states have learned to moderate their foreign policies and their defense strategies. In this manner, states, mainly interested in relative gains, “pursue military, diplomatic, and foreign economic policies that communicate restraint”13. As Kenneth Waltz notes, “the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system.”14 In contrast, offensive realists maintain that states are only concerned with absolute gains. As such, they tend to be more aggressive in the international system. The objective, as John Mearsheimer notes, is for a state to maximize its power in order to establish regional hegemony as a path towards global hegemony. Thus, “power, according to this logic, is not a means to an end, but an end in itself”15. Even though Mearsheimer demonstrates why states are unlikely to establish global hegemony, his theory argues that states cannot escape this logic of power maximization because the anarchic nature of the international system forces states to carry out rent-seeking strategies.

For the purposes of this article, these two theories provide an incomplete understanding of the factors that affect a state’s foreign policy. Although change in the distribution of power in the international system is an important determinant of a state’s foreign policy, a country’s domestic politics also plays a crucial role. Most neo-realist scholars do not pretend to explain how foreign policy is made. As Waltz argues, neo-realism is a theory of international politics. In this sense, it tries to “describe the range of likely outcomes of the actions and interaction of states within a given system and show

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12 The security dilemma is a consequence of anarchical conditions, where states have to do everything in their capacity to secure their own survival. If state A increases its capabilities, state B perceives this as a challenge to its security, forcing it to further develop its capabilities or to create alliances in order to balance against state A. The logic of this dilemma leads to a conflict spiral, where each side feels that their survivable can be best achieved by weakening or destroying the other. According to Robert Jervis, if states understand this dilemma they can learn to cooperate in order to preserve international peace. For more information, see: Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1978): 167-214.
how the range of expectations varies a systems change”.\textsuperscript{16} Neo-realist scholars, while admitting the possible influence of domestic factors, favor studying how systemic changes affect states’ responses because it allows them to build a scientific theory that values parsimony over multicasual explanations or rich historical narratives. Accordingly, a theory’s validity is not measured by its ability to account for the behavior of all states, but only a majority of states. What happens if the theory cannot capture the behavior of one of the great powers in a given historical time period?

Paul Schroeder’s critique of Waltz’s theory of international politics demonstrates that it does not fully explain the interactions of the European states during the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, Mearsheimer’s argument that all great powers will maximize power by going on the offensive when international conditions are ripe does not apply to the U.S. before the Spanish-American War of 1898 or during the 1990s.\textsuperscript{18} In fact, many foreign policy theorists argue that realism cannot completely explain American foreign policy. Henry Kissinger argues that U.S. presidents would have difficulty pushing for a foreign policy that ignores America’s exceptionalism or disregards moral principles.\textsuperscript{19} Echoing this view, Richard Betts adds that bureaucratic politics and competition between U.S. political parties are also important factors affecting the foreign policy making process.\textsuperscript{20}

This paper uses neoclassical realism to explain why the U.S. decided to abandon moderate foreign policies for more revisionist strategies after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Neoclassical realism is not only concerned with general patterns of international politics, but also on how leaders and other domestic institutions react to international pressures and construct strategies to cope with these changes.\textsuperscript{21} Agreeing with neorealist research, neoclassical realists agree that all states mistrust other states and try to balance them “by seeking to control and shape their external environment”.\textsuperscript{22} Whereas neorealist see the state as a unitary actor, neoclassical realists believe that leaders’ perceptions of international events, domestic processes, and the state’s ability to mobilize society’s resources determines “the extent that” states will be able “to shape and control their external environment”.\textsuperscript{23} How does neoclassical realism address the debate between neorealism’s defensive and offensive strands?

Some neoclassical realists, building on the work of classical realism, note that states’ foreign policies can be described as status quo or revisionist.\textsuperscript{24} According to the former label, states are satisfied with the existing international order; their actions are

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{16}Waltz, \textit{Theory of International Politics}, 71-72.
\bibitem{18}Yordán, “America’s Quest for Global Hegemony,”130-31.
\bibitem{21}Taliaferro, “Security Seeking Under Anarchy”, 133-34.
\bibitem{22}Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” \textit{World Politics}, vol. 51, no. 1 (1998), 152.
\bibitem{23}Ibid., 152.
\end{thebibliography}
defensive in nature, as they want to preserve their relative position of power. States that are unsatisfied with the established international order craft revisionist foreign policies to create an international order that advances their interests. Consequently, states promoting a status-quo policy behave as “security maximizers”, in line with the tenets of defensive realism, while states practicing revisionist policies act as “power maximizers” interested in dominating the international system. Can states that adopt status quo positions abandon them for revisionist strategies? If so, what factors influence this decision?

Although revisionist states’ intentions have been under-researched by international relations scholars, the literature tends to suggest that democracies will be “security maximizers” and when they engage in war, it tends to be for defensive reasons. Democratic states, therefore, are likely to be satisfied with the established order and they will work with other states through international institutions, if they want to effect international change or to improve their position of power. The research suggests that revisionist strategies, which are usually offensive in character, are constructed by authoritarian states. Is this the case? This paper disputes this notion emphasizing that democracies are also likely to adopt revisionist strategies if they feel it will advance their interests. This is not to say that revisionist strategies will not be risky or successful.

Building on Randall Schweller’s work, revisionist strategies can be classified according to their aggressive character. What this article calls soft revisionism refers to strategies that are designed to contest the hierarchy of the international system. As Jason Lyall notes, “challenges to the reigning pecking order may be violent but do not necessarily herald a change to either rules of inclusion in international society or the rules governing conduct among its members”. A strategy of hard revisionism seeks to overturn the existing international order to secure the revisionist state’s hegemony over the system. Moderate revisionist strategies may also be instituted. These may include a violation of the “shared limits on the use of force, types of weapons, or tactics”. By definition, this type of violation is considered moderate because it will not lead to an automatic transformation of the international system, though this action could “spark a normative cascade that leads to an evolution (or breakdown) in the practices governing war”.

