

Groupthink, Iraq, and the War on Terror: Explaining US Policy Shift toward Iraq

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Existing scholarship on the Iraq War decision-making process generally treats the event as a logical extension of pre-existing ideas and policies. This paper considers the Bush administration's decision to absorb Iraq into the broader War on Terror as a deviation from long-held views of Saddam Hussein. I argue that the decision to incorporate Iraq into the wider post 9/11 mission was pathologically driven by groupthink, which caused a shift in the administration's view of Saddam from a troubling dictator to an existential threat to US security. Therefore, groupthink can simultaneously explain the defects in the decision-making process and the shift from cautious restraint to accelerated urgency with respect to US relations with Iraq.

A wealth of literature has emerged claiming that the US invasion of Iraq was a logical extension of ideas and policies that predated 9/11. Cognitive and psychological explanations attribute the decision to personality profiles or individual and group level pathologies (Houghton 2008). Shannon and Keller (2007) examine Bush's leadership style as a potential explanation for the US' violation of international norms. For Kaufmann (2004), structural faults undermined the "marketplace of ideas," allowing the administration to inflate the Iraqi threat. The international relations discipline also took up the question of the Iraq War, viewing it from the perspective of imperialism and hegemonic stability. For Cox (2004), the Bush Doctrine and the policies that followed cemented the neo-conservative drive toward American domination in the post-Cold War world. Layne (2006) describes the post-9/11 grand strategy as one that finds its roots in American hegemony since the 1940s.

While the academy generally explained the decision to invade Iraq in somewhat path dependent terms, an abundance of atheoretical literature emerged from journalists, commentators, and, later, key members of the decision-making team that shed light on the intricacies of the decision-making process. For example, Gellman (2009) argues that the administration, in particular Bush and Cheney, began viewing Saddam Hussein as a new kind of threat in the days that followed September 11, 2001. Instead of considering Hussein a troubling dictator—as they had in the past—the Iraqi leader came to represent a new type of threat in the 9/11 milieu.

Yet, scholars, journalists, and pundits alike remain fixated on explaining the decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power, rather than the decision to incorporate Iraq into the War on Terror. This paper takes the latter approach. I argue that the decision to conflate Iraq with the threat of terrorism represented a significant departure from long-held images of that state and strategies for dealing with Saddam Hussein as advocated by members of the Bush administration

prior to 9/11. Specifically, the decision to incorporate Iraq into the War on Terror was pathologically driven by groupthink in the post-9/11 environment, resulting in a flawed decision-making process and a shift in the administration's image of Iraq's dictator. Drawing on Gellman's conclusions, in tandem with other theoretical and atheoretical material, I position the decision in the context of pre- and post-9/11 ideas and strategies regarding Saddam Hussein. Ultimately, groupthink, spurred by 9/11, directed a shift in the administration's view: Saddam Hussein was no longer a just troubling dictator, he came to represent an existential threat to US security.

For Bush, Cheney, and the hawkish members of the administration, the internalization process came early. Immediately post-9/11, they accepted Bush's premise of broad retaliation and considered Saddam Hussein a "new kind of threat" (see Gellman 2009 on Cheney's perception of Saddam Hussein). For others, namely Powell, internalization came later. Ultimately, it was through the groupthink process that hesitant members of the administration came to internalize the image of Saddam Hussein as a major security threat.

Assessing the Iraq episode through the groupthink lens sheds light on the administration's incorporation of Iraq into the War on Terror through a flawed decision-making process, but also highlights groupthink's ability to shift ideas. Thus, the following analysis has implications for the theory of groupthink as well. The use of groupthink in foreign policy scholarship has typically followed Janis (1972) lead in attempting to account for flawed decision making in situations of immediate crisis, studied as what Kuperman (2006) calls "ad hoc episodes." Using groupthink in such cases provides insight into how dysfunctional group dynamics often result in a defective decision-making processes in the immediate-term, such as the decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power. However, as the following study shows, groupthink can also be used to explain changes in long-term ideas that translate to foreign policy shifts. That is, it can explain *how* the administration came to see Saddam Hussein as an existential threat to American security that required a military invasion.

Prior to September 11, 2001, the image of Saddam Hussein as an irrational actor on the world stage and a dangerous tyrant at home was not seriously questioned; however, Bush appointees who previously advocated regime change did not consider Saddam Hussein a grave danger to the US and did not seriously entertain the option of US military invasion. High-ranking and respected officials in previous administrations (many of whom served in the Bush Administration) had recommended containment, regime change from a distance, funding exiles, and economic sanctions to deal with Saddam's threat to Israel, concerns over oil security, weapons programs, and oppression of the Iraqi population. The inclusion of Iraq in the wider US War on Terror—and the decision to invade—marked a significant departure from previous policies recommended by a virtually identical group of voices in the US policy community. Groupthink, though typically not applied to understand ideational shifts, can in fact be used to understand and explain them.

To advance this argument, this paper first reviews the concept of groupthink and the debate over its mechanism within the foreign policy academic community. It then demonstrates the presence of its antecedents and symptoms in the months prior to the US-led war. I argue that groupthink plagued the decision-making process in two ways. First, it served the classical task of tainting the decision-making process by pressuring conformity and diminishing serious evaluation of the policy. Second, the presence of groupthink resulted in incomplete and inaccurate assessments of Saddam's threat that became the guide for policy. Crucial to note is the previous administration's continuous defense of the policy based on the notion of "what we knew then." The information available in the months prior to March 2003 pointed to grave danger precisely because

groupthink plagued the process. I argue that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the pathology led the administration to internalize flawed information, leading to shift in their assessment of Saddam's threat. Finally, the theoretical and empirical implications of this study are addressed.

The Groupthink Model

Janis (1972) advanced the group dynamics approach as a conceptual model of political decision-making to explain why intelligent, experienced individuals sometimes produce defective policies in group environments. He coined the term groupthink—a deliberately Orwellian formulation—to describe a pathology that leads to “deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures” (Janis 1972:9). Equated with flawed concurrence-seeking behavior, groupthink compels individuals to self-censor or internalize the group's view. Janis concluded that the following eight symptoms provide observable markers of this behavior: (i) illusion of invulnerability; (ii) collective rationalization; (iii) belief in the group's inherent morality; (iv) stereotyped view of the enemy; (v) direct pressure on dissenters; (vi) self-censorship; (vii) illusion of unanimity; and (viii) emergence of self-appointed “mindguards” (Janis 1972). Combined, these symptoms infect the decision-making process. Discernable characteristics of a flawed process include failures to survey objectives, alternatives and risks, resulting in a poor information search, information processing bias, and a lack of contingency planning (Janis 1972). Taken together, Janis finds that the presence of groupthink will “increase the likelihood of a poor outcome” (Janis 1972:12).

