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GOOD FOR WHOM? THE FRAMING OF CONFLICT IN POST-9/11 AMERICA, 2001-2004

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GOOD FOR WHOM? THE FRAMING OF CONFLICT IN POST-9/11 AMERICA, 2001-

2004

BY

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ABSTRACT

GOOD FOR WHOM? THE FRAMING OF CONFLICT IN POST-9/11 AMERICA, 2001-

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This thesis explores the framing of conflict after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and more specifically, during President George W. Bush's first term in office. Notions of American exceptionalism touched upon every facet of the nation's response to the attacks, providing guidance, identity and resolve in the history of the Good War. The immediate tethering of Pearl Harbor and September 11 in the national discourse exemplified the foremost role that nostalgia would play in not only making sense of the attacks but devising a response to them. This thesis recovers what was lost to those destructive comforts in the collective memory. Indeed, the Bush administration, led by Bush and the unprecedentedly powerful Dick Cheney, saw opportunity in tragedy, and successfully used the fear and anger elicited by the attacks to extend the Bush Doctrine to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. For Bush in particular, however, the war in Iraq was also a divine one — a self-professed mission from God. The conflict, he pledged, would liberate the Iraqi people from the barbarous Ba'ath regime and bring democracy to the Middle East. Images of American torture released from the Abu Ghraib prison, however, fiercely contradicted the president's narrative. Time and again, the war on terrorism was framed as a *good* war. This thesis explains where that term came from, how it influenced the framing of conflict after the terrorist attacks, and who, ultimately, the war was good for.

INTRODUCTION

May 7, 2020. "This is the worst attack we've ever had," President Donald Trump remarked to White House reporters on the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of speaking, seventy-five thousand Americans had succumbed to the virus — with experts predicting a further ninety thousand by August 4, 2020.[1] "This is worse than Pearl Harbor," Trump continued, "worse than the World Trade Center. There's never been an attack like this."[2]

It is a strange time to be writing about the 9/11 attacks. With New York bearing the brunt of a new crisis, it is impossible not to draw parallels to the past: for the first time since 9/11, for example, the *USNS Comfort* has docked in Manhattan to provide emergency medical assistance. Some have argued, however, that the pandemic signals the dawn of a new epoch in the nation's history: "the final nail in the coffin of the 'post-9/11' era in which the United States harnessed all elements of national power to confront the scourge of violent Islamic extremism," John Negroponte wrote for *USA Today.*[3] America, currently, faces a period of transition. "It's not September 12 anymore," former deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes argued in *The Atlantic.* To beat the pandemic, he continued, Americans would have to "move past our post-9/11 mindset" and "change our government's spending priorities" — chiefly the inflated Pentagon budget.[4] Almost nineteen years removed from the terrorist attacks, America now faces a new adversary, one entirely different to the defining issue of the past two decades.

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[1] Azad Arman, "US coronavirus death toll passes 90,000 but influential model lowers its prediction." *CNN Health,* May 19, 2020. https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/18/health/us-coronavirus-monday/index.html.
[2] Coronavirus: Trump calls outbreak worse 'attack' than 9/11 and Pearl Harbor." *Sky News,* May 7, 2020. https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-trump-calls-outbreak-worse-attack-than-9-11-or-pearl-harbor-11984396.
[3] John Negroponte, "Coronavirus signals we must shift from terrorism to new bipartisan intelligence priorities." *USA Today,* March 30, 2020. https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/03/30/coronavirus-new-intelligence-agenda-needed-column/2935817001/.
[4] Ben Rhodes, "The 9/11 Era is Over." *The Atlantic,* April 6, 2020. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/its-not-september-12-anymore/609502/.

Still, in many ways, America remains a nation at war. President Trump has refashioned himself into a war-time president, describing the pandemic as "our big war" against "the invisible enemy."[5] His wartime framing extends a uniquely American tradition: first the U.S. fought against countries, then against concepts starting with the Cold War, and now, almost seamlessly, pandemics. Beyond generation-defining conflicts in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq were wars against poverty, cancer, drugs, crime and terrorism. It is a language all too familiar to the American public: "the magic words," theologian Stanley Hauerwas writes, "to reclaim the everyday. War is such a normalizing discourse. Americans know war… We are frightened, and ironically war makes us feel safe."[6] Despite calls for America to end its fetishization of war, an argument recently articulated by historian Andrew Bacevich in *The New Republic,* Trump's militarization of the pandemic signals the defining role that conflict continues to play in American life.[7] It is a tradition ingrained in the modern history of the United States.

A common perception of America's global standing as exceptional has anchored the nation's foreign policy position. American exceptionalism, Donald Pease writes, "includes a complex assemblage of… assumptions out of which Americans have developed the lasting belief in America as the fulfilment of the national ideal."[8] It was the Cold War state, Pease

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[5]Brian Bennett and Theresa Bresson, "'Our Big War.' As Coronavirus Spreads, Trump Refashions Himself as a Wartime President." *Time,* March 19, 2020. https://time.com/5806657/donald-trump-coronavirus-war-china/.

[6] Stanley Hauerwas, "September 11, 2001: A pacifist response." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 2 (2002): 426.

[7] Andrew J. Bacevich, "Will 2020 Finally Kill America's War Fetish?" *The New Republic,* June 9, 2020. https://newrepublic.com/article/158092/will-2020-finally-kill-americas-war-fetish. The fetishization of warfare in our current political-cultural moment, Bacevich writes, extends beyond the coronavirus pandemic to the Black Lives Matter protests over George Floyd's death at the hands of the American police. Senator Tom Cotton's call for the nation to do "whatever it takes to restore order. No quester for insurrections, anarchists, rioters and looters," again exemplifies the centrality of warfare as the governing metaphor in American civil discourse.

[8] Donald E. Pease, *The New American exceptionalism.* (U of Minnesota Press, 2009): 22. American exceptionalism, Pease explains, is the lasting understanding of the United States as *the* model nation—the national framework to which other nations aspire. The Cold War state warped this ideology into a coherent foreign policy rationale, justifying America's intervention in other areas of the world because of the nation's exceptionalism.

continues, "that promoted the image of America as the fulfilment of the world's desire for an ideal nation into its rationale for imposing and defending the [nation's] model of nationalism across the globe."[9] When America resorts to war, so the narrative goes, it does so in the name of good — in defense of democracy and freedom. When Woodrow Wilson announced America's entry into World War I, he asserted, "The world must be made safe for democracy."[10] When Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill penned the Atlantic Charter, they extended the assurance that, with the "final destruction of Nazi tyranny," all "the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want."[11] America's history is an ode to war and conflict — an episodic narrative of international duty, benevolence and triumph.[12] As that tradition extends into a new era in the nation's history, perhaps sounding the death knell for the post-9/11 security state, so it defined its expansion after the 9/11 attacks.

America's exceptionalism allayed considerable public fear about the future of the nation. "Scared and angry," Rhodes recalls, "I was roused by President Bush's speech to a joint session of Congress."[13] Bush reasoned that America was attacked because of its values: "Why do they hate us?" he explained, "They hate what we see right here in this chamber — a democratically elected government."[14] To have the event "framed in a way that fit neatly into

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[9] Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism,* 22.
[10] Woodrow Wilson, "The World Must be Made Safe for Democracy." *Classics of International Relations* (1996): 35.
[11] Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston S. Churchill, "Atlantic Charter." *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Globalization.* (2012)
[12] Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism,* 8. As Pease notes, "the conviction concerning America's exceptional status nevertheless sustained the sense of continuity in the nation's geopolitical standing between 1945-89. Over the period, the interpretive assumptions embedded within this foundational term have supplied American citizens with the images and beliefs that have regulated the production, transmission and maintenance of what it means to be an American." Since World War II, and the emergence of the Cold War state, the American narrative has been defined by America's global duty as a defender of democracy, a position that continues to influence American's understanding of the nation. For more examples of this exceptionalism in action, see John F. Kennedy and Ronald Regan's inaugural addresses.
[13] Rhodes, "The 9/11 Era is Over."
[14] George W. Bush, "Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress," September 20, 2001 in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush, 2001-2008*, (The White House, 2008): 162.

the American narrative that I'd grown up with… was reassuring," Rhodes remembers.

"America had a new national purpose on par with the Cold War — another generational

effort to make the world safe for democracy."[15] As with past conflicts, the war on terrorism

reinvigorated the nation with a sense of global purpose, one lost to the conclusion of the Cold

War. America, once again, assumed the mantle of freedom's defender.

Most Americans favored a military response to the terrorist attacks. Public opinion

polls conducted immediately after 9/11 suggested broad support for "military engagement in

Afghanistan," as well as "military action against other countries harboring terrorists." The so-

called "conservative shift" that took place after 9/11 resulted in heightened public support for

a stronger global military presence, which suited the geopolitical aspirations held by many in

the Bush White House.[16] The cultural climate during Bush's first term in office largely

marginalized those who opposed conflict in the Middle East. "I am a pacifist, so the

American 'we' cannot be my 'me,'" Stanley Hauerwas wrote shortly after the attacks:

> But what does a pacifist have to say in the face of the terror September 11, 2001
> names? I vaguely knew when I first declared I was a pacifist that there might be
> some serious consequences. To be nonviolent might even change my life. But I do
> not really think I understood what that change might entail until September 11.
> For example, after I declared I was a pacifist, I quit singing the 'Star-Spangled
> Banner.' I will stand when it is sung, particularly at baseball games, but I do not
> sing. Not to sing the 'Star-Spangled Banner' is a small thing that reminds me that
> my first loyalty is not to the United States but to God and God's church. I confess
> it never crossed my mind that such small acts might over the years make my
> response to September 11 quite different from that of the good people who sing
> 'God Bless America' — so different that I am left in saddened silence.[17]

For those committed to nonviolence, the bonding of patriotism and vengeance after

9/11 defined national belonging in conditional terms: to stand against the war on

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[15] Rhodes, "The 9/11 Era is Over."

[16] Leonie Huddy and Stanley Feldman. "Americans respond politically to 9/11: understanding the impact of the terrorist attacks and their aftermath." *American Psychologist* 66, no. 6 (2011): 455-56.

[17] Hauerwas, "September 11, 2001: A pacifist response," 428.

terrorism risked alienating oneself from the nation. It was this devotion to America's national mission, above all else, that drove the nation to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

To speak out against the use of military force after the terrorist attacks was a lonely position to occupy — especially on Capitol Hill. On September 18, 2001, a joint resolution of the United States Congress authorized the president to use all "necessary and appropriate force" in pursuit of those responsible for the terrorist attacks.[18] The joint resolution passed through the Congress with a single dissenting vote from Democratic Representative Barbra Lee. "Some of us must urge the use of restraint… I have agonized over this vote," Lee reasoned, "As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore."[19] In the Manichean world of George W. Bush, there was little room for dissension. "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists," said Bush on September 20, 2001 — a warning to his fellow countrymen as much as other nations.[20] The illusion of consensus in Bush's America relied upon an imposition of the majority opinion as *the* American one. Lee's single vote paled in comparison to the five-hundred and eighteen permitting Bush the power to wage war.

Still, as the war in Iraq edged closer, record numbers took to the streets in protest. On February 15, 2003, approximately one million people gathered in London to protest the potential war.[21] That same day, millions combined in protest across Europe, including major demonstrations in Madrid, Vienna, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Athens and Rome. In New York, five hundred thousand demonstrators flooded the

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[18] 107th Congress Public Law 40. *U.S. Government Printing Office.* Congressional Record, Vol. 147 (2001): 115.
[19] Barbra Lee. "Why I opposed the resolution to authorize force." *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 2, no. 2 (2002): 278-280.
[20] "President Bush Addresses the Nation." *Washington Post,* September 20, 2001.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html
[21] "Anti-war rally makes its mark." *BBC News,* February 19, 2003.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2767761.stm

city. Outside the United Nation's headquarters, Martin Luther King III bemoaned:

"Just because you have the biggest gun does not mean you must use it."[22]

Commenting on the anti-war demonstrations, Patrick Tyler of the *New York Times*

observed, "there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and

world opinion."[23] Again, the majority position masqueraded as the national

consensus: the protests held in one-hundred and fifty American cities revealed a

fractured nation torn between war and diplomacy.

The international protests failed to temper the Bush administration's zeal for

military intervention in Iraq. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice argued that,

from a human rights perspective, the protests would "not affect [the administration's]

determination to confront Saddam Hussein and help the Iraq people." Rice's was a

familiar argument: the national leadership, she appeared to suggest, knew best. [24]

Republican Senator John McCain, too, condemned the protests as "foolish": "[the

Iraqis] will be far, far better off when they are liberated" from Hussein's "brutal,

incredibly oppressive rule," he explained.[25] Even as Americans flooded the streets in

protest, their leaders remained reticent to listen, steadfast in their understanding of the

conflict as a just war.[26]

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[22] Martin Luther King III quoted in Sue Chan, "Massive Anti-War Outpouring." *CBS News,* February 16, 2003. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/massive-anti-war-outpouring/
[23] Tyler, "Threats and Responses", *New York Times.*
[24] Condoleezza Rice quoted in Karin Simonson, "The Anti-War Movement: Waging Peace on the Brink of War." *Programme on NGOs and Civil Society, Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiation, Geneva,* (2003): 17.

[25] John McCain quoted in Patrick E. Tyler, "Threats and Responses: News Analysis; A New Power in the Streets." *New York Times,* February 17, 2003. https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/17/world/threats-and-responses-news-analysis-a-new-power-in-the-streets.html
[26]Christian Enemark and Christopher Michaelsen. "Just war doctrine and the invasion of Iraq." *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 51, no. 4 (2005): 545-563.Just War doctrine sets forth a series of criteria necessary for a war to be considered justified ethically. In the context of Iraq, Enemark and Michaelsen write, those reasons included Just Cause of self-defence and humanitarian intervention and proportionate cause. In all three cases, Enemark and Michaelson conclude, the Just War doctrine "shows the Coalition's military campaign was unjust." The argument that the war in Iraq was just was often used to pacify dissent and garner support for the Iraq War by the Bush administration.

The title of this thesis owes much to Studs Terkel's *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II.* He places the term "good war" in quotations to hint at the oxymoronic nature of the marriage, as if war could ever truly be good. As Terkel found, such notions are entirely subjective — contingent upon who is asked. Still, romanticized conceptions of the national past guided the war on terrorism and healed the damaged national psyche after 9/11. "The flag that flew in mourning was soon transformed into a pride-filled thing," writes Stanley Hauerwas. "The bloodstained flag of victims transformed into the flag of the American indomitable spirit. We will prevail no matter how many people we must kill to rid ourselves of the knowledge that Americans died as victims. Americans do not die as victims… No one who died on September 11, 2001 gets to die a meaningless death. That is why their deaths must be revenged."[27] Perhaps more accurately, when Americans do die as victims, they do not die in vain. The national foreign policy pursued after the attacks privileged a desire for vengeance and justified aggressive military intervention through the prism of national exceptionalism. Doing so assured many that, as in the past, the war on terrorism would be waged in the name of good.

It should come as no surprise that, facing a nadir in public approval, Trump has returned to the familiar wartime trope. War rallies support for presidents, who often "wag the dog" — that is, use war to distract from other issues — to save an election campaign.[28] Following the extrajudicial killing of George Floyd, however, Trump's America has become a nation divided in war — not united by it. Responding to the national outrage precipitated by Floyd's murder, Trump announced "Operation Legend" — which would send a "surge" of

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[27] Hauerwas, "September 11, 2001: A pacifist response," 426-27. This is not, of course, representative of Hauerwas's own perspective, as a pacifist, but his observation of the broader culture of patriotism and vengeance that swept the nation after the terrorist attacks.
[28] Thomas Friedman, "Trump's Wag-the-Dog War." *New York Times,* July 21, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/21/opinion/trump-portland-syria.html.

federal security forces to Chicago.[29] A desperate attempt to "salvage his campaign," Thomas Friedman observed for the *New York Times,* "Trump turned to the Middle East Dictator's Handbook and found just what he was looking for… Turn [the citizenry] against each other and then present yourself as the only source of law and order."[30] Barbra Lee's prescient caution as she voted against the war authorization in 2001 feels as relevant now as then: "As we act, let us not become the evil we deplore." The national leadership plays a defining role in upholding, or corroding, those values that separate the United States from its adversaries. While history never repeats itself, the great Mark Twain is frequently quoted, it does rhyme.

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[29] "Trump to send 'surge' of hundreds of federal agents to cities." *BBC News,* July 23, 2020.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-53507660
[30] Friedman, "Trump's Wag-the-Dog War."

CHAPTER I

ANOTHER DAY OF INFAMY: PEARL HARBOR, 9/11 AND DESTRUCTIVE
COMFORTS IN THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The Destructive Comforts of the Good War

In times of unprecedented crisis, comfort can be found in collective memories. People in the present, David Lowenthal argues, "seek reaffirmation. The past endorses present views and acts, showing their descent from or likeness to former ones. Precedent legitimates current practice."[31] At the time of the September 11, 2001 attacks, momentous events in the national collective memory centred around collective grief, with instances of death holding a particular staying power in the realms of collective remembrance: John F. Kennedy's assassination; Princess Diana's death; the Oklahoma City bombing; the attack on Pearl Harbor.[32] Grief, writes Ernest Renan, carries more value than triumph in the collective memory because it imposes a "sense of duty and requires common effort."[33] Episodes of death and destruction, as well as the shock that follows, find meaning in the collective memory as symbols of cohesion and national purpose. It was this common past that Americans looked to post-September 11 for comfort, reassurance and guidance.

References to Pearl Harbor dominated immediate reflections on the terrorist attacks. "Attack on America: Another Day of Infamy," proclaimed Howie Carr of the *Boston Herald* on September 12, 2001.[34] "This is War," added Stuart Bykofsky of the *Philadelphia Daily.* "9-11 has joined 12-7 as a day of infamy that will live forever." [35] "Americans are not a vengeful people," the *Green Bay Gazette* asserted, "but when our very freedoms are under attack — as they were when we joined World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor —

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[31] David Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country revisited.* Cambridge University Press, 2015. 92
[32] "America's Collective Memory." Pew Research Centre *US Politics & Policy.* July 3, 1999. https://www.people-press.org/1999/07/03/americas-collective-memory/
[33] Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* 1882. 50
[34] Howie Carr, "Attack on America; Another Day of Infamy." *The Boston Herald.* September 12, 2001.
[35] Stuart Bykofsky, "THIS IS WAR." *Philadelphia Daily News,* Philadelphia PA. September 13, 2001.

we demand justice."[36] Across the nation, abstractions of Pearl Harbor in the collective memory offered refuge in a timeless narrative of "tragedy, resolve and eventual triumph."[37] World War II, many Americans agreed, was a *good* war — a necessary battle to combat fascism, "an evil and expansionist system."[38] While many historians recognize that this rose-tinted view minimizes the uglier aspects of the conflict, such as the internment of Japanese Americans, the notion of the good war has endured. There was little question that the impending war on terrorism, like World War II, would be a *good* one.