One of neo-classical realism’s strength is that it is a theory of foreign policy. As Fareed Zakaria notes, “a theory of foreign policy explains and forecasts how countries will behave and under what conditions they will expand”. What factors will determine whether a state will craft a status quo or a revisionist foreign policy? Four are particularly important. The first is the international environment. States will try to expand when leaders perceive that the benefits of expansion will outweigh the costs of preserving the status quo. A revisionist foreign policy is conducted if decision-makers feel that the

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29 Ibid., 3.
established order challenges their state’s security or if leaders perceive that the existing distribution of power makes expansion possible. A revisionist foreign policy is always a risky undertaking, as other states, satisfied with their position of power, may band together to block the revisionist state’s efforts to re-order the international system.

The second factor is the state’s ability to extract and mobilize the nation’s economic and military resources to support its expansionist interests.31 In democracies, the relationship between the executive and the legislature on foreign policy and defense matters can determine the state’s capacity to mobilize these resources. In case of the U.S., the president is able to craft and implement an effective foreign policy strategy, if Congress plays a passive, if not supportive role. Under these conditions, the president is free to define the nation’s interests and its threats in ways that allow him to mobilize the nation’s resources to build an expansionist foreign policy.

The third factor is the role of “political entrepreneurs”.32 These individuals, who may be senior policy-makers or prominent people outside government, favor revisionist strategies and they use their positions of influence to translate their visions into reality. The last factor is the role of public opinion. In democracies, the public’s views can clash with leaders’ preferences, making it difficult for governmental institutions to mobilize the nation’s resources and to execute certain policies. Thus, leaders try to shape the public’s understanding of external events in hopes that it will support their policies.

What is the role of nationalism in the making of foreign policy? By filtering shared experiences, nationalism is a powerful tools leaders use to frame “the domestic debate on foreign policy”, ascertaining “which beliefs are indisputable and which intolerable, which actions are acceptable and which unacceptable, which course is true and wholesome and which false and baleful, and where lies security and danger.”33 This is a subject that has been widely studied by scholars working within boundaries of neoclassical realism.34 Most of these studies, however, have been influenced by the instrumental approach.

This approach argues that national identity is not fixed; it is subject to manipulation. As a result, instrumentalists argue that the elite mobilize people by reminding them of historical, physical, or ideological affinities that unite them in order to struggle for a common cause. In this respect, these leaders disguise their individual objectives by arousing collective emotions. In line with Ernest Gellner’s research on nationalism, this becomes a process of social engineering to unite various interests under one common identity and a set of shared goals.35 Is this possible in a democratic system?

Proponents of the constructivist approach do not necessarily disagree with instrumentalists’ views. However, they question leaders’ ability to manipulate national

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identity as means to create support for their policies. Constructivists argue that this identity is “embedded within and controlled by the larger society”;\textsuperscript{36} thus maintaining that nationalism must be interpreted within a “relational framework,”\textsuperscript{37} as numerous social forces construct, sustain, or deconstruct it. Supporters of this approach also argue that as “social interactions change”, conceptions of nationality “evolve as well”\textsuperscript{38}. In other words, while leaders may want to mobilize national feelings, it is difficult to do so because existing social structures may inhibit their efforts.\textsuperscript{39} This is especially true in democracies with strong institutions and vibrant civil societies. Under these conditions, the power to construct, reproduce, or deconstruct the nation’s identity is diffused throughout society; hence state institutions, media organizations, interest groups, religious groups, and political leaders, to mention a few, work with and against each other to construct the nation’s identity.\textsuperscript{40} Of course, in authoritarian systems the elite may have a freer hand at constructing nationalist discourse, but its reproduction is still dependent on the state’s ability to control the work of media organizations, education institutions, and other informal bodies embedded in society.

Constructivism is significant for two reasons. First, if national identity is shaped by multiple discourses, then it is not static, but adapting to competing social pressures. In established democracies, this process tends to secure ‘thin’ conceptions of national identity as it is difficult for one single individual or group to control nationalist meanings. Second, this approach can account for radical changes in national identity and the impact these new meanings may have on a state’s foreign policy. This is most likely during crises, when challenges to established institutions give leaders the ability to shape unfolding events.\textsuperscript{41} During these times, the protections afforded by the “marketplace of ideas” and “strong civic institutions” dissipate as the public’s anger and uncertainty of the future allows leaders to construct new definitions of nationality that support their own policy preferences.\textsuperscript{42} In doing so, they are likely to: stress the “cultural and historical distinctiveness” of the nation; inflate the threat posed by other groups; “ignore the degree which the nation’s own actions provoked such threats”; and underplay “the costs of seeking national goals” through military means.\textsuperscript{43}

Taken together, constructivism analysis of national discourses and neo-classical realist studies suggest that under certain conditions leaders can manipulate national

\textsuperscript{38} Lake and Rothchild, “Spreading the Fear,” 6.
\textsuperscript{43} Snyder and Ballentine, “Nationalism,” 11.
feelings in order to promote revisionists strategies. Can this analytic framework explain the Bush administration’s foreign policy following the 9/11 terrorist attacks? Before answering this question, the next section examines the role American nationalism has on foreign policy making.