Janis's work on groupthink incited much interest and criticism. The original formulation failed to position groupthink within the socio-psychological literature, resulting in an incomplete explanation of its emergence and its mechanism. Longley and G Pruitt (1980) recognized this lack of determinacy. They argue that some of Janis's “symptoms” were in fact antecedents and that a causal link could not be established between groupthink and its preconditions. Longley and Pruitt recognized that groups eventually bring an end to the deliberative process in order to make a decision; a lack of deliberation does not in itself indicate the presence of groupthink. They instead argue that the timing of the end to deliberation depends on the nature of the decision, whether a major foreign policy or a routine task.

Other critics of groupthink sought to offer alternative explanations to small group dynamics that extended “beyond groupthink.” Hoyt and Garrison (1997) recognize that within the context of small groups, individuals can “manipulate” the decision-making process on several levels. Manipulation can take place in the traditional sense whereby individuals can alter procedural norms, but can also take the form of structural manipulation through deliberate inclusion and exclusion of individuals (1997:252). Additionally, individuals can manipulate the deliberative process through direct influence; the success of individual manipulation is determined by the individual's likeability, acceptance of his/her authority, perception of expertise, or recognition of the efficacy of the strategy (1997:258).

As Hoyt and Garrison propose, the effects of manipulation may, in some cases, offer an alternative to groupthink; however, structural manipulation can produce a similar result to the combination of two of Janis's symptoms: mindguarding and pressure on dissenters. The groupthink model can in fact accommodate varying individual motivations and levels of participation. In addition, personal influence over members paves the way for internalization of information or policy prescriptions. That is, viewing a particular member as an expert or perceiving (or misperceiving) expertise can persuade individuals to accept a position, rather than resulting in simple acquiescence under pressure (as the original groupthink

model contends). This analysis is compatible with McCauley's (1989) differentiation between groupthink induced compliance and internalization.¹

While Hoyt and Garrison's alternative to groupthink can in fact be incorporated within the model, Stern's (1997) exploration of "newgroup syndrome" cannot. Stern argues that some cases traditionally viewed as classic cases of groupthink can more accurately be explained by newgroup syndrome. In particular, the Kennedy administration's Bay of Pigs fiasco came almost immediately after the group took office. Further, the group's ability to self-correct over time to engage in effective and deliberative policy-making during the Cuban Missile Crisis lends further credence to the newgroup hypothesis.

This model may better explain the Kennedy administration's shortcomings vis-à-vis the Bay of Pigs, but the Bush administration's decision to incorporate Iraq into the War on Terror came after a series of other policy decisions at least a full year after taking office. Though members of the administration may have advocated the removal of Saddam Hussein in the months and years prior to 9/11, establishing a link between Iraq and terrorism (the pretext for absorbing Iraq into the post-9/11 mission) came much later.

Unlike Longley and Pruitt, who critique groupthink's mechanism on its own terms, Hoyt and Garrison and Stern attempt to provide alternative explanations for poor decisions produced by small groups. These subsequent attempts came partly as a reaction to the charge that, in some cases, scholars retroactively apply groupthink to any foreign policy fiasco. While this charge, along with specific critiques of groupthink, does force caution when utilizing the pathology as an explanatory mechanism, groupthink still exists as a useful tool when carefully applied.

t'Hart's (1990) revision of the groupthink model provides a broader socio-psychological context that allows scholars to employ the framework while remaining cognizant of its shortcomings. He argues that several pathways can lead to the same pathology—determined by structural and individual circumstance. Instead of assuming a single pathway to groupthink (as Janis does), t'Hart identifies differing mechanisms, two of which are employed in this analysis. First, (mirroring Janis's original formulation), stress-induced cohesiveness can lead to groupthink when members view the group as a "viable protective mechanism" (124). Alternatively, groupthink can result from anticipatory compliance, whereby members search for strong leadership in the event of stress, a lack of procedural norms, or when a formal leader does not assume control.

t'Hart additionally recognizes that group members display different degrees of leadership that affect the type of influence exerted on individual members. Differentiating between "official" and "*de facto*" leaders, he notes that leadership can derive from position or function, respectively (t'Hart 1990). Unlike Janis's model that solely focuses on peer pressures that condition compliance, t'Hart identifies two types of pressure that can appear in a decision-making process: horizontal influence, which "arises from collegial... pressure," and vertical influence, which "arises as a result of specific status differences within the group" (t'Hart 1990:49). Finally, positioning groupthink within realistic conflict theory illustrates that tension between groups is difficult to overcome. t'Hart suggests that intergroup conflict contributes to the intensification of groupthink by increasing group cohesiveness (t'Hart 1990:105).

¹ McCauley argues that "concurrency can be obtained from internalization of the group norm, from compliance with the norm, or from some combination of internalization and compliance (1989:251)." That is, groupthink can result in a genuine ideational shift or simple acquiescence, and the result heavily depends on the antecedents involved. Though McCauley does not differentiate between active and passive group members, differentiating between the processes of compliance and internalization provides an important contribution to the understanding of groupthink.

In addition, to t'Hart's intergroup conflict, scholars have identified several preconditions that induce groupthink. Scholars have revised and added to Janis' list to include cohesiveness, homogeneity, insulation, close-mindedness, high stress, recent failure, promotional leadership, lack of methodical procedures, overestimation of the group and deindividuation as possible antecedents to groupthink (Janis 1972; Raven 1974; Flowers 1977; Tetlock 1979; Smith 1985; McCauley 1989; t'Hart 1990; Tetlock et al. 1992; Schafer and Crichlow 1996). One or more of several preconditions may be present, though causes of the pathology remain contested. Generally speaking, most agree that stress is a necessary, but insufficient condition—limiting the application of groupthink to major policy-making episodes rather than routine decisions.

Consistent with the literature on groupthink, I argue that stress was an essential precondition to groupthink's emergence, in combination with promotional leadership, and intergroup conflict; however, not all members of the administration fell prey to groupthink in the same way. I use t'Hart's pathways to explain how different members of the group fell prey to the pathology given the presence of the foregoing conditions. Their paths differed based on pre-existing tensions (between hawks and skeptics) within the group that reappeared after 9/11—a fact discussed extensively by Mann (2004) and others. Applying t'Hart's discussion of intergroup conflict in combination with differentiated pathways allows for varying motivations within the group. Once the antecedents came into play and members followed different pathways to groupthink, Janis's original symptoms are used to identify the presence of the pathology in the decision-making process. The symptoms are divided between those that pressure conformity (illusion of unanimity, direct pressure on dissenters, mindguarding, and self-censorship) and those that lead to policy evaluation failures (collective rationalization, illusion of invulnerability, belief in inherent morality, and stereotyped view of enemy outgroups). By dividing the group between "hawks" and "skeptics" another dimension of groupthink emerges. In particular, Hoyt and Garrison's discussion of the potential for small group manipulation by promotional leaders can explain the potential for internalization of ideas and policies. Although they present the model as an alternative to Janis's original formulation, it finds salience within the groupthink framework when the group is divided.