Tasked with explaining the inexplicable, journalists immediately relied on the Pearl Harbor analogy: September 11 became "the Pearl Harbor of a new millennium"; a "terrorist Pearl Harbor"; a national awakening; a second day of infamy.[39] Facing the completely unexpected, writes Emily Rosenberg, it is often "reassuring to discern some familiar pattern, to domesticate the strangeness of the present by invoking the familiarity" of a shared past.[40] Post-9/11 references to Pearl Harbor — for better or worse — channelled the nation's grief into a reassuring sense of mission. "In times such as these we all must look for the deeper meaning. We have to turn back to our roots," wrote Patrick Bourn in a letter to *The Tennessean* on September 16, 2001. "Not since Pearl Harbor has America had to deal with a direct attack against the U.S. […] Veterans and civilians of the past paid what they had to so

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[36] "In Our View." *Green Bay Press Gazette,* Green Bay Wis. September 16, 2001.

[37] Brian T. Connor, "9/11–A new Pearl Harbor? analogies, narratives, and meanings of 9/11 in civil society." *Cultural Sociology* 6, no. 1 (2012): 4

[38] Richard Polenberg, "The Good War? A Reappraisal of How World War II Affected American Society." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 100, No. 3, The Home Front and Beyond: Virginians in the World War 2 Era (1992): 297. This understanding, Richard Polenberg notes, rests on a number of underlying assumptions about the Second World War: that it was a just war "fought only for the right of people everywhere to live in freedom and security," and that the U.S. was not "motivated by a desire for conquest." There is also an understanding of the war as being fought, Polenberg continues, "by a largely united people, who shared purpose not only led them to make sacrifices for the common good but also enabled them to transcend ethnic divisions and religious differences."

[39] "Daily Digest." *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.* September 16, 2001; "Pearl Harbor's Infamy Is Echoed by 9-11." *The Los Angeles Times,* December 7, 2001.

[40] Emily S. Rosenberg, *A date which will live: Pearl Harbor in American memory*. (Duke University Press, 2003):175

that the U.S. could become what it is today. Now it is our turn."[41] A nostalgia for the good

war seemed to encourage outright warfare as a prelude to national redemption. Emboldened

by Pearl Harbor and its aftermath in the collective memory, the nation was nearly united in a

demand for military justice.[42]

Americans embraced a sense of timelessness between the two events.[43] September 11,

David Halberstam argued in the *Boston Globe,* "had a December 7 quality about it" because

of "the break that day has with events, as if things have changed so profoundly from that day

on. It's like a new calendar has been given to us."[44] The overt similarities between the two

seemingly collapsed the decades of history that separated them. "I feel like going to war

again," declared one World War II veteran attending a reunion of the USS *Intrepid* in

Nashville. "No mercy."[45] "We have to come together like '41 and go after them" added one

New Yorker. "That's the only way we can stop this thing."[46] The circulation of Pearl Harbor,

and by extension the good war, as a unifying emblem of national defeat and eventual triumph

offered a reassuring schema for the post-9/11 nation.[47] Few paused to consider whether

outright warfare best suited the decentralized nature of modern terrorism.[48]

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[41] "Letters to the Editor." *The Tennessean,* Nashville Tenn. September 16, 2001.

[42] Leonie Huddy and Stanley Feldman. "Americans respond politically to 9/11: understanding the impact of the terrorist attacks and their aftermath." *American Psychologist* 66, no. 6 (2011): 455. See also: Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, Theresa Capelos, and Colin Provost. "The consequences of terrorism: Disentangling the effects of personal and national threat." *Political Psychology* 23, no. 3 (2002): 485.

[43] William H. Sewell Jr, *Logics of history: Social theory and social transformation.* (University of Chicago Press, 2005): 8-9. Sewell Jr. defines an event as a "turning point" or "watershed" in history, which divides "the flow of history into distinct eras." Historians, Sewell posits, "see the flow of social life as being punctuated by significant happenings, by complexes of social action that somehow change the course of history."

[44] David Halberstam quoted in Donald Aucoin, "Remembering the Date." *Boston Globe,* Boston Mass. October 2, 2001.

[45] Tom Infield, "Attack reverberates around the nation: Many Americans expressed fear as buildings closed." *Philadelphia Inquirer.* September 12, 2001.

[46] Infield, Attack reverberates around the nation, *Philadelphia Inquirer.*

[47] Sewell, *Logics of History,* 131. Sewell defines schema as "general procedures applied in the enactment or reproduction of social life" such as "rules of etiquette" or "sets of equivalences." Sewell's term aids in describing how Pearl Harbor provided a set of general historical procedures through which the post-9/11 nation negotiated the terrorist attacks. The past, in this sense, provided a framework for future action.

[48] Kevin Pobst. "The Aftereffects of September 11: What the polls tell us." *Social Education* 66, no. 2 (2002): 103-110. As Pobst writes, "From the time of the Vietnam era, the reluctance of the American public to engage in military intervention overseas has been a constraint on U.S. foreign policy." However,

The common thread connecting the two events, many argued, was their shared status as "direct attacks" upon the nation.[49] "We are used to seeing these tragedies in countries across the globe, but never in our backyard, killing our American people," the *Los Angeles Times* reported on September 13, 2001. "In sixty years, students will learn about Tuesday the same way students learn about Pearl Harbor."[50] As direct attacks, the two shared an elevated sense of importance because they occurred within the nation's borders — they were attacks on America proper. Few cared to mention the more recent al-Qaeda attacks on America in Kenya, Tanzania and Yemen.[51] While Halberstam suggested that 9/11 represented a break from previous events, the method of the Nairobi bombing suggested a continuity between the two.[52] While the scale of the Nairobi attack certainly differed from that of September 11— leaving eleven American citizens dead — it offered the most logical frame for comparison in understanding a new era in transnational terror. [53] However, in Pearl Harbor and the good war that followed, the post-9/11 nation recognized a comforting symbol of American identity — a triumphant past worthy of structuring the present. From the general public to policy makers, Americans embraced a distant past steeped in nostalgia.[54]

"support for the war against terrorism compares very favourably with support for other U.S. wars of the second half of the twentieth century. More than 90 percent of persons surveyed in polls have regularly expressed approval of the insertion of ground troops into Afghanistan" and, to a lesser (but still majority) extent, Iraq.

[49] Michael Carter, *New York Daily News,* September 12, 2001. On September 12, 2001, Democratic Senator Hilary Clinton said: "Not since Pearl Harbor has our nation come under such a direct and horrific attack… I am sure America will respond to this crime against humanity in a way that has always characterized our country: with unity and strength." The nature of both as "direct attacks" inferred an innate similarity between the two.

[50] Bryan Loftus, "The Day That Changed Everything." *Los Angeles Times.* September 13, 2001.

[51] Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, "History and the social sciences: the longue durée." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center* 2009): 174. The *longue durée,* Braudel writes, is the "history of long, even very long duration." This is the opposite of Paul Lacombe's "episodic history" or *historie evenementielle.* The history of September 11, like Pearl Harbor, is often viewed through the lends of episodic history – an instantaneous event that defines a particular moment in the national narrative. I argue that this viewpoint negates the *longue durée* of both as sequences within a broader, and longer structure of events.

[52] See Cook, J. "Good for Whom? The Framing of Conflict in Post-9/11 America, 2001-2004." 19-20.

[53] Wright, Lawrence. *The looming tower: Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11.* (Alfred a Knopf Incorporated, 2006): 308.

[54] As the sixtieth anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attacks approached, comparisons between past and present circumstances increased. Chris Smith, of *The Press Democrat,* for example, titled an article "Pearl Harbor Message: Keep America Alert; At Oahu Reunion or at Home, Survivors Revive the Mantra for

Traditionally, scholars have separated memory from history. Memories are often denigrated as "recollections, imperfect and incomplete, colored by personal experiences and biases."[55] This distinction, writes Jacob Dickerson, "overlooks the necessarily rhetorical nature of history, and its practice as the selection of important or relevant information arranged into a story told for a particular purpose."[56] In the tradition of Pierre Nora, this chapter advocates for a "history that is interested in memory not as remembrance but as the overall structure of the past within the present — a history of the second degree."[57] It is a history "less interested in events themselves than the construction of events over time; less interested in 'what actually happened' than in its perpetual reuse and misuse, its influence on successive presents."[58] In the immediate post-9/11 period, memories of Pearl Harbor emboldened calls for aggressive military intervention in the Middle East, and overruled the need for a nuanced consideration of al-Qaeda's peculiarities. Nationwide, contemporary references to a day of infamy invoked Pearl Harbor's memory with an idealized fixity — as a universal symbol of national victimhood and the beginning of a righteous conflict. However, even the indelible good war had its complications.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Framing of Pearl Harbor

December 8, 1941. "The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves," President Roosevelt declared before Congress following Japan's bombing of American naval and military bases across Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam and Wake Island. Despite Japan's

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9/11." John Morrison of the *Philadelphia Daily* headed his article on December 7 with "Pearl Harbor Survivors Remember: For many vets, attack on 9/11 bought back memories of 'Day of Infamy' 60 years ago." Per the *Global Newsstream* database, between the time of the attacks and December 7, 2001, no fewer than 1,160 newspaper stories published across the nation referenced Pearl Harbor and September 11 in the same article.

[55] Jacob Alan Dickerson, "Framing Infamy: Media and Collective Memory of the Attack on Pearl Harbor." (2012): 24.

[56] Dickerson, Framing Infamy, 24.

[57] Pierre Nora, "From lieux de mémoire to realms of memory." *Realms of memory: Rethinking the French past* 1 (1996): xxiv.

[58] Nora, *Realms of Memory,* xxiv.

campaign in the Philippines representing a much larger defeat "in terms of casualties and scope of combat," Clayton Chun notes, the attack at Pearl Harbor "frequently overshadows the Philippines" as a more devastating military defeat.[59] Roosevelt's "fear that the damage [in the Philippines] might not be perceived as hitting close enough to home" guided his prioritization of Hawaii, given that few in the continental United States supported a military defence of remote territories.[60] "Yesterday," Roosevelt famously opened to Congress, "December 7, 1941 — a date which will live in infamy — the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked."[61] Few presidential addresses have endured in the collective memory like Roosevelt's declaration of war. Yet the president's iconic speech almost read entirely differently. Take, for example, the alterations made to his first draft: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in ~~world history~~ *infamy,* the United States of America was ~~simultaneously~~ *suddenly* and deliberately attacked."[62] With his alterations, Roosevelt ensured that December 7 would endure in the national collective memory as a symbol of injustice and deceit. Few knew better than the president himself that the facts rarely, if ever, spoke for themselves.

Suddenly

Roosevelt appreciated the power language wielded in shaping history. "No one knew better than he," remembered Robert Sherwood, "that once he had the microphone before him, he was speaking for the eternal record."[63] Roosevelt's emphasis on the sudden nature of the offensive, writes Rosenberg, ensured that the historical record started "with the surprise

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[59] Clayton KS. Chun, *The Fall of the Philippines 1941–42*. (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012): 5.

[60] Rosenberg, *A day which will live,* 14-5; Remote territories borrowed from Daniel Immerwahr, *How to hide an empire: A short history of the greater United States*. (Random House, 2019): 6.

[61] Roosevelt, Address to Congress.

[62] "Address to Congress – Declaring War on Japan." In "Franklin D. Roosevelt, Mater Speech File, 1898-1945. File no. 1400–A, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. Accessed Feb. 3, 2020. [emphasis my own]

[63] Robert Emmet Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An intimate history*. (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2017): 219.

attack on Pearl Harbor, establishing American military action as reactive and defensive."[64] In

actuality, America was already entangled in a warfare-of-kinds. By January 1941, writes

Edward Miller, America was engaged in "full-blooded financial warfare against Japan."[65]

The 1917 Trading with the Enemy Act "evolved into the ultimate U.S. weapon of financial

power," shrinking Japan's commercial sphere to "the yen bloc of its colonies and conquered

regions."[66] The financial freeze, Miller concludes, presented Japan with a Hobson's choice:

"suffer economic impoverishment, accede to American demands to yield territorial conquests

or go to war against the United States and its allies."[67] Japan chose the latter. To the Japanese,

the decision to attack was a response to economic sanctions imposed by Roosevelt and his

administration. To many Americans, however, Pearl Harbor was a sudden and deceitful

attack which demanded an unforgiving military response.

Infamy

Undeniably, the most famous aspect of Roosevelt's speech came with his declaration

of a "date which will live in infamy." The "infamy framing," writes Rosenberg, allowed

Roosevelt to summon "the nation to fight not just an enemy, but a treacherous people who

would deceitfully negotiate peace while preparing for a surprise war."[68] The framing of the

Japanese people as personally deceitful only bolstered American's understanding of their

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[64] Rosenberg, *A day which will live,* 15.

[65] Edward Miller, *Bankrupting the enemy: the US financial siege of Japan before Pearl Harbor*. (Naval Institute Press, 2012): 108

[66] Miller, *Bankrupting the enemy,* 8. The standard judgement of history, Miller argues, "is that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and launched the Pacific War to thwart American resistance of imperial conquests in East Asia." However, the financial freeze, he posits, was more important than any trade embargo. "It was an emasculation of Japan's laboriously accumulated international money reserves, imposed by Roosevelt invoking" the 1917 Trading with the Enemy Act. The financial freeze "isolated Japan economically from the outside world, voiding its monetary assets. Consent to buy goods in the United States, or in any other country that exported for dollars, was withheld by the United States with a parallel freeze by the British and Dutch empires."

[67] Miller *Bankrupting the enemy,* 1.

[68] Rosenberg, *A day which will live,* 12. Roosevelt's speech, Rosenberg observes, "drew power from its simplicity and highly national centric beginning… It is a story rooted not in geopolitics but a highly personalized language of retribution. It assured that any defeat of the United States by outsiders would become a prelude to a glorious victory."

cause as morally justified. "Avenge December 7" became a popular refrain on wartime propaganda posters.[69] If "suddenly" made the narrative simple, then "infamy" made it personal. The masterful framing of the conflict through Pearl Harbor injected the war with a sense of moral purpose, and assured Americans that when attacked, war was not only necessary, but justified. The notion of the good war, in this sense, began with the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

The endurance of the infamy frame demonstrates the power of language in defining historical moments. The framing of the bombing as a direct and unprovoked attack on American soil suited both past and present needs. For Roosevelt, a focus on the more conspicuous details of the event itself distracted from increasing hostilities precipitated by his administration's financial freeze of Japan. For the post-9/11 nation, the Pearl Harbor frame functioned as a reaffirming call to arms grounded in a common national identity. The infamy framing, in this sense, lent meaning to present circumstances, providing a common lexicon to tether past and present trials in the nation's history. As such, an *idea* of Pearl Harbor in the collective memory has long triumphed over its reality. It is an inherently human tendency, writes David Thelan, to "search for common memories to meet present needs and through a process absorb a negotiated meaning into ongoing concerns."[70] Romantic notions of a second good war guided American's understanding of a potential conflict in the Middle East: Pearl Harbor, Rosenberg adds, "provided the relatively uncomplicated call for national unity and personal commitment to war to the end against evil."[71] This was the ultimate lesson from Pearl Harbor and Roosevelt's speech that Americans carried with them — that the United States would fight to the end, not negotiate peace.

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[69] See the V&A's collection here: http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O101118/avenge-december-7-poster-perlin-bernard/

[70] David Thelan quoted in Betty Winfield, Barbara Friedman, and Vivara Trisnadi. "History as the metaphor through which the current world is viewed: British and American newspapers' uses of history following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks." *Journalism studies* 3, no. 2 (2002): 290.

[71] Rosenberg, *A date which will live,* 187.

Pearl Harbor in the Twenty-First Century

The dawn of the twenty-first century witnessed a renewal of interest in the past prompted by the discontinuity of a new millennium.[72] Change, writes Michael Kammen, "propels nostalgia, a quest for timelessness, which then offers opportunities to sell repackaged, imagined versions of the past."[73] With the release of Walt Disney Company's *Pearl Harbor* on May 25, 2001, the Pearl Harbor mythology returned to the fore of the national consciousness. [74] The film proved a commercial hit, opening to a domestic weekend gross of $75 million.[75] In a review for the *New York Times,* John Dower observed, *Pearl Harbor* "lingers in the mind as a paean to patriotic ardour and an imagined American innocence — beautifully choreographed, sweetened with romance, sanitized to an attractive level."[76] The film triggered a summer of nationwide nostalgia, a self-contained "memory boom" — prompting the release of a wide array of Pearl Harbor-related products, including books, websites and nostalgia products.[77] Pearl Harbor's memory "became so ubiquitous in American culture by the summer of 2001," Rosenberg remarks, "that a stranger to the planet might have assumed the bombs had just been dropped."[78] Meanwhile, as the nation looked back to old threats, the intelligence community scampered to prevent a new one.

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[72] Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch, eds. *Memory in mind and culture*. (Cambridge University Press, 2009): 9. A "memory boom" refers to the "renewed interest of historians, anthropologists and the general public in the collective construction of a common past."

[73] Michael Kammen, *Mystic chords of memory: The transformation of tradition in American culture*. (Vintage, 2011): 617.

[74] Roland Barthes, "Mythologies Hill and Wang." (*New York,* 1986): 142-3. Barthes notes that myth "does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification… In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts… it does away with all dialectics."

[75] Pearl Harbor. *Box Office Mojo.* Accessed Feb. 15, 2020. https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl543720961/weekend/?ref_=bo_rl_tab#tabs

[76] John W. Dower, "The Innocence of 'Pearl Harbor.' *The New York Times.* June 3, 2001. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/03/opinion/the-innocence-of-pearl-harbor.html.

[77] Rosenberg, *A date which will live,* 168.

[78] Rosenberg, *A date which will live*, 172.