**AMERICAN NATIONALISM AND FOREIGN POLICY: FROM COOPERATIVE TO MILITANT INTERNATIONALISM**

American nationalism is a product of Americans’ belief that the U.S. is exceptional and that its political community is defined by a set of civic values that are universal in character. This is the foundation of America’s liberal social order, which is built upon the following principles: constitutionalism, democracy, individualism, liberty, laissez-faire, anti-statism, egalitarianism, and populism. How does this connect to debates in American foreign policy?

Recent studies on the development of post-9/11 foreign policy argue that American exceptionalism is an important element that is often ignored. They argue that American national identity is connected to the U.S.’s policy to promote democracy abroad. According to this research, American exceptionalism gives life to two traditions: exemplarism and vindicationism. In the former, the United States prefers to “promote democracy by offering a benign model of successful liberal-democratic state.” This approach suggests that “an activist foreign policy undermines liberal domestic political culture and institutions.” The second tradition is less idealistic, strongly arguing that the U.S. should actively promote its values. This missionary zeal even calls on American leaders to promote democracy through intervention and force.44

Seen from this perspective, the Bush administration’s foreign policy is vindicationist in character. However, is this not also applicable to the Clinton administration’s foreign policy strategy which used force to promote democracy abroad? If this is the case, then why are Bush’s strategies so controversial? The problem with this research is that it locates American nationalism in the myth of exceptionalism and the universal character of its values. Consequently, there is a certain bias in the research that sees American nationalism as progressive, often ignoring Seymour Martin Lipset’s contention that exceptionalism is a double-edge sword. More importantly, if this research tries to make sense of the Bush administration’s foreign policy and tries to paint it as a departure of the American diplomatic tradition, then this dichotomy is not useful. Exemplarism promotes the values of isolationism and it is clear that American foreign policy has not been isolationist since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. While vindicationism is ingrained in tradition of American internationalism, it tells us little about what type of internationalism should guide American foreign policy.

46 Monten, 124.
47 Ibid., 125-126.
Research on American internationalism argues that the “American public is divided along two continua: a continuum of cooperative internationalism and a continuum of militant internationalism.” \(^{48}\) Supporters of the former, influenced by idealism, contend that American foreign policy should be advanced through multilateral fora, while the latter, influenced by realism, strongly prefer unilateral solutions. According to this research, the American population is fragmented into four categories: isolationist, hard-liners, accommodationists, and internationalists. The last three are the most important for the purpose of this investigation. According to these findings, each category represents around 25% of the public. Hard-liners are mostly conservatives and critical of cooperative internationalism. Accommodationists tend to be liberals and they are opponents of militant internationalism. Internationalists are moderates; being more pragmatic, they favor either type of internationalism. Analyses of data collected from 1974 to 1994 claims that that Republicans tend to be either internationalists or hard-liners, and Democrats are more likely to be accommodationist or internationalists. \(^{49}\)

If these findings are correct, then internationalists tend to determine the character of American foreign policy, keeping at bay the most extreme interests of those people that favor accommodationist and hard-line positions. As demonstrated below, the tragedy of the 9/11 terrorist attacks forced internationalist to support a more militant foreign policy. While hard-liners became more influential within policy-circles, the Bush administration’s rhetoric of America’s goodness and Americans’ fears of future attacks fostered a political environment that prevented accommodationists and isolationists from questioning the value of post-9/11 foreign policy. The result was a foreign policy that while it could be described as “vindicicationism with a vengeance”, \(^{50}\) it is best portrayed as revisionist. Thus, its goal is not the preservation of the status quo, but the maximization of power in an attempt to establish American global hegemony. \(^{51}\)

Anatol Lieven’s work suggests that American nationalism is multifaceted; each face is driven by a combination of different discourses ingrained in the American experience. The connecting thread is America’s exceptionalism, which has given nationalism in the U.S. a civic character. However, moments of social crisis can also give life to essentialist or “chauvinistic” definitions of American nationalism. Lieven refers to traditional patterns of American national feelings as the “Thesis” and the more essentialist definitions as its “Antithesis”\(^{52}\). For simplicity’s sake, this study calls the former civic individualistic and the latter civic collectivistic. \(^{53}\) These labels emphasize


\[^{49}\text{McCormick, American Foreign Policy, 527.}\]

\[^{50}\text{McCartney, “American Nationalism,” 401.}\]

\[^{51}\text{Yordán, “America’s Quest for Global Hegemony,” 147-151.}\]

\[^{52}\text{Anatol Lieven, America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).}\]

\[^{53}\text{This approach is based on the work carried out in the following study: Liah Greenfield and Daniel Chirot, “Nationalism and Aggression,” Theory and Society, vol. 23, no. 1 (1994): 85-86. It is important to note that the study does not analyze the civic collectivistic. Instead, the authors look at the “collectivistic ethnic” as a particular type of nationalism that directly correlates with aggression. For the civic collectivistic, see: Liah Greenfield, Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 89-188.}\]
the civic nature of American nationalist discourse, ingrained in the “American Creed”, but the former’s emphasis on individualism and the other on collectivism raises important questions about the nature of American nationalism and its connection to foreign policy.