Applying groupthink in this way reveals the importance of 9/11 as a cause of—rather than a pretext to—the decision to incorporate Iraq into the War on Terror. Empirically, I argue that the stress associated with producing policy after 9/11 exacerbated pre-existing fractures within the group between the hawks—which included Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Cheney, Perle, Feith, and the President—and the skeptics who were less passionate about regime change in Iraq—Powell, Tenet, and Armitage. The hawks considered the group a "viable protective mechanism" as they were surrounded by fellow neoconservatives who had all previously advocated regime change, while other members of the group fell prey via anticipatory compliance and a search for leadership. Because the hawkish faction produced the official and *de facto* leaders, their influence on the latter group resulted in the internalization of information and policy through the groupthink process (as this latter group searched for leadership). This was particularly notable in Powell's case. Ultimately, the hawks experienced horizontal pressures associated with traditional groupthink, while other members of the administration experienced vertical pressures from the newly emergent hawkish leaders.

By combining elements from Janis's original formulation and t'Hart and Hoyt and Garrison's subsequent studies on small group dynamics, the groupthink mechanism—and the foundation for changing conceptions—finds more solid ground. By positioning groupthink alongside broader socio-psychological studies, it retains its utility in explaining an important pathological phenomenon unique

to small group dynamics. I additionally suggest that the pathology may, in some cases, result in both defective policy and ideational shifts. Thus, the following analysis seeks to add the decision to incorporate Iraq into the War on Terror to the groupthink catalog while assessing the role that the pathology played in shifting ideas about Saddam Hussein.

Preconditions and the Foundation for Changing Conceptions

In dealing with the "core group" of decision makers, I specifically refer to the President and his Principal Advisors, in addition to several other members of the administration that became key players in the debate over Iraq, specifically: VP Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, NSC Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of Defense Policy Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, who served as Special Assistant in the State Department, and later as Cheney's Middle East advisor, Richard Perle and Kenneth Adelman on the Defense Policy Board, Bill Luti and Abe Shulsky at the Office of Special Plans (OSP) and CIA Director George Tenet.

Bush's cabinet-level appointees—the self-identified "Vulcans"—boasted much in terms of foreign policy practice. Much of their experience came during the Cold War and its immediate aftermath in the Nixon, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush administrations under the auspices of containment and deterrence. During their tenure in government, some members of the President's principle advisors exhibited an element of homogeneity in their approach toward Saddam that predated 9/11. Immediately following the first Gulf Crisis, Cheney (Secretary of Defense under George H. W. Bush) argued against penetrating Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Instead, the US adopted a combination of sanctions, no-fly zones, and occasional strikes as the Iraq policy, refusing to aid rebels in their attempt to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Yet as the decade pressed on, members of the Bush I administration—no longer influential policy-makers during the Clinton years—began advocating a harder line against Iraq, but always stopping short of US military invasion.

During much of the 1990s, various members of the group promoted a distant regime change strategy, though their rationales and strategies differed. Perle, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Libby and Wolfowitz were, among others, members of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) that favored playing a permanent role in Gulf regional security transcending the issue of Saddam Hussein's regime (PNAC 2000 report). During this period, Wolfowitz coauthored a "how-to guide" to removing Saddam from power in the *Weekly Standard*. In 1998, they joined forces with Rumsfeld, Perle, Woolsey, signing a letter to then President Clinton to adopt the removal of Saddam Hussein as a matter of US foreign policy (Packer 2006, Bamford 2004). In 1996, Perle, Feith and Wurmser coauthored the "Clean Break" report which outlined a plan for Israel to remove Saddam Hussein from power as part of a broad strategy to remake the Middle East into a friendlier region (Clean Break Report 1996).

Despite their agreement that Iraq presented a foreign policy problem, members of the core group disagreed on the specific threat that Iraq posed and on the best way to implement regime change. In particular, members of the administration neither suggested that Iraq posed an existential security threat to the US—in terms of weapons or terrorism—nor did they advocate US military action. Despite loose consensus over regime change, Bush appointees differed in their assessments of the Iraqi threat. According to Packer, Israeli security incited Feith and Wurmser's advocacy, while for Wolfowitz, "Iraq stood for different things—an unfinished war, Arab tyranny, weapons proliferation, a strategic threat to oil, American weakness..." (Packer 2006:32).

Upon taking office, the Bush administration considered several policy options in the 8 months prior to 9/11. In a July 2001 memo, Rumsfeld outlined possible courses of action, citing that the US government should consider stopping "the pretense of having a policy that is keeping Saddam 'in the box,' when we know he has crawled a good distance out of the box" (Rumsfeld 2001). Aside from Powell, members generally agreed on the inefficacy of sanctions, but remained divided on Iraq strategy (Feith 2008). While they agreed that containment had not adequately restricted Saddam Hussein, the group did not view Iraq as a threat to US security that required full invasion.

The September 11 attacks put considerable pressure on members of the Bush administration to retaliate against terrorism and develop a new foreign policy grand strategy. Yet old frictions and new tensions came to light in the wake of the attacks (Mann 2004). The neoconservative hawks—Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz, and the President himself—favored broad retaliation against the nebulous network of terrorists and their state sponsors, while Powell and Armitage favored a limited approach against al Qaeda's hub in Afghanistan. Still, 9/11 was alone insufficient to conduce groupthink.

In the case of the Iraq decision-making process, stress, promotional leadership and intergroup conflict conduced groupthink in the aftermath of 9/11 as members of the core group were under pressure to produce effective policy in response to the attacks.

Consistent with t'Hart's analysis, the post-9/11 stress resulted in a search for leadership (initially provided by Bush in the form of a new Doctrine and later taken over by other prominent members of the administration) and resulted in tensions within the decision-making team and between the core group and the CIA. As Mann suggests, "by early 2002 the Vulcans were in a hurry for new ideas," a thrust accelerated by a conviction that 9/11 had marked the start of a new era (2004:312). Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld engaged in promotional leadership in their response to the attacks, increasing the group's susceptibility to groupthink as members searched for leadership in 9/11's wake.