The national mood sharply contrasted with what those in the intelligence community were calling the "summer of threat."[79] "The whole system was blinking red," recalled Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director George Tenet on the threat that al-Qaeda posed throughout the summer of 2001.[80] Indeed, as intelligence officials increasingly braced for the inevitability of an attack on American soil, the public harkened back to the triumphs of the nation's "Greatest Generation" in *Pearl Harbor*.[81] As Daniel Martinez notes, the film "created an audience anxious to learn," which surely primed the pump of Pearl Harbor related content released in anticipation of the event's sixtieth anniversary, which included more than twenty documentaries and nine major books.[82] The summer of 2001 also witnessed increased foot traffic to World War II memorial sites, a testament to the swelling nostalgia sweeping the nation prior to the attacks.[83] These seemingly disparate worlds — of nostalgia and threat — merged when al-Qaeda attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11.

Journalists played a key role in connecting the two.[84] Following the attacks, the nation's leading national newspapers, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, relied on the

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[79] The term the "summer of threat" derives from the 9/11 Commission Report. *The 9/11 commission report: Final report of the national commission on terrorist attacks upon the United States*. (Government Printing Office, 2011): 254.

[80] George Tenet quoted in the 9/11 Commission Report, 259.

[81] For more information on the heightened threat over the summer of 2001, see pages 254–98 of 9/11 Commission Report. In July 2001, an FBI agent reported a "coordinated effort by bin Laden" to send students to aviation schools in the United States. Meanwhile, in Minnesota, the FBI's Minneapolis field office were tracking Zacharias Moussaoui – a suspicious individual attending the Pan Am International Flight School in Eagan. Moussaoui, the field agent in Minnesota reported, was "an extremist preparing for some future act in the furtherance of radical fundamentalist goals." "I'm trying to keep someone from taking a plane and crashing it into the World Trade Center," the agent reported to headquarters.

[82] Daniel Martinez, "Shrugging off 'Pearl Harbor' inaccuracy." Honolulu Advertiser, 25 May 2001.

[83] Geoffrey M. White, "Disney's Pearl Harbor: National Memory at the Movies." *The Public Historian* 24, no. 4 (2002): 114-115.

[84] Anthony R. DiMaggio, *Selling war, selling hope: Presidential rhetoric, the news media, and US foreign policy since 9/11*. (SUNY Press, 2015): 4, 9. As Anthony DiMaggio notes, the manner in which "journalists package stories – with certain arguments and points of view disseminated at the expense of others – influences how Americans think about politics and guides their policy attitudes." This is particularly true of national media outlets, who benefit from widespread recognition, and "set" the agenda for smaller outlets.

Pearl Harbor analogy to explain the terrorist attacks.[85] *Time* magazine, too, published an

article calling for revenge through the memory of Pearl Harbor. "A day cannot live in infamy

without the nourishment of rage," Lance Morrow argued in *Time* on September 12, 2001:

"Let's have rage. What's needed is a unified, unifying, Pearl Harbor sort of purple American

fury, a ruthless indignation…. This is the moment of clarity. Let the civilized toughen up and

let the uncivilized take their chances in the game they started.[86] Morrow's rage reflected the

national mood. His argument, that America would once again wage war in the name of

civilization, framed the conflict in terms of a "clash of civilizations" — an attitude of national

exceptionalism, Slavoj Žižek argues, entrenched in the minds of many Americans. "Let us

recall the letter from the seven-year-old American girl whose father was a pilot fighting in

Afghanistan," writes Žižek:

> she wrote that — although she loved her father very much, she was ready to let
> him die, to sacrifice him for the country. When President Bush quoted these lines,
> they were perceived as a 'normal outburst' of American patriotism; let us conduct
> a simple mental experiment and imagine an Arab Muslim girl pathetically reciting
> into the camera the same words about her father fighting for the Taliban — we do
> not have to think for long about what our reaction would have been: morbid
> Muslim fundamentalism which does not even stop at the cruel manipulation and
> exploitation of children... Every feature attributed to the Other is already present
> at the heart of the USA. Murderous fanaticism? There are in the USA today more
> than two million Rightist populist 'fundamentalists' who also practice a terror of
> their own, legitimized by (their understanding of) Christianity… In the traumatic
> aftermath of September 11, when the old security seemed to be momentarily
> shattered, what could be more 'natural' than taking refuge in the innocence of a
> firm ideological identification?[87]

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[85] Winfield et al., "History as the metaphor," 297. The *Times* and *Post*, Winfield et al., note, led the conflation of Pearl Harbor and September 11 in the public discourse. While the London-based newspaper *The Times* dismissed the comparison as "absurd," observing that "the psychological impact will be far greater than that of Japan's destruction of the Pacific fleet and will reach far beyond America's borders," both the *Times* and *Post* "relied on Pearl Harbor as an appropriate historical comparison. The similarities included references to al-Qaeda's use of kamikaze pilots and the status of both targets as "beloved national symbols." It is important to note that, *The Times,* instead, pointed to the Soviet experience in Afghanistan as a cautionary tale for British and American troops if they were to enter Afghanistan. In contrast, Winfield et al. conclude, American newspapers "looked back for warning signs."

[86] Lance Morrow, "The Case for Rage and Retribution." *Time Magazine.* September 12, 2001.

[87] Slavoj Žižek. *Welcome to the desert of the real: Five essays on September 11 and related dates*. (Verso Trade, 2013): 43.

Žižek rightly notes that, for many Americans, misguided notions of the nation's exceptionalism guided a "clash of civilizations" framing of the necessary response to the terrorist attacks.[88] "When I saw the first building collapse, I felt like a true American for the first time," said Matt Sadewitz, a senior at Randolph High School on September 12, 2001. "Now I know how the men who enlisted because of Pearl Harbor felt."[89] In the construction of national identity, Duncan Bell writes, a sense of belonging derives from nationalist discourse — the ability to "understand oneself as located in a temporally extended narrative" that represents "the unfolding of time in such a way that the nation assumes a privileged and valorized role."[90] Pearl Harbor's enduring mythology provided young Americans with the language necessary to make sense of the terrorist attacks. In the *Dayton Daily News,* fourteen-year-old Leah Gaffney composed a poem comparing the two events:

Freedom itself was attacked this morning
By a faceless coward
Bush proclaimed to the nation
About the attacks
Hoping to catch
Whoever it was that paid us a visit
And killed many of us.
Many think of this day
As a Pearl Harbor of this generation.
September Eleventh Two Thousand One
Will be remembered forever
As a day of infamy
And many can only wonder
Is it over?
Or has this war
Just begun?

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[88] Žižek, *Welcome to the desert of the real,* 43-4. "On October 19," Žižek continues, "Bush himself had to concede that the most probable perpetrators of the anthrax attacks were not Muslim terrorists but America's own extreme Right Christian fundamentalists— again, does not the fact that acts first attributed to an external enemy may turn out to be acts perpetrated at the very heart of *l'Amerique pro-fonde* provide an unexpected confirmation of the thesis that the true clash is the clash within each civilization?" Žižek works not to imply a moral equivalence between the Taliban and the United States, but to signal the fallacy of the American exceptionalism narrative, one that Bush heavily relied upon to frame the war on terror, and a history that many young Americans looked to for meaning after the terrorist attacks.

[89] Jaclyn Friedlander, "New of Tragedy Stuns Randolph Students." *Daily Record,* Morristown, N.J. September 12, 2001.

[90] Duncan SA Bell, "Mythscapes: memory, mythology, and national identity." *The British journal of sociology* 54, no. 1 (2003): 69.

She added: "I put my heart and soul into this poem".[91] Students who had hitherto experienced Pearl Harbor from the comfort of desks grappled with the notion that they were now experiencing one of their own. Its memory figured as an ideological waypoint, emblematic of an American exceptionalism which Žižek argues was comforting, intoxicating and, ultimately, fictitious.[92]

Given the complications of waging war in the Middle East, perhaps Vietnam would have served as a more appropriate cautionary tale. Had Lyndon Johnson fully considered the manifold issues resulting from military intervention in the region, Richard Neustadt argues, he might have erred on the side of caution.[93] Post-Vietnam movies like Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* articulated the fallacy of America's military strength in light of its disregard for the nuances of warfare in Vietnam, and the challenges posed by a meandering and directionless war. If World War II was America's good war, then Vietnam was it's bad one: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" John Kerry famously posed to the U.S. Foreign Relations Committee on Vietnam on April 22, 1971.[94] The nation's failure in Vietnam stressed caution when waging war, no matter how righteous the cause. As the overwhelming early support for the war on terrorism indicated, however, peace was not what many in the public desired.[95] Indeed, the framing of the U.S. response to 9/11 as a *war* on terrorism was itself historically constructed. In November 2001, eighty-seven percent of the public understood that the "unconventionally defined war" might "drag on." [96] Perhaps this marks the greatest difference between Vietnam and the war on terrorism:

[91] Dale Huffman, "Writers Find Answers in Words." *Dayton Daily News.* October 6, 2001.

[92] Žižek, *Welcome to the desert of the real,* 44.

[93] Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential power and the modern presidents: The politics of leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan.* (Simon and Schuster, 1991): 179-181.

[94] John Kerry, "Vietnam Veterans Against the War." *The New Soldier* (1971).

[95] "Latest Summary: American Public Opinion and the War on Terrorism." *Gallup,* December 21, 2001. https://news.gallup.com/poll/5113/latest-summary-american-public-opinion-war-terrorism.aspx. When asked about their level of satisfaction over the war on terrorism in a December 14-16 Gallup poll, 92% of Americans expressed satisfaction over the progress made in Afghanistan.

[96] Pobst. "The Aftereffects of September 11: What the polls tell us." 103-4.

Americans largely agreed that the war on terror would be a long one and supported it nonetheless.[97]

New Frontiers: The Bush Administration and Pearl Harbor

In times of war, presidents benefit from a spike in public approval, and George W. Bush proved no exception.[98] The terrorist attacks crafted what Calvin Mackenzie terms a "government moment, a time for citizens to recognize and appreciate the services that government provides." Most importantly, Americans were listening to and trusting communications from their government officials.[99] Like Roosevelt, the administration framed the impending conflict through the memory of Pearl Harbor. "December 7 was a turning point for the world and September 11 should be no less so," Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz observed in a November 14, 2001 speech. "On 9/11, our generation received one of history's greatest wake-up calls. Like the 'Greatest Generation,' we must answer that call." [100] Exactly where that call would take the nation, or who it would be fighting against, remained vague. What was made abundantly clear, however, was that from the crucible of warfare, America would emerge as *the* protector of democracy and liberty on the world stage — as it did after World War II.

December 7, 2001. "What happened at Pearl Harbor was the start of a long and terrible war. Yet out of that surprise grew a steadfast resolve that made America freedom's defender," President Bush declared to an audience of crew members of the USS *Enterprise* on the sixtieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor's bombing. "And that mission, our great calling,

[97] Pobst. "The Aftereffects of September 11: What the polls tell us." 104.
[98] David Moore, "Bush Job Approval Highest in Gallup History." https://news.gallup.com/poll/4924/bush-job-approval-highest-gallup-history.aspx.
[99] "Post-9/11 Surge in Public Support of Government Reverses Course." Brookings Institution. May 30, 2002. https://www.brookings.edu/news-releases/post-911-surge-in-public-support-of-government-reverses-course/.
[100] Paul Wolfowitz remarks at the Fletcher Conference on November 14, 2001 quoted in Jim Garamone, "The Link Between September 11 and December 7." U.S. Department of Defence. https://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=44409.

continues to this hour, as the brave men and women of our military fight the forces of terror in Afghanistan and around the world."[101] Nowhere in his speech did Bush elaborate on the intricacies of the modern terrorist threat, nor did he discuss at any great length the battle with al-Qaeda in Nairobi, Tanzania or Yemen. Instead, he looked to Pearl Harbor on its anniversary to articulate the nation's global mission.[102] Doing so fashioned a common unity from national grief, signalling America's long-held duty as "freedom's defender" — a mission which started, but did not end, with the defeat of the axis powers.

The framing of the conflict as a continuation of the good war offered an inviolable moral defense for a swift and unrelenting military response, one that extended well beyond Afghanistan. America's new enemy, Bush argued one month later, was an "axis of evil" — Iran, Iraq and North Korea. The term, presidential speechwriter David Frum explains, was inspired by Roosevelt. "For FDR," Frum observed:

> Pearl Harbor was not only an attack — it was a warning of future and worse attacks from another, more dangerous enemy… no country on earth more closely resembled one of the old axis powers like present-day Iraq. And just as FDR saw in Pearl Harbor a premonition of even more terrible attacks from Nazi Germany, so September 11 had delivered an urgent warning of what Saddam Hussein could, and almost certainly would do with biological weapons. The more I thought about it, the more the relationship between terror organizations and the terror states resembled the Tokyo-Rome-Berlin Axis. [103]

The axis framing dangerously implied a sense of cooperation between al-Qaeda and the "axis" threat, as Graham Allison argues, "conceptually, the 'axis' suggested a relationship

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[101] "President Bush on Pearl Harbor." *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushtext_120701.html.

[102] Ronald R. Krebs and Jennifer K. Lobasz. "Fixing the meaning of 9/11: Hegemony, coercion, and the road to war in Iraq." *Security Studies* 16, no. 3 (2007): 433. Scholars have noted that, when discussing the war on terrorism and the nation's foreign policy strategy, Bush often employed the epideictic mode. Epideictic rhetoric, Krebs and Lobasz state, "explains a social world to make sense of some confusing or troubling event in terms of the audience's key values and beliefs." As such, "meaning is imparted, and circumstances defined: only secondarily does it seek to articulate a rational policy response."

[103] David Frum, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush.* (Random House, 2003): 233-34.

among entities that doesn't exist."[104] Indeed, in Frum's own words, his task was to find the language necessary to "go after Iraq."[105] As intended, the term seamlessly shifted the focus of the war on terrorism to new frontiers, while remaining firmly within the bounds of national exceptionalism.[106] The history of the good war not only helped Americans to understand the attacks themselves, but the national mission beyond them.

Had Americans fully understood the history behind the terrorist attacks, it would have been impossible to attribute them to anyone other than al-Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden. However, months into war with Iraq, the majority of the American public believed that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the terrorist attacks.[107] The reduction of September 11, like Pearl Harbor, to the event itself erased its broader context — a history that not only clarified who attacked America, but how it should respond. While the public demanded justice for those lost to the attacks, and rightly so, the pre-9/11 era in counterterrorism cautioned that conventional methods of war potentially emboldened bin Laden's cause, and contributed to support for his terrorist organization.

The *Longue Durée* of the War on Terrorism

In February 1998, Ali Soufan started his first rotation as a rookie agent at the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) field office in New York. An Arab-American born in Lebanon, Soufan originally applied to the bureau as a bet with his fraternity brothers: "they'll probably think it's a joke application" one taunted.[108] More importantly, however, the job afforded Soufan the opportunity to further his interest in the effects of nonstate actors on

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[104] Graham Allison quoted in Maura Reynolds, "Axis of Evil Rhetoric Said to Heighten Dangers." *Los Angeles Times,* January 21, 2003. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jan-21-na-axis21-story.html.

[105] Frum, *The Right Man,* 232-233.

[106] Lydia Saad, "'Axis of Evil' Countries Dominate U.S. Perceptions of Greatest Enemy." *Gallup,* February 22, 2007. https://news.gallup.com/poll/26653/axis-evil-countries-dominate-us-perceptions-greatest-enemy.aspx.

[107] Washington Post Poll: Saddam Hussein and the Sept. 11 Attacks." September 6, 2003. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/data082303.html.

[108]Ali Soufan, *The black banners: Inside the hunt for Al Qaeda*. (Penguin UK, 2011): 5.

global stability.[109] As a graduate student at Villanova University, he became fascinated with Osama bin Laden, a Saudi billionaire who sacrificed a life of luxury to fight alongside the mujahedeen in the Soviet-Afghan War.[110] Soufan noticed that bin Laden was growing increasingly hostile towards the United States, a hostility that culminated in his proclamation of jihad in 1996. "Terrorizing you, while you are carrying arms on our land, is a legitimate, reasonable and morally demanded duty," bin Laden warned the United States. "The youth know that the disgrace and shame that afflicted the Muslims, by occupying their sacred places, would not be removed except by jihad and explosives."[111] As early as 1996, bin Laden was launching sinister threats towards the United States. Soufan took notice.

Unable to find any literature on bin Laden when he started at the bureau, Soufan drafted a memorandum on the subject to his superiors, urging that they read bin Laden's recent fatwa calling upon Muslims to kill Americans irrespective of gender, age or civilian status. The memorandum caught the attention of Kevin Cruise, a member of the bureau's I-49 counterterrorism squad.[112] Published by an Arabic newspaper in London, the fatwa called for the murder of any American, anywhere on earth, "as the individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."[113] The direction highlighted the diffuse and highly ideological nature of al-Qaeda's mission. After introducing Soufan to the rest of the 1-49 squad, Cruise and his team agreed that an intensified focus on bin Laden was a necessity.[114] The fatwa, the group concluded, "was a serious warning."[115]

Three months later, bin Laden called a press conference from al-Qaeda's Jihadwol training camp in Khost, Afghanistan. In attendance was John Miller, an American journalist

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[109] Soufan, *The black banners,* 9.
[110] Soufan, *The black banners,* 10.
[111] Osama bin Laden, "Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places." https://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa-1996.
[112] Soufan, *The black banners,* 14.
[113] 9/11 Commission Report, 47.
[114] Soufan, *The black banners,* 13-4.
[115] Soufan, *The black banners,* 14.

who arranged to interview the al-Qaeda leader for ABC News. Before the interview, Miller was told that bin Laden's answers would not be translated back to him. "If the answers are not translated now, how can I ask follow-up questions?" Miller asked.

"Oh, that will not be a problem," an aide responded, "there will be no follow-up questions."

True to his fatwa, bin Laden explained to Miller in Arabic, "We do not differentiate between those dressed in military uniforms and civilians… they are all targets… It is our duty to lead people to the light."[116]

Once the interview concluded, Miller — unable to understand bin Laden's answers — sought out his translator Ali, and asked: "So, do we have a story? Please tell me it wasn't just an hour of 'Praise Allah' bullshit."

"We have a very good story," Ali replied. "He was looking right into your face and saying that you — the Americans — would be going home from the Middle East in coffins and boxes."

Miller paused. "So, you're telling me he's promising genocide and I'm nodding like an asshole?"

"Yes," Ali replied, smiling.[117] Miller's sense of humour betrayed the solemnity of the situation — bin Laden had once again reiterated his desire to attack America. This time, he addressed the American public directly.