The strength of Lieven’s work is that it demonstrates that exceptionalism can serve as the basis for a more chauvinistic brand of nationalism and a more aggressive foreign policy. This is still based on the American experience. However, rather than stressing universal or cosmopolitan values, civic collective nationalism promotes the particularity of the American experience. Consequently, American nationalism can also be informed by populism, emphasizing collectivism over individualism and the importance of national sacrifice. As Lieven observes, this competing definition celebrates the American military and it strongly favors its use to promote American interests abroad.\(^5^4\) Similarly, it is influenced by evangelical Protestantism, which depicts the United States as a Christian nation working to make God’s will a reality.\(^5^5\) This type of nationalism is also weary of the so-called “East Coast” intellectuals, who often take accommodationist views and are critical of militant internationalism. Even though its modern version tends to be a byproduct of “suburbanization”\(^5^6\), this form of nationalism is deeply ingrained in the “Southern” mindset, which exalts conservative family values and places a lot of importance on honor and manhood.\(^5^7\) A final element in this form of nationalism is strong feelings of nativism, especially influential among White-Caucasian Americans. This mindset has recently “southernize” the Republican Party\(^5^8\) and has deeply shaped the views of hard-liners and some internationalists, which are strongly represented in the American South, the Midwest and the West.

This is not to say that civic collective notions of American nationalism do not support the spread of democracy and capitalist values. In many ways, these notions are informed by vindicationist views, but they go a set further. By stressing the particularity of the American experience, foreign policy is driven by the pursuit of power. In many ways, this type of nationalism breeds foreign policies that resemble the imperialist policies of the past because the U.S. is unwilling to negotiate the values or interests that inform its strategies and because other nations’ values are treated as an inferior or arcane. From this perspective, the world has to be transformed according to American dictates because the only way the U.S. will be safe is if the world reflects American values.

Given that these two types of nationalism sit side by side, what triggers the acceptance of one discourse over the other? As noted in the previous section, the constructivist approach argues that the trigger is crisis situations. Under these conditions, individuals feel vulnerable. Hence, collective fears of the future bring people together, constructing a new national identity. In these circumstances, the public wants action to protect the nation from threats or future attacks. Not surprisingly, citizens put their faith


\(^{55}\) Lieven, 137-144; and Bacevich, 122-144.

\(^{56}\) Lieven, 135. Walter Russell Mead also makes a similar argument. The rise of a post-Fordist order, based on millennial capitalist values, in the United States has strengthened reactionary forces in American society, which give life to neo-Jacksonian forms of nationalism. For more information, see his *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America’s Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), chapters 5 and 6.


\(^{58}\) Lieven, 105.
in the military and the government. Due to feelings of vulnerability, groups or organizations present the world as “us versus them” or the struggle as “good and evil” gain acceptance. The demand for action, limits the potential for deliberation, but it also rewards leadership. Thus, leaders harness these emotions and exploit these circumstances to push for controversial policies.

Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, American nationalism was driven by individualism. The Clinton administration’s foreign policy was constructed according to the tenets of cooperative internationalism. On many issues, a majority of Americans favored policies that supported the status quo and cooperation with other countries through international institutions on many issues. In the aftermath of the attacks, American nationalist discourse took a turn towards chauvinism. Is this civic collectivistic version of nationalism overtaking civic conceptions in the United States? If American history is a guide, the influence of these collective fears is only temporary. As Americans regain trust in their institutions and become critical of their reactions, civic individualistic nationalism subsumes these chauvinistic elements. However, when civic collectivistic nationalism takes hold, American foreign policy tends to be bolder and more aggressive. When American power is not balanced by other states, American leaders have the propensity to create revisionist strategies, as seen after the explosion of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor in 1898.

It is clear that the 9/11 attacks were instrumental in convincing the American public to support of the Bush administration’s foreign policy, which was based on the principles of militant internationalism. While the invasion of Afghanistan can easily be explained through this prism, does this explain the public’s backing of Bush’s policy of regime change towards Iraq? After all, the 2003 invasion of Iraq reflects the United States’s revisionist tendencies. How did the Bush administration persuade Americans to support such a controversial policy, especially a year and half after the terrorist attacks? This is an important question given the fact that past episodes show that civic collectivistic nationalism is influential in the short-term, not over the long-term. This puzzle informs next section’s analysis.

THE ROAD TO BAGHDAD: NATIONALISM AND THE INSTITUTION OF FEAR

In November 1998, President Bill Clinton reluctantly signed the Iraqi Liberation Act. While this was a victory for members of the Project for the New American Century and Iraqi exiled groups, who had criticized the Clinton administration’s containment policy, the idea of using American resources to change the regime in Iraq enjoyed little public support. A poll conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations in 1999 asked respondents whether they would support American military action if Iraq invaded Saudi Arabia. Seventy-nine percent of U.S. leaders interviewed strongly supported military action, while 54 percent of Americans did not support this type of response. Interestingly, those polled had a very negative impression of Saddam Hussein and more than three-fourth of all respondents believed that Saudi Arabia’s independence was of vital interest.

Consequently, Clinton, though appointing a coordinator in the Department of State to work with Iraqi exiled groups, doubted that these groups could oust Saddam Hussein’s regime. Members of Congress, however, were critical of the administration’s jaded support for Iraq’s liberation.

A couple of weeks into George W. Bush’s first term, the National Security Council met to discuss several items, including America’s foreign policy towards Iraq. Although many of the second Bush administration’s senior officials, especially in the Pentagon, had connections to the Project for the New American Century and strongly favored changing the regime in Iraq, divisions within the National Security Council seemed to have forced the administration to continue the Clinton administration’s containment policy. The National Security Council backed Secretary of State Colin Powell’s policy preferences, which were built on a stronger multilateral approach to tighten the sanctions regime established by the United Nations Security Council following the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

The terrorist attacks made it easier for officials in the Pentagon to push for a policy of regime change. On 13 September 2001, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz advised Bush to invade Iraq. Although American officials had no information that linked Saddam Hussein to the attacks, Wolfowitz argued that Iraq was an easy target. Bush dismissed the suggestion, wanting to devote the country’s energies against the Taliban and al Qaeda. However, by mid-November 2001, Bush asked General Tommy Franks of the Central Command and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to start planning for a possible war against Iraq. How did the president convince Americans of the need of ousting Saddam Hussein’s regime from power? The psychological effect of the terrorist attacks on Americans is an important part of this explanation, but it is important to not exaggerate this point. After all, this war was the first offensive engagement in contemporary American history. Not since the Mexican-American War of 1846 or the Spanish-American War of 1898 has the United States started a war influenced by revisionist interests. Given that chauvinistic feelings in American history are not influential over the long-term, why did a majority of Americans support Bush’s policy of regime change?