Bush exhibited clear elements of promotional leadership immediately after 9/11 by presenting his preferred solution before the group could evaluate evidence and weigh a judicious response to the attacks. In his memoir, Douglas Feith attributes the drive toward war to a proactive president, noting that immediately following 9/11, Bush publicly and privately operated as a war president (Feith 2008). In an unprecedented reaction to terrorism, Bush immediately led the initiative toward wide military retribution by dubbing the attacks "an act of war," expecting his foreign policy team to plan for a wide-ranging response.

In addition, the Defense Secretary took on the role of a "*de facto*" leader as a proponent of wide military retribution. According to Packer, Rumsfeld's "influence lay in [his] position and force of character" (Packer 2006:42). Paralleling Bush's view, he reasoned that the US had to set forth a "confidence-inspiring" reaction to 9/11, fearing military action in Afghanistan alone would seem "puny" (Feith 2008:95). Cheney also acted as a silent, yet powerful, arbiter, taking it upon himself to convince the unconvinced of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein (Gellman 2009).

Together, Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld drove the policy, acting as promotional leaders who influenced other members of the group. Through the groupthink process, members of the administration began internalizing the perception of an elevated threat posed by Saddam Hussein, following from some of groupthink's symptoms (specifically those resulting in evaluation problems) and the influence of Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld. This is especially evidenced by Powell's conformity and apparent confidence in the intelligence, which came long after the announcement of the Bush Doctrine and pressures from the President and other members of the decision-making group.

The 9/11 attacks also brought intergroup rivalry between Bush appointees and the intelligence community to the fore. The core group recognized the CIA's failure to "connect the dots," (OUSDP 2002b) leading the group to look inward for information. Profound distrust led to increased discord between the decision-making team and the CIA when the former began relying heavily on its own members and excluding outside counsel from the intelligence community. Feith openly objected to the CIA's methods of gathering intelligence, criticizing the agency for basing their assessments "almost entirely on information produced through intelligence channels, to the exclusion of commonly available sources or even common sense" (Feith 2008:99). In response, the Defense Department created special units to process intelligence with the explicit purpose of finding links between terrorist group and their state sponsors (discussed further in "Collective Rationalization").

Thus, intergroup conflict—between the core group and the CIA as well as within the decision-making team itself—combined with promotional leadership and the stress of 9/11—led to groupthink. The group became fixated with "connecting the dots" and widening the War on Terror beyond Afghanistan; after 9/11 the core group coalesced around the idea of linking terrorism to state sponsors and engaging those states militarily. Ultimately linking Iraq to the War on Terror, the group abandoned strategies previously supported by its members. In a memo to Wolfowitz, the OUSDP (Feith's office) determined that "Containment can work against armies, not against terrorists—can't contain when Iraq could use terrorists to deliver WMD" (OUSDP 2002a). By 2002, the threats posed by Saddam and terrorism were indiscernible. Groupthink's pressures toward conformity resulted in the adoption of Bush's grand strategy and a lack of critical evaluation that led the group to internalize the "new threat" posed by Saddam Hussein and to absorb Iraq within the War on Terror.

Pressure toward Conformity

Pressure toward conformity occurred in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 as divisions within the group surfaced. The administration's hawks immediately internalized the Bush Doctrine and the need for broad military retaliation that could potentially include Iraq. Others—namely Powell and Tenet remained skeptical—preferring to focus on Afghanistan. These divisions ultimately determined each member's pathway to groupthink. The hawkish members and leaders internalized the new grand strategy and actively engaged critics, falling prey via Janis's original pathway. Horizontal group pressures and the need for group cohesion after the trauma of 9/11 induced groupthink. Powell and Tenet both held precarious positions. As members of the decision-making team and heads of departments that did not necessarily agree with the conflation of Iraq and terrorism, both men faced pressure to conform. For Powell, vertical pressures and mindguards led to a conversion. Initially a skeptic, Cheney and groups within the Defense Department actively engaged Powell and pressured him to conform, leading to the Secretary of State's internalization of Saddam threat. Tenet wanted to retain his influence within the policy-making group and self-censored in the face of mounting pressure from the hawks.

Illusion of Unanimity

An illusion of unanimity indicates that individuals misinterpret silence for consent. Members of Bush's core group did not challenge the President's premise of broad military retaliation, which implied that retribution would extend beyond Afghanistan and take the form of military engagement. In this first stage of the decision-making process, members of the group did not question Bush's

War on Terror (Feith 2008). This led to a failure to survey alternative courses of action following 9/11, a significant indicator of a defective decision-making process.

Post-9/11, two factors led members of the core group to unanimously accept the Bush Doctrine (internalized by the hawks and not challenged by Powell). First, increased cohesiveness among the hawks, following the trauma of 9/11, contributed to their acceptance of broad retaliation. Homogeneity in their approach to foreign policy that predated 9/11 created horizontal pressures that made broad retaliation seem to be the effective strategy. In the wake of 9/11, Feith notes that the core group looked back on the first Gulf War and drew the lesson "that the President should not declare a war aim that might later limit his options" as George H. Bush had done (Feith 2008:10). Second, the lack of debate on the premise of broad retaliation, provoked by Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld's promotional leadership made wide military retribution the dominant strategy. As the less hawkish member of the group, Powell fell prey to groupthink via anticipatory compliance; in the search for leadership post-9/11, hawkish individuals provided the vision for US foreign policy.

Yet universal unanimity remained an illusion. While hawkish members of the group immediately internalized the premise of broad retaliation, Powell was initially skeptical. When Wolfowitz publicly stated that the administration should not limit its response to Afghanistan and seek to "end states who support terrorism," Powell responded that Afghanistan should remain the primary focus: "We're after ending terrorism... 'ending terrorism' is where I would leave it and let Mr. Wolfowitz speak for himself" (Powell in Mann 2004:302). Despite some tension between Powell and the hawks, the Secretary of State's skepticism did little to alter the conception of a War on Terror. In fact, the *de facto* hawkish leaders forced Powell to quietly accept the premise of the Bush Doctrine. Powell did not explicitly reject the premise of broad retaliation while in the presence of the group, he simply preferred to focus on Afghanistan first (Mann 2004:340).