Back at the field office in New York, Soufan was raising the alarm. "That's it, that's the third warning. First there was the declaration of jihad, then the fatwa, and now he's going straight to the American people. I think it's a warning that al-Qaeda is about to attack. We need to be prepared," he cautioned Cruise.[118] Only in retrospect would agents learn that

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[116] John Miller, "Greetings, America. My Name is Osama Bin Laden." *Frontline.* Excerpted from Miller's article in *Esquire,* February 1, 1999.
https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/miller.html
[117] Miller, John. "Greetings, America. My Name is Osama Bin Laden." *Frontline.*
[118] Soufan, *The black banners,* 14.

embedded in Miller's interview were subtle hints at al-Qaeda's impending terror operation in East Africa. Over his shoulder, bin Laden inconspicuously pinned a world map with Africa in clear view.[119] This tactic would become a hallmark of al-Qaeda's future media communications: bin Laden had a penchant for theatricality and showmanship.[120] Yet at the time of the interview, he remained largely anonymous to the American public. As Miller later recalled of the encounter: "nobody wanted [the interview]… they couldn't understand that it was a big deal… because nobody really knew who bin Laden was in the general public."[121] Instead, the domestic media were engrossed in the emerging Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, which dominated the national conversation throughout 1998. To an uninterested American public, Miller concluded, bin Laden remained "just another Arab terrorist."[122]

In the early hours of August 7, 1998, President Clinton awoke to the news that the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania had been attacked in near-simultaneous bombings. The attacks marked a significant shift in al-Qaeda's activity. As Salim Hamdan, bin Laden's personal driver, later recalled, "[it] was the first time that bin Laden was essentially going face-to-face with the Americans."[123] The East Africa operation showcased the sophisticated and transnational capabilities of the al-Qaeda network. Two Nissan Atlas trucks, packed with two thousand pounds of TNT, ammonium nitrate, and aluminium powder were detonated just a few minutes apart at embassies over five hundred miles apart in Nairobi

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[119] Lawrence Wright, *The looming tower: Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11*. (Alfred a Knopf Incorporated, 2006): 300. This map was, Lawrence Wright concludes, an "unremarked clue" of the impending al-Qaeda operation in East-Africa.

[120] Miller, "Greetings, America." *Frontline.* Miller recounted his experiences with bin Laden and his showmanship when he met the al-Qaeda leader for the first time: "Just then, the gunfire erupted. Bin Laden's convoy arrived. Now the show that was being staged for us was in full tilt, and we had no camera with which to record it. Bin Laden's cameraman handed Bennett the Panasonic. Bennett started taping. That's when the kid started shooting in my ear. Then he ran alongside Bennett and was firing within an inch of his ear, too, as he walked backward with this crappy camera, taping bin Laden's arrival."

[121] John Miller interview with Inside Today, Newseum. "Inside Today's FBI: Fighting Crime in the Age of Terror."

[122] Miller, "Greetings, America." *Frontline.*

[123] Soufan, *The black banners,* 78-80.

and Dar es Salaam.[124] "Multiple, simultaneous suicide bombings" were "a new and risky strategy," Richard Wright notes, but they were also effective — "a showy act of mass murder with no conceivable effect on American policy except to provoke a massive response."[125] Bin Laden was hoping, Wright adds, to provoke an aggressive military response in Afghanistan, which was "already being called the graveyard of empires."[126] Upon hearing of the attacks, Assistant United States Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald remarked, "now it begins."[127]

On August 20, 1998, bin Laden got his wish when the United States launched Operation Infinite Reach, which accentuated the pitfalls of conventional warfare as a response to al-Qaeda's attacks. On August 20, 1998 — just weeks after the bombings in Kenya and Tanzania — a series of cruise missile attacks were launched towards various al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan, suspected of producing XV nerve gas for bin Laden.[128] Of particular interest was the Farouk training camp near Khost where, through intercepts of bin Laden's satellite telephone, the CIA determined bin Laden was headed. However, at the last minute, he pivoted for Kabul. Ultimately, the three quarters of a billion-dollar military campaign failed to kill a single high-ranking al-Qaeda official.[129]

Worse still, the failed military operation exacerbated anti-American sentiment throughout the region. According to Wright, Operation Infinite Reach established bin Laden as a "symbolic figure of resistance, not just in the Muslim world but wherever America… had made itself unwelcome."[130] Most experts agree that the attempt to develop "a credible

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[124] Arie Perliger and Matthew M. Sweeney, "United States-Taliban, al-Qaeda, and ISIS." in *Deterring Terrorism,* (Routledge, 2018): 248.

[125] Wright, *Looming Tower,* 309.

[126] Wright, *Looming Tower,* 309.

[127] Wright, *Looming Tower,* 309.

[128] Adam Dolnik, "Justice Beyond Question? Military Responses to International Terrorism and Just War Theory." *Perspectives* 18 (2002): 28.

[129] Wright, *Looming Tower,* 323.

[130] Wright, *Looming Tower,* 323-4. When bin Laden's voice "came crackling across a radio transmission – 'by the grace of God, I am alive,'" Wright notes, "the forces of anti-Americanism had found their

deterrence against al-Qaeda" with targeted cruise missiles failed.[131] Indeed, perhaps the greatest takeaway from the operation was that a war of attrition would only promote bin Laden's cult-like anti-Western appeal, while the United States footed the bill. The organization relied upon a religious fanaticism that transcended the parameters of person or place.

The response did little to temper al-Qaeda's determination to wreak terror. On October 12, 2000, two al-Qaeda operatives, Ibrahim al-Thawr and Abdullah al-Misawa, prepared to strike America for a second time. Wielding a small fibreglass fishing boat packed with explosives, the operatives' target was the USS *Cole,* a guided-missile destroyer refuelling at the Tawahi harbour in Aden, Yemen. Running ahead of schedule, the *Cole* crew reconvened for an early lunch while security topside awaited the arrival of a third and final trash boat — the last of its chores.[132] This came as welcome news to Commanding Officer Kirk Lippold, who was anxious to return to sea where he knew the destroyer was safest.[133] And so, when Thawr and Misawa approached their gargantuan target, they exchanged friendly waves and smiles with those topside anticipating the final trash boat.[134] Minutes later, Lippold, who had retired to his office to tackle a stack of arduous paperwork, was lifted by the impact of a violent explosion. In total, the attack killed seventeen sailors and injured a further thirty-seven.[135]

In disbelief, officers on-board the *Cole* speculated over the possibility of an oil explosion. The sheer force of impact, however, indicated to Lippold that the *Cole* had been

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champion. Those Muslims who had objected to the slaughter of innocents in the embassies in East Africa were cowed by the popular support for this man whose defiance of America now seemed blessed by divine favor. Even in Kenya and Tanzania, Wright concludes, "children would be spotted wearing bin Laden t-shirts." Not only did this signal the dangers of aggressive military intervention in the Middle East, but it hinted at the broader appeal al-Qaeda held across East Africa and the Middle East.

[131] Perliger and Sweeney, United States-Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS, 248-49.
[132] Kirk Lippold, *Front Burner: Al Qaeda's Attack on the USS Cole*. Public Affairs, (2013): 46.
[133] Lippold, *Front Burner,* 46.
[134] Lippold, *Front Burner,* 46.
[135] Lippold, *Front Burner,* 169.

attacked. He immediately called Fifth Fleet Tactical Flag Command Center in Bahrain and

reported "an OPREP-3, Pinnacle, Front Burner Report": OPREP-3 meant his report would

reach the highest levels of command; Pinnacle signalled a matter of national-level media

attention; Front Burner indicated an attack on American Forces. In no uncertain terms,

Lippold believed the attack was an act of war on the United States.[136] The bombing marked a

significant victory in al-Qaeda's war on American modernity. For bin Laden, the symbolic

significance of his carefully orchestrated David-versus-Goliath attack was cause for

celebration. Emboldened by the *Cole'*s decimation, he organized a spontaneous wedding for

his son, Mohammad. There, his men sang:

> *Our men are in revolt, Our men are in revolt. We will not regain our*
> *homeland. Nor will our shame be erased except through blood and fire. On*
> *and on it goes. On and on it goes.[137]*

The conflict with al-Qaeda in East Africa and Asia captured the global scope of the

terrorist organization. After the attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, American intelligence

officials learned of an al-Qaeda switchboard operated by a jihadi named Ahmed al-Hada in

Yemen. The telephone connected a global network of operatives located in Afghanistan,

Yemen, Malaysia, Kenya and Europe.[138] The World Trade Center facet of the operation was

led by the "Hamburg cell" based in Germany, which included Mohammad Atta, Ramzi

Binalshibh, Marwan al Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah.[139] Soufan's first investigation into al-Qaeda

included a figure named Khalid al-Fawwaz, who first established the Nairobi cell before

being sent to London by bin Laden to run an operation in the United Kingdom.[140] While the

Japanese bombers at Pearl Harbor carried the recognizable symbol of the rising sun on their

planes, al-Qaeda donned no such insignia, and operated in covert cells around the globe. The

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[136] Lippold, *Front Burner,* 60.
[137] United States v. Zacarias Moussaoui Criminal No. 01-455-A (2006).
[138] 9/11 Commission Report, 181.
[139] 9/11 Commission Report, 163-4.
[140] Soufan, *The black banner,* 42, 99-103.

"identification problem" proved to be an enduring thorn in the nation's side, given that the enemy was impossible to differentiate from innocent civilians.[141] While the majority of Americans supported a strong military response to the attacks, ideological warfare demanded a different approach.[142]

The notion after 9/11 that America should, as one construction worker from Bradenton, Florida put it, "Find out whoever did it and wipe 'em off the map," was complicated by the fact that al-Qaeda's influence spanned the entire globe.[143] To defeat the terrorist organization, Soufan concluded in his memoir, the nation would have to operate on knowledge, not fear:

> People ask what is the most important weapon we have against al-Qaeda, and I reply, "Knowledge." This is true in anything from deciding how to interrogate a suspect—whether to torture him or to outwit him to get information—to dealing with rogue states: do we simply resort to force, or do we first try to understand their thought processes and internal divisions and try to manipulate them? It's the difference between acting out of fear and acting out of knowledge. Our greatest successes against al-Qaeda have come when we understood how they recruited, brainwashed, and operated, and used our knowledge to outwit and defeat them. Our failures have come when we instead let ourselves be guided by ignorance, fear, and brutality.[144]

While a certain comfort derived from comparisons to Pearl Harbor and the idea of an unrelenting military victory in the Middle East, it contradicted the opinions of experts like Soufan. The disconcerting reality of the situation was that an ideology could not be defeated through bombs alone. Unfortunately, however, fear proved a more valuable currency to the Bush administration.

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[141] Perliger and Sweeney, United States -Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS, 255.
[142] Huddy, Feldman, Capelos, and Provost. "The consequences of terrorism: Disentangling the effects of personal and national threat." 485. See also: David Moore, David Moore, "Bush Job Approval Highest in Gallup History," *Gallup,* September 24, 2001. https://news.gallup.com/poll/4924/bush-job-approval-highest-gallup-history.aspx. One Gallup Poll indicated that support for a military response to the terrorist attacks sat at a remarkably high 89%.
[143] Infield, "Attack reverberates around the nation: Many Americans expressed fear as buildings closed." *Philadelphia Inquirer.* September 12, 2001.
[144] Soufan, *the Black Banners,* 202.

Conclusion

The memory of Pearl Harbor provided Americans with a modicum of comfort after the 9/11 attacks. Journalists, politicians and everyday Americans drew upon a collective mythology to essentialize foreign policy debates through a victorious and triumphant national past. Romanticized notions of the good war reminded Americans of their exceptionalism, and emboldened calls for a second good war to defeat terrorism. This negated the importance of a far more proximate and educational history — that of the *longue durée* of the war on terrorism in East Africa and Asia. The costly failure of deterrence efforts in Afghanistan signalled the inefficacy of conventional methods of warfare against al-Qaeda. Indeed, past military failures warned that an aggressive military response in the Middle East could further destabilize the region and increase support for Osama bin Laden. The comforts provided by the national collective memory, in this sense, erased important lessons for the nation moving forward.

Many came to view 9/11 as a fundamental break from previous events. It was not. It did, however, mark a significant escalation in al-Qaeda's ongoing war of terror. Separating 9/11 from a history of fundamentalist hostility in the Middle East, dating back to bin Laden's fatwa in 1996, generated considerable public confusion over who orchestrated the attacks.[145] This allowed for an expansion of the unilateralist Bush Doctrine beyond the narrow constraints of al-Qaeda and Afghanistan.[146] The Bush Doctrine, set forth in the 2002 National

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[145] As I discuss at greater length in Chapter 2, a remarkable sixty-nine percent of Americans believed that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein played a role in the terrorist attacks, per a Washington Post poll. Washington Post Poll: Saddam Hussein and the Sept.11 Attacks." https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/data082303.html.

[146] Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush doctrine." *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 3 (2003): 365. The Bush doctrine, Jervis notes, consists of four key elements: "a strong belief in the importance of a state's domestic regime in determining its foreign policy and the related judgement that this is an opportune time to transform international politics; the perception of great threats that can be defended only by new and vigorous policies, most notably preventative war; a willingness to act unilaterally; and, as a cause and a summary of these beliefs, an overriding sense that peace and stability require the United States to assert its primacy in world politics."

Security Strategy, stipulated that, "To forestall or prevent… hostile acts by our adversaries, the U.S. will, if necessary, act pre-emptively."[147] A belief that the United States should play the preeminent role in securing democracy on the world stage guided the nation to a pre-emptive war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, despite Hussein playing no role in the terrorist attacks. The alarm generated by 9/11 opened new opportunities to reconfigure America's global standing: for Bush and his advisers, the war on terrorism was a good one indeed.

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[147] George W. Bush, *The national security strategy of the United States of America*. Executive Office of The President Washington DC, 2002.

CHAPTER II

NEXT STOP SADDAM: THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, 9/11 AND THE IRAQ WAR

Smoking Guns and Mushroom Clouds

The terror attacks transformed the complexion of Bush's presidency. Despite Tenet's warning of the increased threat bin Laden posed to the United States throughout the summer of 2001, the president's attention remained fixed on delivering a primary campaign promise, a substantial tax cut. For Bush, terrorism was something of a non-issue.[1] "I didn't feel that sense of urgency," he later explained to Bob Woodward, "my blood was not nearly as boiling."[2] The attacks thrust Bush into an unanticipated wartime presidency defined by his administration's global response to the terror attacks. The shocking footage of planes colliding with the World Trade Center — *the* quintessential symbol of global economic power — shattered illusions of American invulnerability to threats waged in distant lands.[3] The sobering reality of the attacks, that even American cities could fall prey to a barbarism hitherto unimagined, propelled international terrorism to the fore of the national consciousness.

Throughout his presidential campaign, Bush set forth a modest foreign policy agenda. "I'm not so sure the role of the United States is to go around the world and say this is the way it's got to be," Bush claimed at the second presidential debate at Wake Forest University on October 11, 2000. "I think [we] must be humble and must be proud and confident of our values, but humble in how we treat nations that are figuring out how to chart their own

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[1] *The 9/11 commission report,* 341.
[2] Bob Woodward, *Plan of attack*. (Simon and Schuster, 2004): 24.
[3] James P. Pfiffner, "President George W. Bush and his war cabinet." *Foreign Policy Bulletin* 14, no. 1 (2003): 290. To "plan the administration's response to the terrorist attacks," Pfiffner writes, "Bush assembled his 'War Cabinet,'" which included Cheney, Rice, Powell, Rumsfeld and George Tenet.

course."[4] Future national security adviser Condoleezza Rice stressed a similarly laissez-faire policy in an issue of *Foreign Affairs* months prior: "The first line of defence should be a clear and classic statement of deterrence — if they [Iraq] do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt will bring national obliteration."[5] Any reassurance provided by the 'mutually assured destruction' policy eroded after the terrorist attacks, which loomed as a reminder of the threat hostile regimes posed to the nation. The attacks drastically altered Bush's position on foreign affairs — particularly in relation to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. "September the 11th changed the strategic thinking," Bush remarked at a press conference on Iraq shortly before his declaration of war. "It used to be that we could think that you could contain a person like Hussein, that oceans would protect us from his type of terror." The statement appealed to fear more than anything else. "September 11," Bush concluded, "should say to the American people that we're now a battlefield."[6]

There was little doubt that, when capable, Hussein was willing to exact untold cruelty upon his own people. In the Iraqi city of Halabja in 1988, Hussein killed an estimated five-thousand citizens in a poison gas attack — seventy-five percent of whom were women and children.[7] While UN sanctions imposed after the Persian Gulf War appeared to demilitarize the regime, apprehension persisted over Hussein's aspiration to develop nuclear and chemical armaments. In a speech to the UN General Assembly in 2002, Bush charged that Hussein broke his pledge to halt Iraq's weapons program by producing "tens of thousands of litres of anthrax and other deadly biological agents."[8] Fears of a second, more lethal attack on the

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[4] "October 11, 2000 Debate. The Second Gore-Bush Debate." *Commission on Presidential Debates.* https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-11-2000-debate-transcript/
[5] Rice quoted in Christopher Cerf, *The Iraq war reader: history, documents, opinions*. (Simon and Schuster, 2003): 421.
[6] "Transcript: Bush's press conference on Iraq." *The Guardian,* March 7, 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/07/usa.iraq1.
[7] "Thousands die in Halabja gas attack." *BBC News,* March 16, 1988. http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/16/newsid_4304000/4304853.stm.
[8] "George Bush's speech to the UN General assembly." *The Guardian*, September 12, 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/sep/12/iraq.usa3.

nation, this time orchestrated by Hussein, generated a renewed sense of urgency over the Iraq

question. In a televised address on October 8, 2002, Bush reasoned:

> While there are many dangers in the world, the threat from Iraq stands alone
> because it gathers the most serious dangers of our age in one place… Iraq's
> weapons of mass destruction are controlled by a murderous tyrant, who has
> already used chemical weapons to kill thousands of people… Facing clear
> evidence of peril we cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun that could
> come in the form of a mushroom cloud."[9]

The fear generated by the terrorist attacks allowed Bush and his advisers to reconfigure

relations with Iraq: a policy of deterrence quickly shifted to pre-emptive warfare. Prior to the

attacks, administration officials believed that a war with Iraq would serve the national

interest, as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld argued to Condoleezza Rice on July 27,

2001, "ousting Hussein" would "much-improve" the United States' stature in the Middle

East.[10] The war on terrorism opened new avenues to legitimately strike at Saddam and extend

American hegemony under the guise of humanitarian interventionism — from its very

inception, Saddam was a primary target. What was good for America, the Bush Doctrine

purported, was good for the world.