Similarly, researchers have difficulty explaining why Bush was able to sustain strong support for his policies during his first term, even though past events show that presidents’ approval tends to decline at a quicker rate. While the attacks affected the political environment, challenged civic individualistic notions of nationalism, and empowered the White House, the revisionist policy was the result of the Bush

administration’s strategy to heighten and manipulate collective feelings of anxiety and vulnerability in order to push for its revisionist foreign policy.  

The Crystallization of Civic Collectivistic Nationalism

The terrorist attacks had a deep impact on Americans’ self-awareness and their perceptions of the world. While the initial reaction was an outburst of patriotism among Americans, a recent study shows that these feelings were not as tolerant of minorities’ values. Indeed, support for multiculturalism dissipated in the aftermath of the attacks, while mistrust of peoples from the Middle East increased as well. Collective anger and fear of the future slowly transformed the civic individualistic character of American nationalism into more chauvinistic definitions. Constant media coverage of the terrorist attacks was instrumental in this change. Stephanie Craft and Wayne Wanta’s study of public opinion following the attacks in Columbia, Missouri, confirm the media’s influence, though their study also points out that some issues the media focused on, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, were of less concern for people in general. An important story that seemed to resonate with the respondents was the possibility of future attacks. However, this issue had less coverage than other stories.

The American mainstream media, which had served as a counterweight to essentialist discourses, lost its objectivity in the aftermath of the attacks, fueling the turn towards chauvinism. April Eisman’s examination of Time’s coverage is indicative. She concludes that the mainstream media’s news stories were sensationalists and they were not even-handed; alternative views and dissenting voices were rarely published or aired. Eisman’s review of the articles published by the German news magazine, Der Speigel, demonstrates that alternative views existed in American society. German reporters interviewed a great number of American scholars that challenged post-9/11 nationalist attitudes. The consequence, as Elisabeth Anker notes, was a well scripted melodrama that vilified the attackers, exalted the heroic qualities of the first responders and the American government, and portrayed Americans as victims of the attack. The news coverage was Manichean and it exalted state power as unproblematic. It also “eliminated the space for complexity and ambiguity in which these questions could be posed. Thoughtfulness was replaced by the imperative toward retributive action.”

Although the international community rallied behind the U.S.’s efforts to oust the Taliban from power, Americans’ attitudes were not in line with cooperative

internationalism’s principles. One important study found that Americans’ trust on other nations was extremely low, while another investigation concluded that their trust in the government’s ability to address the challenge increased in the weeks after September 11. In many ways, the public rallied behind the president and urged him to take any measures to secure the nation. These feelings were strongest among Republicans. More significant, trust in other nations kept declining throughout 2002, indicating that Americans had little patience for multilateralism. This is not to say that the public opposed a diplomatic strategy that would work with the United Nations, other international institutions, or allies to achieve key interests. Indeed, while one poll, conducted in 2002, found that 75 percent of respondents supported “the use of U.S. troops to overthrow Saddam Hussein’s government”, a clear majority preferred this policy if it had the support of the United Nations and American allies. But, as Walter Russell Mead notes Americans’ support for multilateralism in the months following was more pragmatic, than ideological. Hence unilateralism was seen as a legitimate option that had to be pursued, if multilateralism failed.

This observation is important because it shows how Americans were clearly differentiating themselves from the rest of the world. As boundaries that define “Americaness” hardened, Americans’ faith in militarism increased. While public confidence in the military was extremely high, the attacks had a positive impact on its standing. Knowing that the country was going to war, enlistment levels increased substantially, though reducing to normal levels by December 2001. In college campuses, where ROTC programs had been controversial, students were more willing to consider joining the training program. Similarly, Americans expressed support for the use of force against other states, if they supported terrorism or threaten key U.S. interests.

Many people started to interpret the emerging order using religious discourses. The fact that the United States had been attacked by Islamist fundamentalist was seen by many as a threat to the nation’s Christian values, which have played an important in the nation’s history. In the attack’s aftermath, Americans attended with more frequency places of worship and searched for answers as to why the suicide attacks took place in religious website. Why is this significant? Although Christian doctrine emphasizes forgiveness and tolerance, some Christian leaders, mostly representing evangelical Protestant churches, defined the post-9/11 era as a clash of civilization between Islam and

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76 Mead, Power, 93.
Christianity. They even sanctioned Bush’s war on terror, portraying American military power “as inherently good, perhaps even a necessary adjunct to the accomplishment of Christ’s saving mission.”83 While some of these religious views were extreme, research shows that they shaped Americans’ foreign policy attitudes, especially those individuals who described themselves as conservative or Republican.84

Political Entrepreneurs and the War Presidency

This changing social landscape provided the Bush administration an opportunity to enact a revisionist foreign policy.85 The president’s popularity, which at one point reached 90 percent, and Americans’ thirst for leadership enabled him to shape public opinion after the terrorist attacks.86 With strong public backing, the White House started to undermine the limits to the president’s powers. Given that the international system could not constrain American power, the president’s advisors closely worked with political entrepreneurs outside government to institutionalize the war presidency. In this model, Congress succumbs to the executive’s interests, serving as a rubberstamp for the president’s domestic policies and its foreign policy strategies. Although lawmakers’ got out of Bush’s way so he could address the new threat, their passivity can also be explained by the president’s popularity and the initial success of his war on terror.87 Thus, it is not surprising that Congress started to challenge the president when Americans’ frustration with the Iraq war started to grow.