These factors led members of the decision-making group to accept the policy of military retribution against Iraq although individual members of the group had historically advocated different rationales for and methods to oust Saddam from power. As a result, as Gordon and Trainor (2006) note, some members of the administration quickly moved forward on plans for Iraq despite ambiguity in the foundation for consensus. On September 16, 2001, Bush met with Rice to request contingency plans to deal with Iraq in case evidence implicated Saddam Hussein in 9/11—though the focus remained on Afghanistan. Rumsfeld was a step ahead, having ordered Lieutenant Colonel Reilly to draw up plans for Iraq 3 days earlier. On September 19, Richard Perle assembled his Defense Policy Board for a meeting on Iraq, inviting Bernard Lewis and Ahmed Chalabi, both proponents of regime change, to speak (Gordon and Trainor 2006). The administration also began seriously considering attacks on Syria and Iran (Wilkerson 2009). Within the first week after 9/11, the core group coalesced around the premise of an expansive response to the terrorist attacks.

The illusion of unanimity then involved little examination of alternative courses of action. Once the War on Terror became an established foreign policy objective and the war in Afghanistan was underway, members of the administration began looking for the next target. As the administration hawks began talking publicly and privately about Iraq, Powell and Tenet quietly conformed despite reservations. According to Mann, "Powell emphasized that he was not opposed in principle to military intervention in Iraq. The important questions, he argued, were how and when to intervene" (2004:340).

Once Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld communicated their intentions to eradicate terrorism beyond 9/11's architects, the administration hawks determined that Iraq would be the next logical target. According to Tenet, there was no

“significant discussion regarding enhanced containment or the costs and benefits of such an approach versus full-out planning for overt and covert regime change” (Tenet 2007:305). The War on Terror provided the rationale and strategy for regime change in Iraq. As some members of the administration worked to gather intelligence and garner support for the policy, Powell and Tenet stood on the sidelines. They were not excluded from the deliberation process, they were instead pressured to conform by leaders within the group.

Direct Pressure on Dissenters and Mindguarding

Key individuals actively engaged potential dissenters within the core group. Gellman (2009) discusses Cheney’s attempts to convince (instead of marginalize) certain individuals who questioned the policy associated with the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, an approach that would ostensibly limit the scope of public debate.

Cheney’s role as a driver of policy follows t’Hart’s discussion of vertical pressure. As he suggests, the type of influence exerted on an individual differs depending from where the pressure stems. Following Hoyt and Garrison, this vertical form of pressure can lead to the internalization of a leader’s preferred strategy by other members of a small group. This explains how Powell came to internalize the policy. Efforts to engage skeptical members (as Gellman suggests) led to vertical pressure and, ultimately, internalization.

In addition, mindguards serve to “protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency” (Janis 1972:198). Combined, horizontal pressure, vertical pressure and mindguards served to drive Powell and Tenet toward conformity. As Woodward notes, the President personally requested Powell’s support, asking the Secretary to “put on [his] war uniform” (Woodward 2006). In addition, Powell’s shift came as an inevitable reaction to the President’s, Rumsfeld’s, and Cheney’s inclinations. Prior to 9/11, Wilkerson notes that the President gave Powell some latitude; however, after the attacks and the determination that smart sanctions would not guarantee containment, Powell accepted the policy because “that’s what the President decided” (Wilkerson 2009).

Mindguards also serve to control the flow of information. In the Bush administration they included the hawks, all of whom protected themselves, as well as the president, from dissenting viewpoints. According to former Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill, the vice president and his allies formed a “praetorian guard that encircled the president” in an effort to thwart opposing views (Suskind 2004:293). Among those in the circle, O’Neill named Karl Rove, Karen Hughes, Dick Cheney, Andrew Card and Condoleeza Rice. The Office of Special Plans (discussed further in the following section) also served a mindguarding function by aiming to *convert* individuals and agencies who opposed the war policy. This is consistent with Gellman’s (2009) discussion of Cheney’s active engagement with skeptics within the group. Instead of marginalizing high-level policy-makers, including Powell and Tenet, the hawks worked to alter their conception of Saddam Hussein’s threat. The individuals and agencies that required conversion included the State Department, namely Colin Powell, and the intelligence community (Bamford 2004:317). In an interview, Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski, a desk officer for the Undersecretary of Defense Policy (Feith’s office), commented on the OSP:

The concerns were only that some policymakers still had to get onboard with this agenda... that we needed to convince the remaining holdovers. Colin Powell, for example. There was a lot of frustration with Powell; they said a lot of bad things about him in the office. They got very angry with him when he convinced Bush

to go back to the U.N. and forced a 4-month delay in their invasion plans... we were told to follow the party line (Cooper 2004).

Instead of marginalizing dissenters, administration mindguards attempted to convert Powell in particular. Through this process, less hawkish members of the core group eventually came to view Saddam Hussein in the same light. By mid-2002, Powell's role in the decision-making process shifted. While he initially took a dissenting role various pressures led him to acquiesce. Instead of attempting to slow or halt the process, Powell internalized the information and instead became fixated with securing allies.

In addition, to pressure placed on Powell within the core group, the administration applied passive and active pressure on other individuals and agencies that did not willingly conform. This allowed the core group to promote and maintain internal consensus. Once the Bush Doctrine was accepted, the next phase of planning began (discussed in detail in *Collective Rationalization*).

In the case of the CIA, the administration applied passive pressure. Although the intelligence agency failed to unanimously agree on the presented allegations and reported "low confidence" in its ability to link Saddam Hussein to terrorism (NIE Key Judgements 2002), tensions between the core group and the CIA pressured the latter to produce actionable intelligence. According to Paul Pillar, an intelligence analyst during this period, certain types of intelligence had an "easier time making it through the gauntlet of coordination and approval" (Pillar 2006). In addition, the Defense Department created the Policy Counterterrorism Group (PCTEG) and the Office of Special Plans (OSP) to "digest" intelligence—both discussed further in the following section—which further pressured the CIA to "abandon some of its independence" (Levine 2004). As Pillar notes:

The actual politicization of intelligence occurs subtly and can take many forms... It was clear that the Bush administration would frown on or ignore analysis that called into question a decision to go to war and welcome analysis that supported such a decision. Intelligence analysts... felt a strong wind consistently blowing in one direction. The desire to bend with such a wind is natural and strong, even if unconscious. (Pillar 2006:6)

The CIA's intelligence failures outlined in the Silberman-Robb Commission Report highlight the poor information search that occurred outside of the core group. The Commission concluded that intelligence produced by the CIA regarding WMD in its 2002 NIE constituted a "major failure." The report highlights the agency's failure to examine the credibility of informants and its reliance on too few sources (Silberman and Robb 2005). Still, the Commission found that the agency had not "distorted" evidence in creating its assessments. This form of subtle, rather than overt, pressure on the CIA lends further credence to the groupthink hypothesis. Pathological pressures swayed CIA analysts, resulting in incomplete, inaccurate estimates rather distorted intelligence resulting from explicit pressure from the core group.