The War on What, by Whom?

"A little inaccuracy sometimes saves tons of explanation."
Saki, *The Square Egg,* 1924

On the evening of the attacks, Bush convened his "war cabinet" to discuss his

administration's response to the day's events. The nation was at war "with a new and

different kind of enemy," Bush determined, and the solution was the total elimination of

"terrorism as a threat to our way of life."[11] This started with al-Qaeda's safe haven,

Afghanistan, but, as Bush stressed in his speech to the nation that evening, did not end

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[9] "George Bush's speech to the UN General assembly." *The Guardian.*
[10] US Defense Department Memo from Donald Rumsfeld to Condoleezza Rice, "Iraq," July 27, 2001. In Richard Hass, "War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars." (Simon and Schuster, 2009): 181.
[11] *9/11 Commission report*, 330-331.

there.[12] Bush wondered whether Hussein might have played a role in the attacks, citing Iraq's support for Palestinian suicide terrorists.[13] Key members of Bush's counsel favoured pre-emptive war to oust Hussein, irrespective of the dictator's role in the terrorist attacks. Chief among them was Dick Cheney, Bush's vice president.

For Cheney, it was imperative that the administration's response to the attacks reflect the novel and growing threat of international terrorism.[14] Cheney was unlike any vice president before him. He enjoyed unprecedented authority as Bush's enforcer, presiding over important decisions within the administration, while acting as a "self-appointed examiner of worst-case scenarios."[15] In areas where Bush struggled, particularly foreign policy, he often deferred to Cheney, who served as secretary of defence under his father, George H. W. Bush.[16] Prior to assuming the presidency, Bush confided in Condoleezza Rice — with whom he struck a close relationship during his election campaign — "I don't have any idea about foreign affairs. This isn't what I do."[17] To proactively combat the terrorist threat, Cheney believed that America should not be required to wait for a "smoking gun," advocating instead for a pre-emptive military strategy requiring a lower standard of proof.[18] He had long expressed interest in targeting Iraq, harbouring "a deep sense of unfinished business" from

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[12] *9/11 Commission Report,* 334. The President's speech to the nation reflected the necessarily broad scope discussed in his meetings with the War Council. The directive, the *9/11 Commission Report* found, "extended to a global war on terrorism, not just al-Qaeda. It also incorporated the President's determination not to distinguish between terrorists and those who harbor them. It included a determination to use military force if necessary, to end al-Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan. […] The United States would strive to eliminate all terrorist networks and prevent them from acquiring weapons of mass destruction." In his speech to the nation that evening, Bush stressed: "The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." At this point, Bush knew that a ground invasion of Afghanistan was necessary but remained focused on Iraq as a potential target in the second wave of the war on terrorism. "Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation," Remembering 9/11 Archive. https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/september11/archive.html.
[13] *9/11 Commission Report,* 334.
[14] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 30.
[15] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 30.
[16] Robert Draper, *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush*. (New York: Free Press, 2007): 114.
[17] Bob Woodward, *State of denial*. (Simon and Schuster, 2006): 6. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 23.
[18] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 30.

the first Gulf War.[19] The vice president, observed Woodward, "was beyond hell-bent for action against Saddam. It was as if nothing else existed."[20]

Equally eager to target Hussein was Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Cheney's long-time friend and former colleague during the Ford presidency.[21] Together, Cheney and Rumsfeld forged a formidable coalition. "There was a line from the vice president directly to the secretary of defense, and it's as though there was a private line between those two," recalled Richard Clarke, a member of the National Security Council.[22] This posed a significant challenge to the less experienced Condoleezza Rice, who served as national security adviser during Bush's first term. "She knew that if she took on Rumsfeld or Cheney, or, more often than not, both of them… she would be distancing herself from the president," recalled Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Colin Powell.[23] Above all else, Rice desired a close relationship with Bush, as a friend of hers observed: "I think she just really likes Bush as a person… she's still sort of starstruck… policy wasn't as important as that friendship."[24] This, Thomas Preston argues, "meant that the national security council

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[19] Bob Woodward, "Cheney Was Unwavering in Desire to Go to War." *The Washington Post,* April 20, 2004. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2004/04/20/cheney-was-unwavering-in-desire-to-go-to-war/396ae82a-4c87-4203-b8d9-46f326d32c48/. Brent Scowcroft offers a similar perspective on Cheney's Gulf War hangover, observing: "The real anomaly is Cheney… I consider Cheney a good friend. But Dick, I don't know anymore… I don't think [he] is a neo-con but allied to the core of neo-cons that… thought we made a mistake in the first Gulf War, that we should have finished the job." Quoted in: Jeffrey Goldberg, "Breaking Ranks: What Turned Brent Scowcroft Against the Bush Administration?" New Yorker, October 31, (2005): 57.

[20] Bob Woodward, *Bush at War,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002): 346. See also: Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 64.

[21] Stephen Benedict Dyson, "Stuff Happens": Donald Rumsfeld and the Iraq War." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5, no. 4 (2009): 334. Instead of engaging in debate with "the rest of the principals" in the administration, Dyson notes, Rumsfeld "sought to secure a direct line to Bush." "He had differences with Colin and no real respect for Rice whatsoever, so he wanted to be in charge of everything. So, he had private meetings with the president, excluded all of them, and told the president what he thought," a long-time associate of Rumsfeld's explained.

[22] "Interview with Richard Clarke." *Frontline,* January 23, 2006. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/darkside/interviews/clarke.html. Walter LaFeber adds, Rumsfeld owed his job to Cheney, who "helped convince Bush to hire Rumsfeld." See Walter LaFeber, "The rise and fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine." *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (2009): 80-81.

[23] Author interview with Lawrence Wilkerson in Dyson, "Donald Rumsfeld and the Iraq War," 333.

[24] Interview with senior Bush official in Thomas Preston, *Pandora's Trap: Presidential decision making and blame avoidance in Vietnam and Iraq.* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011): 76.

wouldn't play the… devil's advocacy role it performed in other administrations. It meant that important decisions on Iraq… were quite narrowly focused and driven by the dominant views of Bush's inner circle."[25] Benefiting from a highly amenable national security adviser, Cheney and Rumsfeld commanded the lion's share of the president's time and attention on Iraq.[26] As Deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley concluded, "The real work was being done upstairs with the president, Cheney and Rumsfeld."[27]

As early as May 31, 2001, Rumsfeld and his neoconservative deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, were pushing for an invasion of Iraq. Wolfowitz, writes Woodward, "believed it was possible to send in the military to overrun and seize Iraq's southern oil fields, which had about two-thirds of Iraq's oil production, and establish a foothold… [From there] support would be given to the anti-Saddam opposition, which would rally the rest of the country and overthrow the dictator." Wolfowitz, Woodward observed, "was like a drum that would not stop."[28] Within the White House, Wolfowitz became the "neoconservatives' leading voice," advocating for the use of military force to "extend democracy" and achieve national goals: "the best democracy program ever invented," one neoconservative boasted, "is the United States Army."[29] The neoconservative vision took particular interest in Iraq, where, Walter LaFeber writes, neoconservatives believed "democracy could take over not only to topple Saddam but also protect the more democratic Israel."[30] Wolfowitz viewed Iraq as the ultimate

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[25] Preston, *Pandora's Trap*, 73.
[26] Scott McClellan quoted in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 58. Together, Rumsfeld and Cheney dominated the president's time. Colin Powell's deputy, Richard Armitage, was acutely aware of this, noting: "I had become aware that Secretary Rumsfeld was spending a lot of time with the president." In his interviews with other Bush White House officials, Preston notes, "one individual is seen clearly to stand out in terms of both his influence with the president and his ability to shape policy on Iraq" – Dick Cheney. The pair "spent considerable time together in private meetings, their discussion largely kept confidential."
[27] Stephen Hadley quoted in Woodward, *State of Denial,* 230.
[28] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 21-5. Wolfowitz, writes Woodward, was the "intellectual godfather and fiercest advocate for toppling [Hussein]." Despite opposition within the administration, chiefly from Colin Powell. Wolfowitz "and his group of neoconservatives," Woodward observed, "were rubbing their hands over the ideas which were being presented as 'draft plans.'"
[29] LaFeber, "The rise and fall of Colin Powell," 79.
[30] LaFeber, "The rise and fall of Colin Powell," 80.

source of the "terrorist problem," and, according to Colin Powell, saw Bush's war on terrorism "as one way of using the event [9/11] as a way to deal with the Iraq problem."[31] In this, Wolfowitz was not alone.

Rumsfeld, too, recognized opportunity in tragedy. Soon after American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon, Rumsfeld contemplated the possibility of invading Iraq, jotting in his personal notes: "Hit S.H. [Hussein] @ same time – not only UBL [bin Laden]."[32] When Bush reconvened his war council at Camp David on September 15, 2001, both Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld suggested Iraq be the target in the first wave of the war on terrorism. "Even if there was a ten percent chance that Hussein was behind the 9/11 attack," Wolfowitz wrote to Rumsfeld, "maximum priority should be place on eliminating that threat."[33] Despite "no compelling case" existing that "Iraq had either planned or perpetrated the attacks," recounted Richard Clarke, "I think we knew pretty much [the week of the attacks] that the probability of finding a justification for going to war with Iraq was high on the agenda."[34] "I realized with almost a sharp physical pain," Clarke recounted in his memoir *Against All Enemies*, "that Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were going to try and take advantage of this national tragedy to promote their agenda about Iraq. Since the beginning of the administration, indeed well before, they had been pressing for war."[35] For Cheney, Rumsfeld

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[31] *9/11 Commission Report*, 335.

[32] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 25.

[33] *9/11 Commission Report,* 335-336.

[34] Interview with Richard Clarke, *Frontline.* Bush, Clarke remembered, ordered: "'Saddam! Saddam! See if there's a connection to Saddam!' And this wasn't 'See if there's a connection with Iran, and while you're at it, do Iraq, and while you're at it, do the Palestinian Islamic group.' It wasn't 'Do due diligence.' It wasn't 'Have an exhaustive review.' It was 'Saddam, Saddam.' I read that pretty clearly, that that was the answer he wanted. I said to him, 'We have already done that research prior to the attack'— in fact, we'd done it a couple of times — 'and there's nothing there.' And the facial expression back was, 'That wasn't the right answer.' So, I said, 'Well, but we will do it again.' And we asked CIA to do it again. CIA did it again, came up with the same answer. That answer was written up and handed to the president by George Tenet in one of his morning meetings, and it said, 'For the third or fourth time, we've gone back to look at the relationship between Al Qaeda and Iraq, and there is no real cooperation between those two.'" Despite no evidence existing of a link, Clarke makes clear that Hussein was at the fore of the administration's agenda after the September 11 attacks.

[35] Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror.* (New York: Free Press, 2004): 30.

and Wolfowitz, whom Wilkerson described as an "unholy conglomeration of decision making that haunts us still," Iraq had long been atop the foreign policy agenda.[36]

Unlike his colleagues in the War Cabinet, Secretary of State Colin Powell opposed military intervention in the Middle East.[37] Powell, however, shared a volatile relationship with Bush. "A sense of competition hovered in the background of their relationship," Woodward observed, "a low-voltage pulse nearly always present."[38] "There was some fear of [Powell], politically… his polls were in the stratosphere, like Mother Teresa's," remembered Wilkerson. "They [Bush and Cheney] were jealous of that."[39] Despite calls for Powell to run for president in 2000, his endorsement of Bush legitimized the Texan as a "competent leader in foreign policy and military affairs," an area of scrutiny throughout Bush's election campaign.[40] Unsurprisingly, writes LaFeber, Bush was unenthusiastic "about giving much credit for the victory to Powell."[41] The president's ego, which fuelled an "uncomfortable relationship" between the two, distanced the distinguished Powell from his inner ranks.[42] Unlike his colleagues, Powell later disclosed to Wilkerson, he was far less willing to "rub the president's cowboy attitude."[43] His exclusion owed much to Bush's desire to project confidence as a wartime leader, despite his superficial grasp of foreign policy issues.

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[36] Author interview Lawrence Wilkerson, June 26, 2008 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 28. On the alliances within the administration, Wilkerson remarked: "I think there was an unholy alliance between hyper nationalists like Cheney and Rumsfeld, neo-cons like Wolfowitz… although Paul is a category all by himself… I think that all came together in this unholy conglomeration of decision making that haunts us still."

[37] Woodward, "Cheney Was Unwavering in Desire to Go to War." *The Washington Post.* In a conversation with Paul Wolfowitz, documented by Bob Woodward, Dick Cheney remarked: "Colin always had major reservations about what we were trying to do." On Wolfowitz's nation building vision for Iraq prior to the attacks, Powell assessed: "This is lunacy." See Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 22.

[38] Woodward, "Cheney Was Unwavering in Desire to Go to War." *The Washington Post.*

[39] Author interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, June 26, 2008 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 64.

[40] Robert E. Denton, and Robert E. Denton Jr, eds. *The 2004 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005): 109.

[41] LaFeber, "The rise and fall of Colin Powell," 80.

[42] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 79.

[43] Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 59. For more on Bush's own understanding of himself as a cowboy, and the ties that had to his faith, see Joseph Cook, "Good for Whom? The Framing of Conflict in Post-9/11 America, 2001-2004," 55-6.

By his own admission, Bush lacked foreign policy knowledge, a shortcoming many within the administration were privy to. "It is true that [Bush] was a novice in foreign policy," Assistant Secretary of State Kim Holmes recalled, "and had figures around him like Powell, Rumsfeld, Cheney… who knew a lot more about the issues than he did."[44] To compensate, Bush projected himself as an instinctive leader, skilled in the art of delegation. "If I have any genius or smarts," Bush assessed of his leadership style, "it's the ability to recognize talent [and] ask them to serve and work as a team… I trust their judgement."[45] Unlike Powell, Cheney was all too willing to pander to Bush's self-anointed role as "the Decider."[46] "This guy was just totally different," he said of Bush. "He just decided here's what I want to do, and I'm going to do it. He's very directed… very focused."[47] Sorely lacking experience, however, Bush often "deferred to Cheney" during foreign policy meetings, and heavily relied on "the wrong advice" from "a severely limited circle of like-minded advisers on Iraq," according to former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft.[48] A man of great self-confidence, Bush offset his glaring inexperience with a self-assured bravado, while trusting (and relying on) the guidance of administration hardliners, predominantly Cheney.[49] It was a trade-off that suited both parties.

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[44] Author interview with Kim Holmes in Dyson, "Donald Rumsfeld and the Iraq War," 332.

[45] Woodward, *State of Denial,* 11. "Bush had no problem trusting his instincts," recalled Woodward. "It was almost his second religion. In an interview with me on August 20, 2002, he referred a dozen times to his 'instincts' or 'instinctive' reactions as the guide for his decisions. At one point he said, 'I'm not a textbook player, I'm a gut player.'" Cheney, especially, indulged this egotism, and benefited from it as Bush's right-hand man on foreign policy.

[46] Interview with David Satterfield in Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008.* Simon and Schuster, (2008): 407

[47] Cheney quoted in Woodward, "Cheney Was Unwavering in Desire to Go to War." *The Washington Post.* Bush, surely, would have enjoyed this. He was critical of his own father's deliberative decision making as president, once remarking: "he just wasn't enough of a decider; he was just *too* inclusive. He sought too many conflicting views." Author interview with senior Bush official in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 37.

[48] Draper, *Dead Certain,* 114. See also Goldberg, *Breaking Ranks,* 57.

[49] McClellan, *What Happened,* 128. As one senior administration official observed, Bush "clearly is a very self-confident man, which in the view of many, is both his greatest strength and weakness." Not only did "Bush like to appear to be the Decider," he continues, but "believes himself to be the Decider." Author interview in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 40.

Powell was acutely aware of Bush's tendency to be swayed by his closest advisers. On the subject of invading Iraq, Powell cautioned Bush, "This is not as easy as it is being presented… You don't have to be bullied into this."[50] A moderate who stressed deliberation, Powell represented the antithesis of the Bush White House culture: he "would not, quote, go locker-room, unquote. He wouldn't slap anybody on the ass with a towel… with Powell in the room, it's kind of like, 'you don't swear in front of your father,'" remembered Richard Armitage, Powell's deputy.[51] This, Powell often joked with Armitage, led to his being "frozen out by the White House – in the 'icebox' or the 'refrigerator.'"[52] In everything he did, David Satterfield observed, "Bush constantly reminded those around him that he was in charge."[53] When it came to his own decision making, Bush held zero patience for deliberation or second-guessing, as Wilkerson observed: "Not only was he a president who *believed* in being aloof from the details, being the 'great decision maker' as he himself had said… the guy who makes the big ones… he was also lazy in my view… And he'd say, 'My decision is made! Its sacrosanct!'"[54] Powell challenged Bush's wholesale belief in his gut-instincts, forcing him to confront the minutiae he so adamantly avoided.[55] "You are going to be the proud owner of twenty-five million people," he cautioned Bush in a rare private meeting on

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[50] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 22.

[51] Author interview with Richard Armitage, December 15, 2008 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 80.

[52] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 79.

[53] Interview with David Satterfield, in Woodward, *The War Within,* 407.

[54] Author interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, June 28, 2008 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 43. Wilkerson offers an intimate portrait of the relationship between Bush and Powell that is highly unlikely to be expressed by Powell himself. Powell's loyalty to Bush, despite his disagreement over policy decisions, is well documented. As Tim Bakken writes, "Powell's reflexive obedience to Bush was forged in a military culture that elevates loyalty over truth." See Tim Bakken, *The Cost of Loyalty: Dishonesty, Hubris, and Failure in the US Military*. (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2020): 13.

[55] Woodward, *The War Within,* 433. "For years, time and again," Woodward observed, "President Bush has displayed impatience, bravado, and unsettling personal certainty with his decisions…" It is difficult not to see this as part of the President's own lack of foreign policy knowledge, and total disregard for context or details. As Richard Clarke recounted, "The problem was that many of the important issues, like terrorism, like Iraq, were laced with important subtlety and nuance. These issues needed analysis and Bush and his inner circle had no real interest in complicated analyses; on the issues that they cared about, they already knew the answers, it was received wisdom." Bush, in this sense, had no desire to look beyond what he believed he already knew, a policy position which his advisers often indulged. See Clarke, *Against All Enemies,* 243.