The attacks also had a personal impact on the president. Even though he was uninterested in foreign policy before the attacks, he became more focused, requiring his advisors to fall behind his preferences.88 However, Bush’s inexperience also forced him to rely on his advisors’ guidance, especially the group of advisers that described themselves as neo-conservative.89 Why did Bush listen to these advisors rather than nationalist-pragmatics like Powell or his father? Due to length restraints, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive answer, but a couple of words are important because neo-conservatives inside and outside the government worked closely together to establish the war presidency, heighten Americans’ sense of vulnerability, and sustain levels of civic collectivist nationalism in order to transform American foreign policy from its status quo bias to a revisionist foreign policy. Even though some may be tempted to describe neo-conservatives as part of a cabal, their influence grew because Bush shared the same worldview.

89 Thomas Preston and Margaret Hermann, “Presidential Leadership Style and the Foreign Policy Advisory Process,” in The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy, 377.
The president’s speeches after the terrorist attacks show that his reaction was similar to Americans’ civic collectivistic attitudes described above. In many ways, Bush believed that Americans had been the victims of the attack. He emphasized that the attackers and their supporters were driven by hatred of the U.S. and the freedom that informs American lives. By exulting America’s goodness, the president promised an active foreign policy that defended the U.S. from further attacks, but that promoted freedom in order to create new social orders friendly to American interests. The “war on terror” became a battle between good and evil, similar to the battle between democracy and fascism during World War II or the struggle against communism during the Cold War. Using religious imagery, Bush expressed his belief that the attacks had given the U.S. an opportunity to eradicate evil and to move the world closer to God’s “moral design.”

While the president informed Americans, in a speech following the attacks, that America’s struggle was one shared by the rest of the world, Bush knew that it would be difficult to sustain international support over the long-term. Thus, the president had told his advisors that he was ready to continue with the “war on terror,” even if the U.S. did not enjoy the international community’s backing. Hence the president trusted that the unilateral use of American power could achieve the nation’s interests. Why did Bush take this stance, if international cooperation could have legitimized his foreign policy? Since the beginning, the “war on terror” was more than the destruction of the al Qaeda network. The Bush administration wanted to recast the world order according to its values and interests. In other words, the attacks presented the U.S. an opportunity to secure and expand its primacy in the international system. While Bush’s rhetoric tried to couch American hegemony in positive terms (i.e. the expansion of a democratic world order), the great powers and other secondary states opposed it because of the Bush administration’s strong criticism of multilateral mechanisms before the 9/11 attacks.

Political entrepreneurs used the confusion and uncertainty triggered by the terrorist attacks to secure the president’s interpretations of the events and to increase public support for the “war on terror” or any policy needed to defeat al Qaeda at home or abroad. One target was American intellectuals. For instance, the Vice President’s wife, Lynne Cheney, presented a list of 117 statements, made by American scholars that she found as anti-American or “morally equivocal.” Conservatives used talk-radio, television news networks, and newspapers to quickly dispel anybody that questioned America’s goodness or tried to be critical of the administration. In many ways, these political entrepreneurs restricted the debate on 9/11 tragedy and by echoing the White House’s interpretation of the events, which closely reflected the nation’s understanding, it

92 “President’s Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance”.
94 Woodward, Bush at War, 81.
96 Cited in Lieven, American Right or Wrong, 30.
made it difficult to present new explanations about the causes of the 9/11 attacks or consider alternative policies to deal with the threat.97

Similarly, the passage of the PATRIOT Act gave the government a new set of tools that discouraged Americans, especially in the Muslim community, from criticizing state power and its strategies. The combined effect of greater government scrutiny, political entrepreneurs’ media blitz, and the mainstream media’s sensationalist news coverage restricted the autonomy of civil society, skewing the “marketplace of ideas” in favor of the White House’s interpretations of the causes of the terrorist attacks and its strategies to combat the threat.

Making the Case for the Iraq War

In the 2002 State of the Union Address, the president expanded the reach of the war on terror to include regimes that were developing or were interested in weapons of mass destruction. Bush argued that Iraq, Iran, and North Korea were part of an “Axis of Evil” and opposing their strategies was necessary to safeguard American interests and the stability of key regions of the world. To connect the “war on terror” with this new objective, he warned Americans that these weapons could fall in the hands of terrorists. Although he did not give details on how his administration would stop these countries’ efforts, he stressed his conviction that American security would be best assured by replacing these regimes with democratic systems.98

In June 2002, Bush unveiled the most controversial aspect of America’s post-9/11 foreign policy. He explained to West Point’s graduating class that the “Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment” are not applicable to the emerging threats. “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 a path of action.” Although some experts questioned the president’s views, these had little influence over the administration’s thinking.99

In September, five days after Bush addressed the U.N. General Assembly and called on the international community to address the threat of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, the White House unveiled the 2002 the National Security Strategy (NSS). It was composed of five critical elements: the maintenance and expansion of American primacy; support for the transformation of the U.S. military; concern of rogue regimes’ desires to build and proliferate weapons of mass destruction; the right to engage in preventive war; and support for the spread of democratic and liberal economic values.100 The NSS signaled the Bush administration’s faith in military power and its ability to transform the world according to American interests. Rather than explaining how the U.N. or other intergovernmental organizations could help the U.S. achieve its interests, the

document mentions the importance of building coalitions of the willing.\textsuperscript{101} In essence, the NSS paints a dangerous world and the U.S. as its savior.