Prior to the publication of the Silberman-Robb Report, former weapons inspector, David Kay, weighed in on the 2002 NIE. According to Kay "it was a poor job, probably the worst of the modern NIE's, partly explained by the pressure" (PBS 2006). He resigned in January 2004 over the WMD issue. Pillar further admitted that the document contained significant flaws "which mainly had to do with insufficient checking on the credibility of sources" (Pillar 2006) including "Curveball" (Pillar 2006; Tenet 2007).² The Silberman-Robb Commission's 2005

² Despite warning from the CIA's European counterparts regarding the validity of Curveball's identity and information, the CIA relied heavily on him as an informant who claimed to have worked at one of Saddam Hussein's chemical plants. The Iraq Survey Group's 2004 report later established that his claims were false.

report on Iraq intelligence confirmed that the CIA has “erred in failing to highlight its overwhelming reliance on Curveball for its BW (biological weapons) assessment” (Silberman and Robb 2005:93).

In October 2002, Senator Bob Graham requested declassification of the CIA’s judgments regarding the likelihood of Saddam *using* WMD against the US. Graham “had become convinced that the Agency was being less than forthcoming” with reports that weakened the core group’s assertions (Sifry and Cerf 2003:367). Tenet responded by declassifying excerpts of their judgments and dialogue from a closed hearing. In his response to Graham, Tenet’s letter underscored the agency’s doubt that an “unthreatened” Saddam Hussein would use WMD against the US (Tenet 2002). Only in response to Graham’s insistence did this information become available. By publicizing the type of intelligence it sought, censoring the information flow, and reinterpreting intelligence, the administration placed passive pressure on the CIA. The types of pressures placed on the CIA signify the intergroup conflict that existed and the core group’s insistence on connecting the dots.

In addition, to passive pressure placed on the CIA, the administration marginalized or dismissed individuals and groups who deviated. These included General Eric Shinseki—who advised the deployment of a larger force than that which Rumsfeld approved—Lawrence Lindsay—who estimated the war’s cost at over 200 billion (Houghton 2008) and Joseph Wilson (and by implication, his wife)—who publicly debunked the “yellowcake” allegations. According to Packer, the core group sent the message that “the cost of dissent was humiliation and professional suicide” (Packer 2006:117).

Self Censorship

While the plurality of group members fell prey to groupthink due to horizontal pressures, within the core group Powell and Tenet faced vertical pressures to conform. Powell, who initially opposed regime change and believed sanctions had worked, shifted his focus to securing allies once he internalized the policy.

Tenet experienced similar pressures but did not ultimately internalize the same view of Saddam Hussein. Unlike Powell, he engaged in self-censorship in an effort to maintain his dual role as head of intelligence and a member of the decision-making team. Playing the dual role, Tenet faced pressure to produce good intelligence (as head of the CIA) and actionable intelligence as a member of the decision-making group). The latter ultimately succeeded. In his memoir, Tenet recalls the build-up of intelligence within the administration, claiming that it had gone too far; yet, in failing to protest the improper use of intelligence, Tenet laments that he “should not have let silence imply agreement” (2007:317).

Evaluation Problems

Given the group’s acceptance of broad military retaliation after 9/11, the realization that the CIA and bureaucracy failed to “connect the dots” compelled some members of the group to venture to connect every dot. The 9/11 commission report expressed this failure explicitly, and the Bush Doctrine made it policy. This resulted in the formation of special units to re-examine intelligence, with the explicit purpose of connecting the dots between terrorist organizations and their state sponsors. Given their purpose, the primary unit tasked with this role found links between Saddam Hussein and terrorism, immediately propelling Iraq into a new category of threat that required a hard-line policy to ensure US security. As the group collected information over the course of sixteen months between 9/11 and the March invasion, its members internalized the need for a

policy shift as they perceived a major threat. Because the CIA was marginalized, this flawed intelligence became the guide for policy and the reinforced the image of a "new threat" posed by Saddam Hussein.

Collective Rationalization

Incorporating Iraq into the War on Terror required linking Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda or demonstrating that Saddam could share WMD technology with terrorist groups; however, the CIA had consistently found "no credible link between al Qaeda and Hussein" (Bamford 2004:289; Tenet 2007; Packer 2006; Woodward 2006) and could not confidently establish the latter case (NIE Key Judgements 2002). This posed a consistency problem for the administration's core group. The presence of intergroup conflict between the CIA and the core group led the latter to diminish the validity of assessments produced by the intelligence agency and rationalize the case for war. This resulted in a poor information search and an information processing bias.

Given the rift between the core group and the CIA, the Defense Department established the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group (PCTEG), which reported directly to Feith.³ Headed by David Wurmser, the PCTEG was "staffed primarily with hand-selected detailees from DIA" (OUSDP 2002b).

Contrary to various accounts that accuse the PCTEG of deliberately circumventing the CIA, producing its own intelligence and reestablishing links with questionable sources (Bamford 2004; Levine 2004), Feith (2008) claims that the group simply intended to *use* the CIA's intelligence to produce summations, including policy prescriptions that the CIA does not supply. The PCTEG assumed the role of "digesting" intelligence. According to Perle, "within a very short period of time, they began to find links that nobody else had previously understood or recorded in a useful way" (Perle 2003). As head of the group, David Wurmser pieced together bits of "ignored information" to create a broad picture of "an epic struggle between a whole category of nations and us" (Wurmser in Gellman 2009:224).

Yet, according to Pillar, the PCTEG "was dedicated to finding every possible link between Saddam and al Qaeda" while accusing "the intelligence community of faulty analysis for failing to see the supposed alliance" (Pillar 2006). When probed about the group's ability to make new connections, Perle responded, "[if] you're not looking for hidden treasure, you won't find it. If you're looking for it, you may find something" (Perle 2003). As Prados notes, the group "engaged in a novel exercise, taking a hypothesis (that Saddam and bin Laden were allied) and seeing if the data fit, rather than taking the data and adding it up to form their conclusion" (Prados 2004:240).

The PCTEG later evolved into the Office of Special Plans (OSP), which served the same function. Though Feith maintains (2008) that the OSP "was nothing more than a standard geographic office within the Policy organization" he stated in a 2004 briefing that OSP's main function was to "think through how the various terrorist organizations relate to each other and how they relate to different groups that support them; in particular their state sponsors" (Feith 2004). Like its predecessor, the OSP digested intelligence provided by the CIA and concluded that a link existed between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda.

Regardless of the OSP's motivating intentions, it has become abundantly clear that the group was driven by Bush's Doctrine of establishing a justification for a broad War on Terror by linking states to terrorist networks. Acceptance of the Bush Doctrine (a function of the search for leadership) resulted in a rush to gather intelligence that fit the far-reaching policy of broad retaliation.