Iraq. "You need to understand this is not going to be a walk in the woods."[56] Despite his best

efforts, Powell failed as a lone dissenter within Bush's ranks. Powell "really underestimated,

badly, the vice president, the secretary of defense, and their ability to… get the right things

out of him. I think he overestimated his own ability to prevent that," Wilkerson observed.[57]

Ultimately, Bush wanted confidence, not questioning, from his closest advisers, which he

received, in abundance, from Cheney and Rumsfeld.[58] Above all else, Bush valued consensus

and loyalty. Unfortunately for Powell, to Bush — an obstinate leader with a disdain for

questioning — dissent equalled disloyalty.[59]

In recent years, Dick Cheney has been the subject of increased public scorn as the

puppet-master behind the Iraq War. Likened to Satan by actor Christian Bale, who played

Cheney in Adam McKay's *Vice,* Cheney has received all-too much credit as the "string-

pulling power behind the throne," to quote Todd McCarthy of *The Hollywood Reporter.*[60]

Such accounts fundamentally misunderstand the dynamics of the Bush administration, and

the principle role Bush's own arrogance played in the making of foreign policy during his

first term.[61] Bush's tendency to rely on his gut-instincts fuelled a "shoot-from-the-hip"

policy-making culture, a product of his own inexperience, or, as John Kerry determined,

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[56] Powell quoted in Woodward, "Cheney Was Unwavering in Desire to Go to War." *The Washington Post.*
[57] Author interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, June 28, 2008 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 63.
[58] Author interview with Richard Armitage, December 15, 2008 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap*, 54. As Richard Armitage recalled of a conversation he had with Powell: "Bush has a lot of shoot by the hip, cowboy hat, buck-skin inclinations. The VP knows how to bring those out… the VP astutely recognized that and then used that shoot from the hip, that you're with us or against us type of predisposition to reinforce a much wider perspective on an issue or a foreign policy."
[59] Author interview with Richard Armitage, December 15, 2008 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap*, 43. On the subject of dissent being viewed as disloyalty within the administration, Richard Armitage observed: "This was pretty prevalent. Powell and I felt that [dissent] was the height of loyalty! We weren't disagreeing… We knew what he wanted to do! But if you're gonna do X, and I don't think X (for instance going to war in Iraq) was immoral. We had all those UN resolutions saying Hussein was a terrible guy. For me, I want it done a different way. And we raised issues, all along the way! Issues to be resolved before we did it. Not issues to be used as a roadblock. But they were misinterpreted as roadblocks."
[60] Todd McCarthy, "Vice: Film Review." *The Hollywood Reporter,* December 17, 2018. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/vice-review-1166477.
[61] See Woodward, *Bush at War,* 342.

ineptitude.[62] Figures like Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz dominated Bush's attention

because they played the game according to his rules, as Scott McClellan observed: [63]

> Overall, Bush's foreign policy advisers played right into his thinking, doing little
> to question it or to cause him to pause long enough to fully consider the
> consequences before moving forward. And once Bush set a course of action, it
> was rarely questioned. That is what Bush expected and made known to his top
> advisers… there would be no handwringing, no second-guessing of the policy
> once it was decided and set in motion.[64]

And while the President did rely on the advice of his inner circle, he made the penultimate

decisions.[65] "They would not push Bush in different policy directions than he was already

predisposed to agree with," writes Preston, "since they shared his deeply conservative

perspectives."[66] More accurately, while Bush believed himself to be the play calling

"decider," the ideologues he so often relied on — Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz —

heavily conditioned his understanding of foreign policy and conflict after 9/11.[67] By design,

the war in Iraq was a team effort.

Let's Roll: Selling the Good War, the Bush Way

"A belief is not true because it is useful."
Henri-Frédéric Amiel, *Amiel's Journal,* 1883.

Few could argue that Bush lacked charisma. He "had a reputation as a wise guy with a

good sense of humour," remembered photojournalist David Hume Kennerly, who captured

Bush's first election campaign. "If he hadn't quit drinking, he's the kind of guy you'd like to

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[62] David Halbfinger, "Kerry Denounces 'Inept' Bush Foreign Policy." *The New York Times,* December 4,
2003. https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/04/us/kerry-denounces-inept-bush-foreign-policy.html.
[63] Draper, *Dead Certain,* 282–283. This was not always a concerted effort to play Bush's rules, more so, it
was an alignment in ideology. As Draper notes, figures like Rumsfeld and Cheney shared with the
president a penchant for big ideas and knew that "if you wanted the president's support for an initiative, it
was always best to frame it as a 'Big New Thing'"—something Powell never did. This, of course, gave
advisers like Rumsfeld and Cheney the upper hand when it came to shaping foreign policy.
[64]Scott McClellan, *What happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's culture of deception*.
(PublicAffairs, 2008): 128.
[65] John O'Neill quoted in Ron Suskind, *The price of loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the
education of Paul O'Neill*. Simon and Schuster, (2004): 126.
[66] Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 39.
[67] Jonathan Renshon, *Why Leaders Choose War: The Psychology of Prevention*. (Praeger Security Intl,
2006): 107.

have a beer with."[68] As president, Bush remarked to Senator John McCain, he aspired "to be

like Ronald Reagan," which influenced his framing of the post-9/11 world. Like Reagan's

damnation of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," Bush condemned Iraq as part of an "axis

of evil."[69] This discourse reflected Bush's idiosyncratic worldview, as one scholar

commented on a White House meeting he attended on the Middle East, "much of the

discussion focused on the nature of good and evil, a perennial theme for Bush, who casts the

struggle against Islamic extremists in black-and-white terms."[70] President Bush conveyed

information in the manner he preferred to receive: simplistic, value-laden, decisive and with

conviction.[71] This communication style proved wildly popular among the general public after

the terrorist attacks.[72]

For many Americans, the 9/11 attacks took a personal toll. Seventy-one percent of the

American public reported immediate feelings of depression, while one in three reported

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[68] "Election 2000: The Final Hours of Bush v Gore." CNN News Video, July 24, 2018. Accessed April 12, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpHa8B0KvUk&t=86s

[69] Woodward, *State of Denial,* 407-8.

[70] Peter Baker, "A President Besieged and Isolated, Yet at Ease." *Washington Post,* July 2, 2007. Here, I would like to return to the scholarship of Žižek. "There is in the USA today more than two million Rightist populist 'fundamentalists' who also practise a terror of their own, legitimized by (their understanding of) Christianity," he writes. "Since America is, in a way, 'harboring' them, should the US Army have punished themselves after the Oklahoma bombing?" Žižek advocates for a more nuanced understanding of the nature of extremism in the Middle East—one entirely different to the black-and-white approach adopted by Bush. The passage gives food for thought. If the black-and-white approach was not adopted after the Oklahoma bombing, why was it so easy to adopt after the September 11 attacks? Zizek argues that the answer resides in the tradition of American exceptionalism, and the "clash of civilizations" narrative. For more, see Žižek, *Welcome to the desert of the real,* 42-46.

[71] Clarke, *Against all Enemies,* 243. In his memoir, Clarke recalled of Bush's style: "Bush was informed by talking with a small set of senior advisers rather than casting his net more widely for advice… Early on we were told that 'the President is not a big reader' and goes to bed at 10." McClellan adds: Bush's constantly stressing "larger, strategic objectives – how they fit into the bigger picture of what the administration seeks to accomplish… His intellectual curiosity tends to be centred on knowing what he needs in order to effectively articulate advocate and defend his policies… [he] keenly recognizes the role of marketing and selling policy." See McClellan, *What Happened,* 128, 145-46.

[72] David Moore, "Bush Job Approval Highest in Gallup History," *Gallup,* September 24, 2001. https://news.gallup.com/poll/4924/bush-job-approval-highest-gallup-history.aspx. As David Moore found, "nine out of ten Americans" gave Bush high marks for his address to congress after the terrorist attacks, "with 62% saying the speech was excelled and 25% good." Additionally, among all Americans, 78% believed Bush explained the nation's objectives clearly, while 83% of those who watched the address live found the explanation to be clear.

issues sleeping at night.[73] Acutely aware of the nation's vulnerability to international

terrorism, the public looked to the president for guidance through a low moment in the

nation's history. "The zeroes world of George Bush," Johnathan Franzen wrote for the *New

Yorker,* would be defined by a longing to "return to the ordinary, the trivial, and even the

ridiculous in the face of instability and dread."[74] The unique cultural moment suited Bush's

interpersonal style: as McClellan observed, "much of what the general public knows about

Bush is true. He is a man of personal charm, wit, and enormous political skill."[75] As a

wartime leader, Bush relied on a strength that helped him succeed as a business student at

Harvard University, as the Governor of Texas, and as a candidate for the United States

presidency: his personality.[76] As David Frum observed of Bush shortly before the war in Iraq:

"My judgement is, taken all in all, he's a pretty impressive character, the right character for

now."[77]

The president's magnetism was on full display just days after the attacks, where,

bullhorn in hand, he addressed a gathering of first responders at Ground Zero. As Bush

strained through the muffled device, one rescue worker shouted, "I can't hear you!" Bush

famously responded: "I can hear you! I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And

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[73] Pew Research Centre, "American Psyche Reeling from Terror Attacks," accessed July 15, 2019, https://www.people-press.org/2001/09/19/american-psyche-reeling-from-terror-attacks.
[74] Johnathan Franzen, Tuesday and After, *New Yorker,* September 24, 2001. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/09/24/tuesday-and-after-talk-of-the-town.
[75] McClellan, *What Happened,* xii.
[76] Draper, *Dead Certain,* 29 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 54. At Harvard, Draper notes, Bush's "particular genius" was his "facility for wiping out the milliseconds of distance separating himself from total strangers," to generate "instant familiarity through remembering their names (or if one's surname twisted the tongue, assigning a nickname), flinging arms around shoulders, acute eye contact, a gruff yet seductive whisper." Assessing the differences between Bush and Gore during the 2000 election, photojournalist David Hume Kennerly, who captured Bush's campaign, added: "look at the high school president… the popular person is generally going to win, and that's the person who's more charismatic." His counterpart capturing Gore, Callie Shell, said of Bush: "I really felt like Bush could laugh more and was more charismatic… that seemed way more important to people." See "Election 2000: The Final Hours of Bush v Gore." *CNN.*
[77] David Frum interview with *The Atlantic,* February 12, 2003. https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/interviews/int2003-02-12.htm.

the people — and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!"[78]

With one arm slung around the shoulder of firefighter Bob Beckwith, Bush paused for a

moment, no doubt absorbing the rapturous applause and patriotic cries of "USA! USA!

USA!" "Go get 'em George!" bellowed another voice from the crowd. The scene captured

the national mood: a volatile mix of grief, patriotism and anger. One *Washington Post* poll

also indicated significant confusion over who orchestrated the attacks, with seventy-eight

percent of participants blaming Saddam Hussein.[79] Bush was in no rush to correct the

misunderstanding.[80] "Dad made a mistake not going into Iraq when he had an approval rating

in the nineties," Bush disclosed to a family friend in 2000. "If I'm ever in that situation, I'll

use it — I'll spend my political capital."[81] True to his word, when the terrorist attacks

catapulted his public approval rating to ninety percent, Bush made the most of his own

political moment.

    November 8, 2001. "We cannot know every turn this battle will take, yet we know our

cause is just and our ultimate victory assured. We will no doubt face new challenges, but we

have our marching orders," Bush declared at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta.

"My fellow Americans… let's roll."[82] In the final words of Todd Beamer — who died in a

remarkable display of bravery onboard the hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 — Bush found

the mantra for his War on Terror. The phrase reflected Bush's own philosophy as

commander-in-chief, as Woodward observed, "his instincts are almost his second religion…

He was the 'gut player,' the 'calcium-in-the-backbone' leader who operated on the principle

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[78] Transcript of "Bullhorn Address to Ground Zero Rescue Workers." September 14, 2001.
https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911groundzerobullhorn.html.
[79] "Washington Post Poll: Saddam Hussein and the Sept. 11 Attacks." September 6, 2003.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/data082303.htm
[80] Clarke, *Against all Enemies,* 30. As Clarke notes, Bush learned through the CIA on the evening of
September 12, 2001 that al-Qaeda were, without doubt, responsible for the attacks.
[81] Draper, *Dead Certain,* 173.
[82] Transcript of Bush Speech in Atlanta, *CNN* November 8, 2001.
http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/11/08/rec.bush.transcript/.

of 'no doubt.'"[83] "If Bush believed something was right," David Satterfield added, "he believed it would succeed. Its very rightness ensured ultimate success. Democracy and freedom were right. Therefore, they would win out."[84] When journalist Helen Thomas questioned Bush's belief that Iraq would be better off without Hussein — retorting "That's not a reason to go to war" — Bush vented to his Press Secretary Ari Fleischer:

> Did you tell her I don't like motherfuckers who gas their own people? Did you tell her I don't like assholes who lie to the world? Did you tell her I'm going to kick his sorry motherfucking ass all over the Mideast?[85]

A personal grievance appeared to drive Bush's disdain for Hussein: "after all," he later added at the Senate, "this is the guy who tried to kill my dad."[86] And while Cheney held reservations about the practicality of Bush's vision to oust Hussein and install a democracy in Iraq, he followed nonetheless, declaring during a debate in the Situation Room: "We've got a genuine obligation to go stand up a democracy… We've got to fundamentally change the place. And we've got to give the Iraqi people a chance at those fundamental values we believe in."[87] It was the Bush Doctrine at its most idealistic, the United States resorting to war for the good of the world. The memory of heroes like Beamer further aided in that perception.

In the years following his famous "bullhorn moment," Bush did little to correct the misguided public opinion that Hussein was personally involved in the terrorist attacks. Indeed, months into America's occupation of Iraq, still sixty-nine percent of the American public believed Hussein played a role in the operation.[88] This belief owed much to the associative logics consistently deployed by Bush in his public communications, which

[83] Woodward, *The War Within,* 431. See also: Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 40.
[84] Woodward, *The War Within,* 407
[85] Michael Isikoff and David Corn, *Hubris: The inside story of spin, scandal, and the selling of the Iraq War*. (Broadway Books, 2006): 3-4.
[86] John King, "Bush calls Saddam 'the guy who tried to kill my dad.'" *CNN,* September 27, 2002. https://edition.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/09/27/bush.war.talk/
[87] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 284.
[88] "Washington Post Poll: Saddam Hussein and the Sept.11 Attacks."

suggested a loose connection between the two.[89] "The danger," Bush explained to reporters

on September 25, 2002, "is that al-Qaeda becomes an extension of Saddam's madness and his

hatred and his capacity to extend weapons of mass destruction around the world… You can't

distinguish between al-Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror." [90] The

following month, in his "Address to the Nation Concerning the Threat of Iraq," Bush

reminded the public of the threat Hussein posed:

> We also must never forget the most vivid events of recent history. On September
> the 11th, 2001, America felt its vulnerability — even to threats that gather on the
> other side of the earth. We resolved then, and we are resolved today, to confront
> every threat, from any source, that could bring sudden terror and suffering to
> America.[91]

He added: "We know that after September 11, Hussein's regime gleefully celebrated the

terrorist attacks on America." [92] Such thinly veiled appeals to fear and anger triggered

discernible shifts in public support for war with Iraq.[93] The more Americans were subjected

to Bush administration rhetoric, Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner found, the more likely

they were "to perceive a strong connection between Hussein and terrorism, and thus more

likely to support the war in Iraq."[94] For this, Bush can only be credited so much.

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[89] Oliver Marchart, Das historisch-politische Gedächtnis. Für eine politische Theorie kollektiver Erinnerung in Molden, Berthold. "Resistant pasts versus mnemonic hegemony: On the power relations of collective memory." *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (2016): 127. Marchart explains collective memory "as a layered field of sedimentations which's contingent origin in the dispute of competing definitions of the past has become forgotten, after a certain version of the past has imposed itself and become hegemonic." It is in human agency, Elizabeth Jelin adds, "that the past is activated. Memory is produced whenever there are subjects who share a culture [and] social agents who try to materialize meanings of the past." See Elizabeth Jelin, State Repression and the Labors of Memory. (University of Minnesota Press, 2003) in Molden, *Resistant pasts,* 127. In consistently conflating Iraq and the September 11 attacks, Bush actively sought to – and succeeded in – shaping the collective memory of September 11 to suit his administration's geopolitical agenda.
[90] Walter Pincus, "CIA Learned in '02 That Bin Laden Had No Ties to Iraq," *The Washington Post* September 15, 2006. Accessed July 27th, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2006/09/15/cia-learned-in-02-that-bin-laden-had-no-iraq-ties-report-says/097f75d8-b7fe-4186-bd7b-a8dc6e7a45ba/
[91] George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Threat of Iraq," *American Rhetoric,* October 7, 2002. Accessed July 23, 2019. https://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbushwariniraqcincinnati.htm
[92] George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Threat of Iraq."
[93] Amy Gershkoff and Shauna Kushner. "Shaping public opinion: The 9/11-Iraq connection in the Bush administration's rhetoric." *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 3 (2005): 531.
[94] Gershkoff and Kushner, "Shaping public opinion," 531.

When Bush's actions did not match his rhetoric, Cheney acted unilaterally. On August

16, 2002, *The New York Times* published a story detailing growing dissent within the

Republican ranks over Iraq, arguing that the "administration had neither adequately prepared

for military action nor made the case that it is needed." The article also noted Brent

Scowcroft's opinion that "an attack on Iraq… would seriously jeopardize, if not destroy, the

global counter-terrorist campaign we have undertaken."[95] Frustrated with the president's

forbearance under pressure, Woodward observed, "Cheney decided that everyone was

offering an opinion except the administration. There was no stated administration position

and he wanted to put one out, make a big speech if necessary." At a National Security

Council meeting, Cheney dictated to Bush, "I'm going to give that speech."

"Don't get me in trouble," the characteristically nonchalant president responded. Less than

two weeks later, Cheney delivered a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars national

convention in Nashville, Tennessee, detailing the threat Hussein posed to modern America:

> If the United States could have pre-empted 9/11, we would have, no question.
> Should we be able to prevent another, much more devastating attack, we will, no
> question. This nation will not live at the mercy of terrorists or terror regimes…
> Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass
> destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends,
> against our allies, and against us.[96]

These comments, writes Woodward, "just short of a declaration of war, were widely

interpreted as administration policy."[97] "My understanding is that the president himself was

very surprised by that speech," recalled a former senior administration official. "It had the

effect of somewhat limiting the president's options."[98] In order to garner the trust of the

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[95] Todd Purdam and Patrick Tyler, "Top Republicans Break with Bush on Iraq Strategy." *New York Times* August 16, 2001. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/16/world/top-republicans-break-with-bush-on-iraq-strategy.html.