Having set the revisionist logic of the Bush Doctrine, the president set out to convince Americans of the need to oust Saddam Hussein’s regime from power. The West Point speech and the release of the NSS had actually created four problems for the president. First, the international community, though willing to reconsider the existing approach towards Iraq, was critical of Bush’s aggressive rhetoric. Second, the administration was divided about the best way to achieve America’s interests; Powell advocated an approach approximating the principles of cooperative internationalism, while the Vice President and the Pentagon pushed for a revisionist foreign policy informed by the tenets of militant internationalism. Second, Democrats’ growing criticism of the president’s strategy in Congress was challenging the execution of this strategy. In fact, the Republican leadership informed the White House that it needed to explain why the containment strategy was not working and why regime change was necessary.\textsuperscript{102} Third, and most important, the president’s popularity had decreased, though his approval ratings remained over 60 percent.\textsuperscript{103} Noting these challenges, the White House devised a three-point strategy.

First, to appease Powell, Democrats in Congress, and the international community, the Bush administration agreed to work with the Security Council to find a way of disarming Saddam Hussein peacefully. Although the president wanted to replace the Iraqi regime with a secular, pro-American democracy, he knew it was premature to make the case for a unilateral solution. Second, to put pressure on Congress, to sideline Powell, and to rally American support, members of the Bush administration started to publicly make the case for the strategy. While many Americans disliked Iraq and favor the use of force to oust the dictator, as noted above, opinion polls showed that Americans prefer to do so with allies’ support and the Security Council’s approval. Knowing that international support was not guaranteed, Bush and his advisors attempted to revive the civic collectivistic emotions that emerged in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

As Scott Althus and Devon Largio demonstrate, the White House’s public relations campaign in 2002 mentioned Saddam Hussein more that Osama bin Laden. This shift was accompanied by reports that alleged a link between Iraq and al Qaeda. Even though Bush refuted this claim in September 2003, many Americans were convinced that Iraq had played some kind of role in the 9/11 plot. By fall of 2002, Americans were paying close attention to the possible threat Iraq posed on the U.S.\textsuperscript{104} The next step was to exaggerate the Iraqi threat and to firmly establish a relationship between al Qaeda and Saddam. For instance, in a televised interview in late September 2002, Cheney explained that Mohammed Atta, one of the 9/11 hijackers, had met with an Iraqi intelligence official in Prague. Although some intelligence officers disputed this claim, the president’s

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 14 and 25.
\textsuperscript{103} Hetherington and Nelson, “Anatomy of a Rally Effect,” 39.
most trusted advisors repeated this connection so many times that many Americans had internalized it.\textsuperscript{105}

Informed by the same logic, the Bush administration made it clear that Iraq was close to completing a nuclear weapon and that it had a large stockpile of biological and chemical weapons. Again, though intelligence officials and U.N. weapons experts doubted the veracity of this assertion, Bush and his allies presented information to silence the critics. For instance, in September 2002, the British government released a dossier showing that Iraq was trying to acquire aluminum tubes for its alleged centrifuge programs. In Bush’s 2003 State of the Union Address, he revealed that Iraq had been able to acquire “yellowcake” from Niger. On February 5, 2003, Powell addressed the Security Council and presented information that challenged the U.N. weapons inspectors’ findings. He showed a number of reconnaissance photographs that showed were Iraq was hiding biological and chemical weapons, while also showing the existence of mobile biological weapons labs.\textsuperscript{106} The international community was dubious about his contention, but high levels of confidence in Powell and low levels of trust in other nations may have persuaded Americans of Saddam Hussein’s intentions to use these weapons against the U.S.\textsuperscript{107}

To secure the success of the public relations strategy, the White House also enlisted the assistance of sympathetic political entrepreneurs. Chaim Kaufmann argues that Ken Pollack’s book, \textit{The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq}, was instrumental in convincing moderates and liberals that were unconvinced by Bush’s explanations of the need to oust the Iraqi regime.\textsuperscript{108} It is important to note that Pollack is not a neo-conservative and that he had worked in Clinton’s National Security Council on Middle Eastern issues; hence his assessment’s influence on moderates and liberals. Neo-conservatives also played an important role, supporting the White House’s case for war and discrediting the views of George H.W. Bush’s advisors, Brent Scowcroft, Lawrence Eagleburger, and James Baker, who had publicly criticized the president’s desire for war.\textsuperscript{109}

The third part of Bush’s strategy was to secure a resolution from Congress supporting the use of force in case Saddam Hussein failed to comply with the demands of the international community. The president’s advisors explained that the resolution would help American diplomats convince the Security Council and America’s allies to disarm Iraq.\textsuperscript{110} Fearing that Bush was trying to stir the 2002 midterm elections to Republican’s favor by highlighting national security issues, the Democratic leadership agreed to the vote in order to concentrate the last weeks of the campaign on the issues that favored their party.\textsuperscript{111} A majority of lawmakers in both chambers voted for the measure, but not

\begin{enumerate}
\item On Powell’s credibility, see the data in the following poll: “Public Wants Proof of Iraqi Weapons Programs” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, January 2003), \texttt{<http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=170>}.\textsuperscript{107}
\item Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation,” 11-16.\textsuperscript{108}
\item Woodward, \textit{Plan of Attack}, 409-12.\textsuperscript{109}
\item Ibid., 168.\textsuperscript{110}
\item Foyle, “Leading the Public to War,” 282-83.\textsuperscript{111}
\end{enumerate}
because they necessarily believed the Bush administration’s rationale for regime change. Instead, they did not want to be depicted as unpatriotic. Although liberal Democrats attempted to challenge the administration’s Iraq policy after the midterm elections, it was too late. Public opinion favored the president’s policy and divisions among Democrats complicated Congressional critics from mounting a serious challenge to the policy.  