³ The PCTEG was later absorbed by the Office of Special Plans (OSP).

Additionally, the group was headquartered within the DoD—the organization that housed several of the group's hawks. This insulated the group from outside counsel and allowed them to rely on internal intelligence. For the hawks who suspected Saddam Hussein's involvement in 9/11, the OSP provided the smoking gun; for the skeptics, the scarcity of good intelligence (due to the CIA's marginalization and pressure to produce actionable intelligence) resulted in OSP briefings as the guide for policy. As evidence mounted, so too did the group's resolve in the policy.

Upon linking Iraq to terrorism, the administration immediately began publicly alluding to the connection. In late 2002, Bush gave several speeches that mentioned "long-standing ties" between Saddam Hussein and terrorist groups, including al Qaeda and asserting that "al Qaeda members" were in Iraq (9/26 Rose Garden; 9/28 Radio Address; 10/7 Cincinnati; 10/14). Cheney, Feith, Rice and Rumsfeld publicly repeated these assertions in press conferences and speeches (Cheney 3/16 Meet the Press; Feith 2/21 ABC Interview; Rice 11/15 NATO summit; Rice 3/9 Face the Nation; Rumsfeld 9/25 Warsaw Press Conference).

Cheney took it upon himself to convince the "remaining holdovers" in the administration of the grave threat posed by Saddam Hussein. According to Gellman, "Cheney believed in his bones that the risks were real and real," a scenario of low or medium probability, but of "very high impact" (2009:227). Using intelligence produced by the PCTEG (and later OSP), Cheney painted a grave picture of Saddam Hussein's threat, persuading potential policy challengers to incorporate Iraq into the broader mission. Eventually Powell chimed in. At the World Economic Forum in January of 2003 and the following month at the Security Council, Powell warned his audience of the "sinister nexus between Iraq and the al-Qaida terrorist network" (Powell 2003).

Still, the CIA judged that evidence remained inconclusive. A 2005 Senate intelligence report revealed that prior to the war, the CIA found little evidence of a connection between Saddam and al Qaeda, considering the two "far from being natural partners" (Senate Select Intelligence Report 2006:64). As of September 2001, no recent, definitive assessment existed to deny or confirm the presence of WMD as inspections had ended in 1998; however, the lack of tangible evidence resulting from Iraqi noncompliance lent credibility to the administration's case that Saddam Hussein possessed WMD. The CIA and inspectors suspected their presence based on historical cues (Duelfer 2002, 2004; Tenet 2007). According to the Duelfer Report, "Outward acts of compliance belied a covert desire to resume WMD activities" (Duelfer 2004:49). Hans Blix, former director of the UN Inspection Commission found the claims made by the administration regarding Iraq's disarmament failure, "plausible, but without evidence" (Blix 2004:136). Still, he conceded on Rumsfeld's point that "an absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."

The CIA held the same impression, which it passed to the administration in the 2002 NIE. The WMD case only justified the absorption of Iraq into the War on Terror insofar as terrorists could obtain WMD technology. In its 2002 estimate, the CIA expressed with "high confidence" its assessment on Iraq's continuation and expansion of WMD programs and with "low confidence" its ability to determine whether Saddam would share these technologies with al Qaeda (NIE Key Judgements 2002). Still, the administration extracted both judgments, definitively linking the issue of WMD with Saddam's capability to share technology with terrorists.

The administration's handling of intelligence illustrates the core group's effort at collective rationalization rather than deliberate and direct manipulation. Due to tensions with the CIA, the group became more insulated and cohesive. According to Pillar "official intelligence analysis was not relied on in making even the most significant national security decisions" during this period (Pillar

2006:1). Instead of relying on the CIA, intergroup conflict led the core group to reinterpret intelligence in an effort to "connect the dots."

This process of "connecting the dots" resulted in both inaccurate intelligence and an internalization of a new view of Saddam Hussein. No longer was he merely considered a troubling dictator; new "evidence" uncovered more sinister motives. It was this intelligence that the administration internalized and used to defend the war policy. Constant exposure to limited information (from both within the group and from the CIA) created a perception of grave danger. As groupthink plagued the evaluation process, members of the administration shifted their view of Saddam Hussein, making invasion a logical strategy given the information available in March 2003.

Illusion of Invulnerability

For Janis, an illusion of invulnerability signifies concurrence-seeking behavior and "creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks" (Janis 1972:197). Even with a bastion of caveats warning of backlash in the event of invasion, the Bush administration moved forward with its policy without planning for potential risks. Their illusion of invulnerability resulted in three indicators of defective policy: failures to manage objectives, risks, contingency plans.

In January of 2003, the National Intelligence Council delivered warnings to the White House in two reports entitled "Regional Consequences of Regime Change in Iraq" and "Principal Challenges in Post-Saddam Iraq." The first recognized the possibility that increased factional violence could "encourage terrorists groups to take advantage of a volatile security environment to launch attacks within Iraq" (NIC Report 1 2003). The second warned that establishing democracy could take years of turbulence that would require an "occupying force," and even then, Iraq could revert back to authoritarian rule (NIC Report 2 2003).

The intelligence community also warned that guerilla warfare waged by Saddam's residuals and other militant groups could challenge the newly placed Iraqi government. In a report entitled "The Perfect Storm: Planning for Negative Consequences of Invading Iraq," the CIA issued several warnings. It identified the possibility that an invasion could result in "a surge of global terrorism against US interests," that Iraq could face "territorial breakup," and that the world could face "major oil disruptions and severe strains in the Atlantic alliance" (Tenet 2007:317-318). According to Pillar, the CIA further warned that "war and occupation would boost political Islam and increase sympathy for terrorists' objectives - and Iraq would become a magnet for extremists from elsewhere in the Middle East" (Pillar 2006:3-4).

Bush dismissed the warnings as "guess-work" (Jehr and Sanger 2004) and failed to consider the "prospect of anti-American backlash" (Susan 2004). Despite ample warnings, the administration's illusion of invulnerability prevented them from sufficiently accounting for the potential risks, outlining clear objectives and developing contingency plans. According to Tenet the administration failed to seriously consider "the implications of regime change" (Tenet 2007:309). Groupthink not only explains the illusion of invulnerability that led to the administration's failure to consider potential risks and implications, but also highlights the urgency of the threat they perceived.