[96] Transcript of Dick Cheney's Speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars national convention. *The Guardian,* August 27, 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/aug/27/usa.iraq.

[97] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 164.

[98] Senior administration official quoted in Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq.* (Penguin, 2006).

international community, however, the administration needed — to quote the now infamous words of George Tenet — a "slam dunk."[99] Only one figure within the administration held the international clout necessary to deliver the case convincingly.

The hawkish public relations campaign reached a fever pitch on February 5, 2003. Only this time, it was the largely estranged Colin Powell presenting the administration's case for war to the United Nations (UN), not Bush, Cheney or Rumsfeld. "The reason I went to the UN," Powell later recalled in an interview with Jason Breslow, was "because we needed to put the case before the entire international community in a powerful way, and that's what I did."[100] Wilkerson believed Powell was selected for the job because of his popularity, observing, "They're putting him out in the front of the fox hole, because he's the one with all the credits... He's got the credibility. That's the reason he's doing it.[101] Just two days before Powell's speech, sixty-three percent of the American public said they trusted him over Bush, and ninety percent reported that his presentation would determine their support for the war.[102] A topic of derision among administration hardliners, Powell's popularity came to benefit his detractors at a pivotal juncture.[103] Despite his reservations, particularly pertaining to the veracity of the intelligence provided by the war-hungry Cheney and Rumsfeld, Powell — whom Wilkerson described as "the world's most loyal soldier" — delivered the

[99] Woodward, *State of Denial*, 303.
[100] Colin Powell interview in "Colin Powell: U.N. Speech 'Was a Great Intelligence Failure." *Frontline,* May 17, 2016. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/colin-powell-u-n-speech-was-a-great-intelligence-failure/.
[101] Author interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, June 28, 2008 in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 146.
[102] "Powell's U.N. Appearance Important to Public." *Gallup,* February 4, 2003. https://news.gallup.com/poll/7720/powells-un-appearance-important-public.aspx.
[103] Cheney, particularly, scorned Powell's preoccupation with poll numbers in his memoir, Richard Cheney and Liz Cheney, *In my time: A personal and political memoir.* (Simon and Schuster, 2011): 185-6.

presentation.[104] He later described the speech as a "painful" and "lasting blot on his record."[105]

 February 5, 2003. "Every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we're giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence," Powell opened to the United Nations Security Council.[106] Behind the scenes, however, Powell lacked conviction, as Paul Pillar remembered of the intelligence:

> Yeah, it [was] crap. And the secretary apparently had similar views. It was just garbage. 'And Zarqawi was here [Iraq], at this point, so that means he was being controlled by the regime!' It was all a bunch of nonsense… The whole purpose was to create an impression that was contrary to professional judgments.[107]

Powell's mention of Abu Musab Al Zarqawi as the nucleus of a "sinister nexus between Iraq and the al-Qaeda terror network" formed the only tenuous link between Iraq and the terrorist attacks. In actuality, Zarqawi was considered a relatively marginal figure within the broader scheme of Islamic terrorism, and no corroborating evidence existed of a relationship between himself and the regime in Baghdad. [108] The priority, however, was to establish a connection between Hussein and the 9/11 attacks on the world stage in a manner that, Bush directed, even "'Joe Public' could understand."[109] A connection between the two legitimized the currency the Bush administration so often traded in: fear. If anyone could make that case successfully, it was the immensely respected Powell: his speech to the UN triggered a thirty-point jump in the number of Americans "who felt convinced of a link between Hussein and

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[104] Lawrence Wilkerson interviewed by Dana Milbank in Dana Milbank, "Colonel Finally Saw Whites of Their Eyes." *Washington Post,* October 20, 2005. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/19/AR2005101902246.html?nav=hcmodule.
[105] Steven Weisman, "Powell Calls his UN Speech a Lasting Blot on His Record." *New York Times,* September 9, 2005. https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/09/politics/powell-calls-his-un-speech-a-lasting-blot-on-his-record.html.
[106] "Full text of Colin Powell's speech." *The Guardian* February 5, 2003. Accessed July 10, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/feb/05/iraq.usa3.
[107] Author interview with Paul Pillar, June 18, 2008. in Preston, *Pandora's trap,* 150.
[108] Peter Chambers, "Abu Musab Al Zarqawi: The making and unmaking of an American monster (in Baghdad)." *Alternatives* 37.1 (2012): 37.
[109] Bush quoted in George Tenet and Bill Harlow. *At the Center of the Storm.* HarperCollins, (2007): 361.

al-Qaeda."[110] In his complicity, Powell significantly contributed to the misguided public opinion that Hussein was tied to the terrorist attacks. "It was the old general's ultimate sacrifice as a good soldier," Tom Ricks concluded of the UN speech, "the first casualty of the Iraq War."[111]

Even Powell, however, failed to judge the extent to which the administration had abandoned factuality. The intelligence report provided to him, Robert Draper observes, "amounted to semi-educated guesses built on previous and seldom-challenged guesses… [CIA] analysts knew not to present these judgements as facts. But that distinction had become lost by the time Powell spoke."[112] Bush and his inner circle cared less for the veracity of flawed intelligence than spinning it to meet geopolitical ends. "Look, in about five weeks I may have to ask fathers and mothers to send their sons and daughters off to war," Bush told CIA deputy director John McLaughlin, after he delivered a less than inspiring first draft of the speech to the president in the Oval Office. "It needs to be more convincing," he was told. When asked for "undeniable" evidence of a "smoking gun" to go after Hussein, however, chemical weapons analyst Larry Fox simply replied: "Ah. Well no. We don't have any."[113]

Despite the absence of a smoking gun, Bush demanded Tenet and McLaughlin construct a more "convincing case." "Give me everything you've got," one analyst working on the project was told, "never mind sourcing or other problems."[114] Despite personal reservations, Powell was assured by Tenet that the intelligence sourced from the National Intelligence Estimate was solid. "Mr. Secretary, I fear my oversight committees more than I fear your ire if I'm wrong! I'm not wrong," Tenet reassured Powell shortly before the

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[110] Gershkoff and Kushner, Shaping public opinion, 531.
[111] Ricks quoted in Bakken, *The Cost of Loyalty,* 14.
[112] Robert Draper, "Colin Powell Still Wants Answers," *New York Times,* July 16, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/16/magazine/colin-powell-iraq-war.html?smid=em-share
[113] Bush and Fox quoted in Draper, "Colin Powell Still Wants Answers."
[114] Draper, "Colin Powell Still Wants Answers."

presentation.[115] Not only was Tenet wrong; the CIA had deliberately presented unreliable intelligence to make the administration's case for war. When one analyst expressed concern over the integrity of the agency's primary source, known as Curveball, he was told: "Let's keep in mind the fact that this war's going to happen regardless of what Curveball said or didn't say, and that the Powers That Be probably aren't terribly interested in whether Curveball knows what he's talking about." Apparently, the integrity of the truth paled in comparison to crafting the desired narrative: "we were all infected in the case for war," one intelligence official recalled.[116] Left untreated, that infection soon became an epidemic, inspiring war irrespective of the truth.

March 19, and After

"There is no group in America that can withstand the force of an aroused public opinion." Franklin D. Roosevelt, June 16, 1933.

March 19, 2003. "My fellow citizens. At this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger," Bush calmly declared from his desk in the Oval Office. "Our nation enters this conflict reluctantly, yet our purpose is sure. The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens peace with weapons of mass murder."[117] For months, administration officials stressed the urgent need to invade Iraq: "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud," Condoleezza Rice repeated to Wolf Blitzer on CNN.[118] In total, Operation Iraqi Freedom cost eight-

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[115] Author Interview with Wilkerson in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 151. This was according to Lawrence Wilkerson. (see also: footnote 121)
[116] Draper, "Colin Powell Still Wants Answers."
[117] Transcript of "George Bush's address on the start of the war." *The Guardian,* March 20, 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/20/iraq.georgebush.
[118] Isikoff and Corn, *Hubris,* 35. The metaphor "smoking gun, mushroom cloud," tested through the roof with the White House Iraq Group, who agreed that the "administration would soon make maximum use of it."

hundred and fifteen billion dollars… with no weapons of mass destruction to show for it.[119]

Post-war findings revealed that Iraq had suspended its nuclear weapons program in 1991, which Hussein made no attempt to revive — although he did make consistent efforts to hide that fact from the UN and the United States.[120] To the American public, however, Iraq was always about more than finding weapons of mass destruction: days into the occupation, eighty-two percent said they supported the war, regardless of whether WMDs were found.[121] Nationwide, there persisted a notion that Saddam was somehow tied to the 9/11 attacks — a perception the administration did little to challenge. Whether the public believed Hussein was personally involved in the first attacks, or feared he would orchestrate a second, the memory of September 11 played a key role in justifying the war in Iraq.

From the moment the planes hit the World Trade Center, Bush and his inner circle recognized an unrivalled opportunity to hit an old foe under new pretences. This desire, which preceded the terrorist attacks, shifted the focus of the war on terrorism from the elusive al-Qaeda regime to the easily located "axis of evil." The driving force was the memory of September 11, as George Tenet determined in his memoir, *At the Center of the Storm*:

> After 9/11, everything changed. Many foreign policy issues were now viewed through the prism of smoke rising from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. For many in the Bush administration, Iraq was unfinished business. They seized on the emotional impact of 9/11 and created a psychological connection between the failure to act decisively against al-Qaeda and the danger posed by Iraq's WMD programs… Had 9/11 not happened, the argument to go to war in Iraq undoubtedly would have been much harder to make.[122]

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[119] Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11." (*Congressional Research Service,* December 8, 2014): 5.

[120] Report on government statements, U.S. Intelligence Committee, 16.

[121] Gershkoff and Kushner, *Shaping Public Opinion,* 531.

[122] George Tenet and Bill Harlow. *At the Center of the Storm.* (HarperCollins, 2007): 305. Interestingly, Tenet distances himself from the administration's case for war, despite his own personal assurances to Powell that the information provided for the U.N speech in 2003 was solid. Wilkerson discussed the shoddy intelligence provided to with Preston, recalling a conversation between Powell and Tenet: "And he [Powell] asked, "You stand by this George, right? You stand by this? There's no doubt in your mind that these exist [mobile weapons facilities] and that they're for the purposes you've so detailed here, and that I'm being asked to detail to the Security Council?" And on each occasion, George is in the background going like this [nodding]… And the last time he did that was on the top of the UN building, when he turned to Tenet and said, "Now I'm going to do this tomorrow. You stand behind everything that we have

Still, selling the war required a concerted marketing campaign. Andrew Card, then White House Chief of Staff, spelled out the administration's strategy for selling the war in an interview with the *Times* on September 7, 2002: "From a marketing point of view you don't introduce new products in August."[123] Instead, the White House determined, the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks "was a more optimal time to promote the new product."[124] The tangible national grief elicited by memorialization efforts became valuable capital in spinning the Iraq War. At his speech in Cincinnati, just a month later, Bush argued:

> Some citizens wonder, after 11 years of living with this problem, why do we need to confront it now? And there's a reason. We've experienced the horror of September the 11th. We have seen that those who hate America are willing to crash airplanes into buildings full of innocent people. Our enemies would be no less willing, in fact, they would be eager, to use biological or chemical, or a nuclear weapon.[125]

This argument was bolstered by a *New York Times* article published that same day, in which columnist William Safire regurgitated the narrative that ousting Hussein was a necessity given Iraq's ties to al-Qaeda.[126] These hints at Hussein's culpability created understandable public confusion. "You get a general fuzz going around," John Mueller observed. "People know they don't like al-Qaeda, they are horrified by September 11, they know this guy [Saddam] is a bad guy, and it's not hard to put those things together."[127] Indeed, in many of his speeches, Bush placed them together for the American public himself.[128]

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left in this presentation?" And Tenet said, "Yes, I do, Mr. Secretary." Author Interview with Wilkerson in Preston, *Pandora's Trap,* 151.

[123] Elizabeth Bumiller, "Traces of Terror; The Strategy. Bush Aides Set Strategy to Sell Policy on Iraq." *New York Times,* September 7, 2002. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/07/us/traces-of-terror-the-strategy-bush-aides-set-strategy-to-sell-policy-on-iraq.html.

[124] Isikoff and Corn, *Hubris,* 33.

[125] Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Threat of Iraq."

[126] William Safire, "Saddam's Last Ploy." *New York Times,* October 7, 2002.

[127] John Mueller quoted in "US thinks Saddam had Role in 9/11" *The Guardian,* September 7, 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/07/usa.theobserver.

[128] Gershkoff and Kushner, *Shaping Public Opinion,* 527-28. As Gershkoff and Kushner note, "From September 12, 2002, to May 2003, the subjects of terrorism and Iraq were intertwined on a regular basis. Of the 13 speeches given in this period, 12 referenced terror and Iraq in the same paragraph and 10 placed them within the same sentence. In 4 speeches, a discussion of terrorism preceded the first mention of Iraq, giving the impression that Iraq was a logical extension of the terrorism discussion… Another notable

The domestic media did little to clear the rhetorical haze. As one resident of Plymouth, Indianapolis confessed, her "gut-feeling" of a relation between the two was conditioned by the news: "From what we've heard from the media… it seems like what they feel is that Saddam and the whole al-Qaeda thing are connected."[129] By late 2004, both the *Washington Post* and *New York Times,* issued public apologies for failing to adequately scrutinize administration discourse. Former *Post* editor Howard Kurtz assessed that, in the year leading up to Bush's declaration of war, the *Post* published "one-hundred and forty front-page pieces making the administration's case for war… The result was that coverage, in hindsight, looks strikingly one-sided."[130] This support for administration narratives, Antony DiMaggio observes, created a "distorted political-media discourse… in favor of government 'spin.'"[131] As Bush so strikingly warned after the terrorist attacks: "you're either with us, or you're with the terrorists."[132] In the patriotic fervour hastened by the terrorist attacks, national media outlets picked 'us'— they paid with an unwitting complicity.

In Jean Giraudoux's *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place,* Greek commander Ulysses remarks to the war-weary Trojan military commander Hector: "There's a kind of permission for war which can be given only by the world's mood and atmosphere, the feel of its pulse. It would be madness to undertake war without that permission."[133] After September 11, the Bush administration recognized opportunity in tragedy, and capitalized upon a national mood particularly conductive to war: fear, anger and intolerance. On March 10, 2003, the Dixie

construction in Bush's speeches is the juxtaposition of Iraq/Hussein with September 11… Seven of 13 speeches from September 2002 – May 2003, place September 11 and Iraq in the same sentence. Three times in this period, Bush speeches proposed a hypothetical situation in which the September 11 hijackers were armed with WMD provided by the Iraqi government."

[129] Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane, "Hussein Link to 9/11 Lingers in Many Minds," *The Washington Post,* September 6th, 2003. Accessed through ProQuest, June 10, 2019.

[130] Howard Kurtz quoted in DiMaggio, Anthony R. *Selling war, selling hope: Presidential rhetoric, the news media, and US foreign policy since 9/11*. SUNY Press, (2015): 75-6.

[131] DiMaggio, *Selling war, selling hope,* 7.

[132] Transcript of "President Bush's Address to the Nation." *Washington Post,* September 20, 2001. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html.

[133] Jean Giraudoux, *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place:(la Guerre de Troie N'aura Pas Lieu)*. Methuen, 1955.

Chicks became a lightning-rod for the nation's rage after lead singer Natalie Maines decried

to a crowd in London: "Just so you know, we do not want this war, this violence. And we're

ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas."[134] In a week, sales for the group's

number-one single, Travelin' Soldier, declined by forty-two percent. Fox News's Bill

O'Reilly branded the group "callow foolish women who deserve to be slapped around."[135]

The public responded in kind, with one angered radio caller arguing: "they should send

[Maines] over to Iraq, strap her to a bomb and drop her over Baghdad."[136] When the Dixie

Chicks opened their tour in South Carolina that May, Rep. Jay Lucas took aim at both the

band and their supporters, threatening, "I think we in South Carolina ought to say goodbye to

the Dixie Chicks. Anybody that thinks about going to that concert ought to be ready, ready,

ready to run away from it."[137] For their dissent, the Dixie Chicks became the foremost

example of what happens when you speak out against a good war. While it is true that figures

within the Bush administration desired war with Hussein long before the attacks, it is equally

true that much of the American public supported Bush and the war effort.[138] Without that

support, it would have been impossible for the administration to extend its foreign policy

doctrine to Iraq.

Conclusion

When the administration's WMD theory proved hollow, the only legitimate reason for

a national presence in Iraq was the humanitarian cause. As Robert Jervis observes, "the war

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[134] Barbra Kopple and Cecilia Peck. *Dixie Chicks: Shut Up and Sing.* (The Weinstein Company, 2006)
[135] Kopple and Peck*, Dixie Chicks: Shut Up and Sing.*
[136] Kopple and Peck, *Dixie Chicks: Shut Up and Sing.*
[137] Jay Lucas quoted in Amy Edgar, "House Resolution asks Dixie Chicks for free show for troops." *Beaumont Enterprise,* March 18, 2003. https://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/House-resolution-asks-Dixie-Chicks-for-free-show-753614.php.
[138] "In Depth: Topics A-Z: Iraq." *Gallup* https://news.gallup.com/poll/1633/iraq.aspx. At the beginning of the Iraq War, seventy-five percent of Americans believed sending troops to Iraq was "not a mistake," while sixty-seven percent did not believe the Bush administration misled the public about whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. From March 22 to April 22, those who favoured U.S. war with Iraq stood at seventy percent.

[in Iraq] is hard to understand if the only objective was to disarm Saddam… But if changing the Iraqi regime was expected to bring democracy and stability to the Middle East, discourage tyrants and energize reformers throughout the world, and demonstrate the American willingness to provide a high degree of what it considers world order whether others like it or not, then as part of a larger project, the war makes sense."[139] The fear elicited by the 9/11 attacks created new opportunities to extend American hegemony under the guise of humanitarian interventionism. It was certainly a radical departure from the humble foreign policy championed by Bush on the election trail. As the inner-dynamics of the Bush administration testify, the Bush Doctrine was, in actuality, the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld Doctrine. For all three, Hussein was a problem in need of solving — irrespective of the terrorist attacks. The war on terrorism was a good one because it allowed the administration to strike under largely moral pretenses: even if that did rely on deliberate misrepresentations of Hussein's ties to al-Qaeda, or his ability to deploy weapons of mass destruction.