How successful was this three-point strategy? While some Americans took the streets to demonstrate against the Bush administration’s policy, these were smaller than the ones organized in European cities and they had little impact on public opinion. Support for the war, though dipping in early March 2003 to 59 percent, exceeded 70 percent of the nation at the start of the war. The president’s approval rating also remained high, though lower that the 90 percent ratings he got following the terrorist attacks. While the overall picture is very clear, it is important to deconstruct the numbers to highlight how the Bush administration manipulated public opinion and sustain the civic collectivistic nationalism that emerged in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

One study demonstrated that party affiliation was a determinant of an individual’s support for the war. Republicans were more likely to support the president’s policy, than Democrats, though it is important to say that support with both constituencies was more than 50 percent. It also found that religious affiliation was also an important determinant, revealing that evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and Catholics supported the war. Support for the war among the first group stood at 77 percent compared to 62 percent of Catholics and mainline Protestants. Forty-four percent of the people that described themselves as non-religious supported the war. These numbers suggests the influence of religious beliefs. However, the analysis shows that while religion did have some influence, the media was the number one driver of public opinion. But, collected data illustrate that the evangelical clergy was more likely to publicly support the war than the clergy from mainline traditions. In contrast, Catholic priest and leaders of Black churches were strongly anti-war. Moreover, Protestants in general were less concerned about civilian costs than Catholics, members of Black churches, and seculars. The latter were more concerned with American troops’ lives and feared that the Bush administration would not let them use.

Another study, conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), analyzed seven national polls carried out from January to September 2003. It hypothesized that media outlets’ coverage of the White House’s public relations strategy affected viewers’ support for the policy of regime change. The study argued that the Bush administration had three reasons for going to war against Iraq. As discussed above, these are: a working relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda; Iraq had weapons of mass destruction; and that world public opinion supported the administration’s policy (The last

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112 Ibid., 284.

of these reasons was not discussed in this investigation, but it informed PIPA’s analysis. As noted above, all these reasons have been proven incorrect and, during the debate, their facticity was questioned. The study concluded that 80 percent of Fox News’s viewers and 71 percent of CBS watchers believed that at least one of these reasons was accurate. Only 61 percent of ABC viewers and 55 percent of NBC and CNN viewers felt the same way. More telling, a majority of people tuning to public supported media (i.e. National Public Radio and the Public Broadcast System) for their information questioned the truthfulness of the three reasons.\footnote{Steven Kull et. al., “Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War” (College Park, MD: Program on International Policy Attitudes/Knowledge Networks, October 2003), available: <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/102.php?nid=&id=&pnt=102&lb=brus >.}

This evidence indicates that the Bush administration was successful at harnessing the civic collective sentiments that emerged after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, it is important to note that the nation was not as united as it was in late 2001. Liberals and some moderates disapproved Bush’s policy of regime change. Nevertheless, these groups only represented a small section of American society and they were unable to challenge the White House’s public relations campaign. Consequently, the Bush administration was successful at mobilizing public sentiments and support for his policy of regime change. The road from the 9/11 attacks to Baghdad was well planned. By taking advantage of the political vacuum caused by the attacks, the White House used the memory of attacks as a way of expanding the aims of the “war on terror,” which included the maximization of power as a path to global hegemony.

As noted above, the White House’s public relations strategy included four phases. The objective of the first was to stress the “cultural and historical distinctiveness” of the nation. The second phase involved the inflation of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein’s regime, while officials in the third phase “ignore[d] the degree which the nation’s own actions provoked such threats” and created “media echo chambers” to discredit any view that contradicted this claim. Finally, the Bush administration minimized “the costs of seeking national goals” through military means, explaining the justness of the war.\footnote{Snyder and Ballentine, “Nationalism,” 11.} Consequently, this strategy weakened the “marketplace of ideas” and civil society institutions to such an extent that it allowed the Bush administration to execute a policy that ousted Saddam Hussein’s regime from power.

**CONCLUSION**

Revisionist foreign policies are aimed at transforming the structure of international system. Research finds that hegemonic powers are not likely to act as revisionist states. Similarly, democracies are unlikely to build this type of strategies because it is difficult to extract and mobilize the nation’s resources over a long period time. This paper questions these findings stressing that the Bush administration’s post-9/11 foreign policy was revisionist in nature. The objective was to expand American power and establish firm control over the Middle East as a way of enlarging American hegemony.

If democracies have difficulties extracting and mobilizing resources for revisionist strategies, how did the White House convince the American people of the need of ousting Saddam Hussein’s regime? In the past, revisionist states have
manipulated nationalist discourse and inflated threats as a way to mobilize public support for expansionist strategies. The Bush administration did the same thing. The 9/11 attacks transformed the political environment and weakened civil society institutions that balance against extreme ideas. Fueled by feelings of vulnerability and collective fears of the future, American civic individualistic nationalism gave way to civic collectivistic notions. While the resulting passions backed militant internationalist views, the White House arduously worked to preserve the contours of the new political environment because it gave the president an opportunity to push for his personal agenda.

The Bush administration’s war against Iraq was a product of a calculated strategy to mobilize public passions by heightening feelings of vulnerability. The memory of 9/11 and fears of future nuclear attacks convinced a majority of Americans that ousting Saddam Hussein’s regime was the only way they could secure once again.