Because members of the group internalized the image of Saddam Hussein as an existential threat, the logical policy prescription because immediate military action. Given this new perception, the rush to war ensued and postwar planning received inadequate attention. The core group identified regime change as the war's objective, but failed to plan for the inherent responsibilities associated with the policy. Packer notes that "Plan A" assumed "the Iraqi government would be

quickly decapitated, security would be turned over remnants of the Iraqi police and army, international troops would soon arrive and most American forces would leave within a few months. There was no Plan B" (Packer 2006:118). Bush created The Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (OHRA) just sixty days prior to the invasion (Ferguson 2005). With insufficient resources and time, OHRA failed in its handling of reconstructing Iraq.

Bush's "Mission Accomplished" declaration highlights the administration's fixation of regime change as the sole policy objective with little consideration given to post-Saddam Iraq. It also demonstrates the administration's sense of the exigent nature of Saddam's threat and the need to depose him to ensure US security. Within months of the initial invasion, the administration wrongly presumed that major combat operations would end. Upon questioning regarding prolific looting and chaos in Baghdad following the invasion, Rumsfeld replied, "stuff happens," dismissing the possibility that Iraq was spiraling into disorder amid the lack of postwar planning (Rumsfeld 2003b).

Belief in Inherent Morality and Stereotyped view of "Enemy" Outgroups

Belief in inherent morality inclines "members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions" (Janis 1972:198). By incorporating Iraq into the "war on terror," the Bush administration defined clear moral boundaries between the US and its "enemies" while reifying cultural biases. This invariably created a stereotyped view of enemy outgroups and allowed the administration (and the public) to maintain an impression of morality. This led the core group to overlook the moral risks of their policy.

The incorporation of Iraq into the War on Terror also lent a moral quality to the administration's case. The administration's perception of moral legitimacy is evident in the rhetoric used in the run up to war. In his remarks at West Point in June of 2002, Bush identified the terrorist threat as one "with no precedent," requiring a pre-emption strategy to ensure US security (Bush 2002). By justifying and formalizing "pre-emption" within the national security strategy, the President legitimized the War on Terror as a moral imperative to ensure American security. Including Iraq within that framework obliged the US to remove Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, Bush's "axis of evil" speech—conflating Iraq, North Korea and Iran—and "with us or against us" expressions delimited the boundaries between "good" and "evil." In addition, Bush's democratic rhetoric added to his personal belief in the morality of invading and transforming Iraq.

Given the belief in the morality of the policy and administration's stereotyped view of the enemy, the administration ignored potentially harmful moral consequences of the policy. The State Department warned the core group of humanitarian concerns associated with its failure to plan for post-Saddam Iraq. A Feb. 2003 memo warned that "a failure to address short-term public security and humanitarian concerns could result in serious human rights abuses which would undermine an otherwise successful military campaign, and our reputation internationally" (Lorne, Dewey, and Simons 2003). Despite ample warning, Saddam came to be perceived as an existential threat, and the group pressed forward with the policy.

Conclusion

Contrary to the mainstream view, I argue that the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq under the auspices of terrorism presented a significant departure from the rationales and strategies previously supported by members of the Bush administration. 9/11 did not simply provide an opportunity to implement a pre-existing policy; in fact, the chosen policy is surprising when considering

previously held images of Saddam Hussein. In this context, the groupthink model explains the decision to incorporate Iraq within the War on Terror. Instead of viewing Iraq as an isolated threat that required a modest regime change policy—as the group advocated prior to 9/11—the core group's adoption of the President's premise of a broad War on Terror, and the fixation with "connecting the dots," forced a shift in their view of Saddam Hussein. This shift was primarily guided by the hawks within the administration who took it upon themselves to engage critics of the policy and convince them of an impending threat. Yet, the administration's ideologues did not necessarily engage in duplicity; they in fact feared Saddam's threat in the wake of 9/11. In narrowing the scope of intelligence and quantity of information and analysis on Iraq, the administration's ideologues fostered groupthink while directing a shift in the group's image of Saddam Hussein.

These issues, along with the intelligence processing affair, neither implicate nor vindicate the core group as malevolent or rational. They instead highlight the drive to war that resulted in rushed, incomplete and inaccurate estimates that dealt with Iraq as a threat within the War on Terror. As the decision makers continue to argue long after the initial decision was made, the Bush administration decided to invade Iraq—within the War on Terror—based on the information available in March 2003. However, the presence of the foregoing symptoms showcase the administration's inability to critically evaluate information, resulting in poor information search, information processing bias and a failure to examine the risks of the policy. Plagued by groupthink, the administration made the policy based on partial and inconclusive evidence, found morality of their policy, and dismissed warnings regarding potential setbacks. Internalization of the information occurred during the evaluation process, moving policy-makers toward a war stance. Because they were tasked with "connecting the dots," members of the administration found evidence to perform this function and briefed decision makers accordingly. The timing of Powell's shift confirms that internalization occurred during the evaluation stage. He remained weary of the policy until new "intelligence" was uncovered; his speech to the UN marked the shift. This shift explains the urgency with which the administration pursued the war policy.

This analysis has implications for both the study of the Iraq War decision-making process and groupthink more generally. While typically used to explain flawed decision-making processes, groupthink can also explain ideational shifts when considering the long-term context. As Kuperman notes, "starting to make a foreign policy decision requires making a decision to make the foreign policy decision" (2006:538). Instead of studying foreign policies as isolated events, it is critical to consider the historical context of the decision makers' views to account for the "sequential decision-making process" (Kuperman 2006:540). In this sense, groupthink can be utilized outside the bounds of "ad hoc episodes" and maintains a role in explaining the decision to incorporate Iraq into the "war on terror." Rather than applying groupthink to explain a decision-making process in isolation of perceptions, this analysis has illustrated the importance of considering policy-makers' views, the shifts in their ideas, and the process that leads to ideational changes. By combining elements of Janis's and t'Hart's conceptions of groupthink and incorporating other elements within the socio-psychological literature—namely Hoyt and Garrison—a clearer picture emerges regarding groupthink's ability to account for varying motivations and changing conceptions.

Clearly, though a wealth of literature has emerged since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, scholars and journalists alike await the declassification of important documents that will more clearly elucidate this phase of foreign policy decision making. Once new information surfaces, the facts will become clearer and new

analyses will emerge. Still, given the presently available documentation, it has become evident that the information available in March of 2003 justified the war policy insofar as groupthink infected the decision-making process and magnified Saddam's threat.

The present case study illustrates that groupthink explains the shift in the Bush administration's perception of Saddam Hussein, from an oppressive dictator to a real threat to US security. Understanding the interconnected nature of the two outcomes of groupthink—defective process and changing images—prevents limiting the study of decision making within episodic bounds. That is, longer term shifts in perceptions can be considered in conjunction with flawed decision making. The 2003 Iraq decision-making process signified this type of ideational shift and defective process marked by the presence of groupthink.

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