The sanctimonious tone of the war, however, was largely a product of Bush alone. In his communications with the public, Bush consistently framed the Iraq conflict as a divinely sanctioned mission, much like he viewed his own presidency. Any explanation of Iraq as a good war must account for that idiosyncratic evangelical perspective. In 2004, David Frum observed: "The Islamic world has lagged further and further behind the Christian West… By a poignant coincidence, the decade in which the Arab and Muslim Middle East tumbled into economic stagnation and mass mutual slaughter was the same decade in which the United States hurtled into one of its periodic technological sprints."[140] His viewpoint reflected Bush's own: that the war on terrorism was a clash of civilizations, not only intended to spread democracy but to exterminate evil and barbarism; to extend the enlightenment of American

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[139] Jervis, "Understanding the Bush doctrine," 386.
[140] David Frum and Richard N. Perle, *An end to evil: How to win the war on terror*. (Random House Digital, Inc., 2004): 46, 57.

ideals to the Iraqi people. To Bush, the war in Iraq was more than a good war, it was a mission from God.

CHAPTER III

BAD APPLES AND ROGUE SOLDIERS: THE 'GOD WAR' AND ITS DEFEAT AT ABU GHRAIB

<u>We're on a Mission from God</u>

> I don't think you can get at [George W.] Bush and his decision-making style, and some of the decisions he's made, without thinking about the evangelical aspect, without thinking about the spiritual aspect, in the sense that he gets advice from a higher authority.

>   -   Lawrence Wilkerson, Former Chief of Staff to Colin Powell, 2008.[1]

December 13, 1999. "What political philosopher or thinker do you most identify with and why?" WHO-TV anchor John Bachman posed to the GOP candidates gathered in Des Moines, Iowa, for the Republican presidential debate. The day prior, Alan Keyes attacked Bush, the front runner, for avoiding the "greatest moral crisis" facing the nation. "Issues like abortion," Keyes lamented, "have to be addressed up-front."[2] Commentators agreed that Des Moines represented a critical juncture for Bush: a chance to "prove he's as good as his numbers tell us he is," Charles Jones remarked, "to show he lives up to what those numbers represent."[3] In response to Bachman's question, Keyes offered the founding fathers, noting that a "return to the original constitution they gave us" meant the public would no longer rely "on nice politicians like Mr. Bush, or bad politicians like Bill Clinton."[4] In a characteristic display of quick-witted humour, Bush retorted, "at least he called me nice."

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[1] Author interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, June 28, 2008 in in Preston, Thomas. *Pandora's Trap: Presidential decision making and blame avoidance in Vietnam and Iraq*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, (2011): 58

[2] Alan Keyes quoted in David Yepsen, "Bush attacked on eve of debate." *Des Moines Register,* Iowa, December 13, 1999.

[3] Charles Jones quoted in Wayne Fields, "Debates crucial to Bush." *Times Union,* Albany, N.Y., December 12, 1999.

[4] Republican Candidates Debate, "Political Philosopher or Thinker." *MSNBC,* December 13, 1999. https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4462554/political-philosopher-thinker.

Bachman returned, "Governor Bush, a philosopher-thinker, and why?"

"Christ, because he changed my heart," Bush responded, resolutely. "When you turn your heart and your life over to Christ, when you accept Christ as the saviour, it changes your heart — changes your life. And that's what happened to me."[5] After a small passage of silence, the crowd gathered at the Greater Des Moines Civic Center erupted in applause. "It struck lots of ordinary people who said grace before a meal… and turned to their Maker in times of need as being sincere, and revealing of who Bush really was," campaign strategist Karl Rove remembered.[6] The reply demonstrated the centrality of Evangelical Christianity to the New Right, the Republican Party and Bush himself.[7]

The Des Moines debate, like the whole election, polarized viewers. Dan Baiz and David Von Drehle of the *Washington Post* applauded Bush's strong showing, observing, "he appeared more aggressive in presenting his views, casting himself as… a man with strong conservative convictions."[8] Bill Kristol, then editor of the *Weekly Standard*, warned that Bush's pious response was revealing of "a kind of narcissism." "It is inappropriate," he argued, "as a matter of public philosophy to appeal to a private religious experience."[9] For Bush, however, the realms of faith and politics were one and the same.[10] In his autobiography, Bush recounted his motivation for entering the presidential race after a "rousing sermon" by Pastor Mark Craig in Austin, Texas:

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[5] Republican Candidates Debate, December 13, 1999.

[6] Karl Rove, *Courage and consequence: My life as a conservative in the fight*. (Simon and Schuster, 2010): 140.

[7] Jason Berggren and Nicol C. Rae. "Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, foreign policy, and an evangelical presidential style." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2006): 615. As Berggren and Rae note, "George W. Bush is quite at home before evangelical audiences. He counts many evangelical preachers as close friends and often surrounds himself, whether personally, in business, or in politics, with fellow believers."

[8] Dan Baiz and David Von Drehle, "Bush and McCain Clash: Debate in Des Moines Reflects Intensifying Competition." *Washington Post,* December 14, 1999.

[9] Bill Kristol quoted Aikman, *A Man of Faith,* 6.

[10] Jo Renee Formicola, "The Good in the Faith-Based Initiative" in Jo Renee Formicola, Mary C. Segers, and Paul J. Weber, *Faith-based initiatives and the Bush administration: The good, the bad, and the ugly*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003): 25-6. Discussing faith and politics in 2000, Bush remarked, "my style, my focus and so many of the issues that I talk about, you know, are reinforced by my religion."

> People are 'starved for leadership,' Pastor Craig said, 'starved for leaders who have ethical and moral courage.' It is not enough to have an ethical compass to know right from wrong, he argued. America needs leaders who have the moral courage to do what is right for the right reason. It's not always easy or convenient for leaders to step forward, he acknowledged. Remember, even Moses had doubts.[11]

While his detractors condemned the impromptu answer at Des Moines as a transparent appeal to Iowa's evangelical base, Bush fundamentally believed that his service as commander-in-chief was tied to his faith. Born again as an evangelical Christian in 1985, his journey to the presidency was grounded in a narcissistic belief that he was chosen to lead by God. "I've heard the call," Bush disclosed to televangelist James Robinson and his audience in 1999, "I believe God wants me to run for President."[12]

Those closest to Bush were privy to his evangelical inclinations. In a memorandum addressing his staff as governor, Bush encouraged they pause upon entering his office to observe his favourite piece of artwork by W. H. D. Koerner. The painting depicted a horseman, fearlessly scaling a rugged mountainside, pioneering a path for those behind him. "What adds complete life to the painting for me," Bush added, "is the message of Charles Wesley that we serve One greater than ourselves."[13] This philosophy anchored the Bush White House culture, as David Frum recalled, the very first words he heard upon entering the building were "missed you at bible study."[14] Koerner's painting, which Bush took with him to the Oval Office, was indicative of the leader he aspired to be; the righteous and doubtless leader his pastor advocated for. When al-Qaeda operatives flew two commercial airliners into the World Trade Center, Bush unsurprisingly assessed the crisis through the prism of his faith. Upon hearing the news that a third plane had hit the Pentagon, he retreated to his

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[11] George W. Bush and Karen Hughes, *A Charge to Keep*. (Harper Collins, 1999): 13.

[12] Bush quoted in Craig Unger, *The fall of the house of Bush: The untold story of how a band of true believers seized the executive branch, started the Iraq war, and still imperils America's future*. (Simon and Schuster, 2007): 160.

[13] Bush, *A Charge to Keep,* 45.

[14] David Frum, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush*. (Random House, 2003): 3.

presidential cabin on-board Air Force One to pray for wisdom and courage.[15] His faith would play an instrumental role in framing the impending conflict.

That evening, Bush promised retribution to the nation. "The search is underway for those who were behind these evil acts," he explained in a televised address from the Oval Office. "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." Bush concluded with Psalm 23: "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for you are with me.*" The comfort of Christian doctrines surely resonated with the predominantly Christian population of America, as they did with Bush himself.[16] "There is no textbook on how to steady a nation rattled by a faceless enemy," Bush recounted in his memoir, *Decision Points*:

> I found solace in reading the Bible, which Abraham Lincoln called 'the best gift God has given to man.' I admired Lincoln's moral clarity and resolve. The clash between freedom and tyranny, he said, was 'an issue which can only be tried by war, and by decided victory.' The war on terror would be the same.[17]

This unyielding faith in America's exceptional cause cast the war on terrorism in black-and-white terms: good versus evil; right versus wrong; democracy versus tyranny.[18] Intervention in Iraq then became about more than the threat of weapons of mass destruction. "I understood why people might disagree on the threat Hussein posed to the United States," Bush recalled of anti-war sentiment on the home front. "But I didn't see how anyone could deny that liberating Iraq advanced the cause of human rights."[19] Americans largely agreed: at the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, seventy-three percent of the public viewed the war as

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[15] George W. Bush, *Decision points*. (Broadway Books, 2011): 128.
[16] "American Religious Identification Survey." CUNY Graduate Center, 2001. https://www.gc.cuny.edu:443/faculty/research_briefs/aris/key_findings.html. In 2001, eighty-one percent of American adults identified as Christian, per a CUNY Graduate Center survey.
[17] Bush, *Decision Points*, 140.
[18] Greg Cashman and Leonard C. Robinson, *An introduction to the causes of war: Patterns of interstate conflict from World War I to Iraq*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, (2007): 335. As Cashman and Robinson note, "the president sees the war on terrorism and the war against Iraq in the context of his perception of a divine mission. In the words of Bush in his speech at the National Cathedral after 9/11, 'Our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.'"
[19] Bush, *Decision Points,* 248.

morally justified. [20] Guided by Bush's pious discourse, Americans largely agreed that the nation was engaged in a good war.

Ousting Hussein, Bush argued both publicly and privately, was a faith-driven undertaking. "I am driven with a mission from God," Bush disclosed to Palestinian foreign minister Nabil Shaath four months after invading Iraq. "God would tell me 'George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq.' And I did."[21] The administration's demonization of Hussein heavily relied on the dictator's adoption of torture practices, which Bush condemned as a "grave violation of human rights." At his State of the Union Address in 2003, Bush painted a damning portrait of Hussein's Ba'ath Party:

> Iraqi refugees tell us how forced confessions are obtained — by torturing children while their parents are made to watch. International human rights groups have catalogued other methods used in the torture chambers of Iraq: electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, and rape. If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning.[22]

Stories emerging from the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad, Iraq's largest detention facility, testified to the brutality of Hussein's dictatorship.[23] "They had a game," Abdallah Ahmed, a survivor of the prison recounted, "they made people drink gasoline, then put them out in open ground and fired guns at them."[24] The family of Naji Abbas, who went missing after a trip to the local store, were ordered by police to retrieve his body from the prison thirteen months later. When they arrived, they found a battered corpse: one eye missing; a broken arm; and severe burns to the chest from electrical wires. They were then ordered to pay a substantial

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[20] "In Depth: Topics A-Z: Iraq." *Gallup* https://news.gallup.com/poll/1633/iraq.aspx.

[21] Nabil Shaath quoted in Ewen MacAskill, "George Bush: 'God told me to end tyranny in Iraq.'" *The Guardian,* October 6, 2005. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/07/iraq.usa.

[22] George W. Bush, State of The Union Address to the 108th Congress in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush, 2001-2008*, (The White House, 2008): 162.

[23] In September 2003, the Bush White House Archive compiled "Tales of Saddam's Brutality" – oral histories from survivors of Hussein's dictatorship. The tales from the Abu Ghraib prison, in particular, were harrowing. Other stories from the archive on Iraq can be found here: https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030929-14.html

[24] *Los Angeles Times* article, April 11, 2003 quoted in "Tales of Saddam's Brutality." *The White House, President George W. Bush,* September 29, 2003.

sum for the bullets used to kill him.[25] It was hardly challenging to broadcast the regime as

barbaric, nor Hussein as evil incarnate. Operation Iraqi Freedom, Bush promised, would

liberate Iraqis from the shackles of fear and tyranny.

Bush rightly depicted Hussein as a ruthless and wholly irredeemable autocrat. Like

the horseman in Koerner's painting, Bush was resolute in the moral necessity of ousting

Hussein and liberating Iraq. To his detractors in the White House, however, Koerner's work

prompted concern: they see a "lone, arrogant cowboy plunging recklessly ahead, paying little

heed to danger… listening to no voice but his own," wrote David Gergen. "That he believes

he is doing the Lord's work only increases their apprehension. He's not taking us up a

mountain, they fear, but over a cliff."[26] Despite Bush's seemingly noble intentions, many

now view his war in Iraq as doing exactly that. After images of American torture at the Abu

Ghraib prison were broadcast worldwide on April 28, 2004, American support for the war,

and Bush, declined. Abu Ghraib's strongest effect, Eric Voeten and Paul Brewer note, "was

on evaluations of Bush's job performance on Iraq, which declined by an estimated 6.1

percentage points as a consequence of the scandal." [27] By the end of his tenure as president,

the majority of the American public believed the war to be a mistake. [28]

In John Landis' *The Blues Brothers,* Jake and Elwood Blues, played by John Belushi

and Dan Aykroyd, embark on a journey to save their Catholic orphanage from foreclosure.

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[25] Los Angeles Times, April 11, 2003. See "Tales of Saddam's Brutality" see above.

[26] David Gergen, "Leadership in the Bush White House." *Harvard Business School,* October 27, 2003. https://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/leadership-in-the-bush-white-house.

[27] Erik Voeten and Paul R. Brewer, "Public opinion, the war in Iraq, and presidential accountability." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6 (2006): 819-20. "The initial success of the war effort," writes Erik Voeten and Paul Brewer, "drove support for the war to a maximum of almost 70 percent. After that, support dropped gradually, to between 35 and 40 percent in early 2006." Support for the war hit an all-time low, they conclude, after "the revelations of the prison scandal in Abu Ghraib." Concurrently, Voeten and Brewer observe, evaluations of Bush's performance in Iraq reached a low of 42 percent when images of the scandal were released in April 2004, down from 73 percent the previous year.

[28] "In Depth: Topics A-Z: Iraq." *Gallup* https://news.gallup.com/poll/1633/iraq.aspx. By the time Bush left office, according to Gallup, 56% of the American public believed the war in Iraq to be a mistake — a stark contrast to the 23% at the start of the war.

"We're on a mission from God," Aykroyd's Elwood calmly remarks, as the brothers wreak

chaos in a high-speed pursuit with police. Addressing a Palestinian delegation at the Egyptian

resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, Bush described his invasion of Iraq in near-identical terms.[29] His

comments were reflective of the narcissism Kristol flagged at Des Moines. Time and again,

Bush held America's geopolitical cause to be not only morally, but divinely sanctioned. The

conflict, he suggested, was more than a good war — it was God's war. "The liberty we prize

is not America's gift to the world, but God's gift to humanity," Bush declared shortly before

the invasion of Iraq. Such rhetoric ensured that, when images of American torture emerged,

the fall would be swift and hard. "Shamefully," Ted Kennedy declared from the Senate floor,

"we now learn that Saddam's torture chambers reopened under new management — U.S.

management."[30] Despite this embarrassingly public contradiction to his crusade against

Hussein, Bush refused to be held accountable for a scandal which was, undeniably,

symptomatic of his own self-appointed mission.

Bad Apples and Rogue Soldiers

"They that govern the most make the least noise."
John Selden, *Table Talk,* 1686.[31]

May 5, 2004. "Don, someone's head has to roll on this one," Bush remarked to

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld after images of American torture emerged from the Abu

Ghraib prison near Baghdad.[32] The story garnered widespread media attention after *60*

Minutes II aired a news segment detailing cases of detainee abuse at the notorious prison,

including excerpts from an Army investigative report, headed by General Antonio Taguba.

Taguba determined that, in Tier 1-A of the prison, "numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant

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[29] MacAskill, "George Bush: 'God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq.'"
[30] Ted Kennedy quoted in Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir.* (Penguin, 2011):
 546.
[31] John Selden, *The table talk of John Selden.* (Clarendon Press, 1868): 122.
[32] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown,* 547.

and wanton criminal abuses were inflicted on detainees."[33] Explicit photographs evidencing

the crimes, all taken by the culprits themselves, were shocking. In one, Specialist Charles

Graner, of the 372nd Military Police (MP) Company, signals a thumbs-up as naked detainees

form a human pyramid. In another, Private Lynndie England, of the same company, smirks

alongside a naked detainee, who has been forced to masturbate. The scandal threatened to

corrode the moral righteousness underpinning the war effort. "We're not going to recover

from this damage," Congressman John Murtha lamented. "This one incident destroyed our

credibility in Iraq."[34] In a public admission of guilt, Secretary of State Powell likened the

scandal to the My Lai massacre, conceding, "in war these sorts of horrible things happen

every now and again, but they're still to be deplored."[35] Others within the administration,

wary of the disastrous impact the scandal might have on the war, shifted the blame entirely.

Rumsfeld, privately at least, was not one of them.[36] On May 5, he handed the

president a hand-written letter of resignation, hoping that it "might demonstrate

accountability on the part of the United States government."[37] Bush refused it. Five days

later, Rumsfeld submitted a second, insisting, "I have concluded that the damage from the

acts of abuse that happened on my watch, by individuals whose conduct I am ultimately

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[33] Antonio M. Taguba, "Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade" [Henceforth cited as Taguba Report]. *Executive Summary,* May (2004): 16. Executive summary of Taguba's findings available here: https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/taguba.pdf. The most perverse offenses listed by Taguba in his report include: "Forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing; Forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped; A male MP guard having sex with a female detainee; the pouring of phosphoric liquid on detainees" and "sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick."

[34] John Murtha quoted in Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 546.

[35] Powell quoted in Christian Appy, "Faces of War." *Boston Globe,* May 16, 2004. http://archive.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/05/16/faces_of_war/.

[36] Taguba, Taguba Report, 19. While Rumsfeld was accepting of responsibility privately, he also shifted a considerable portion of the blame onto the military police in his memoir, despite the crimes deriving from a memorandum on interrogation techniques that he approved in December of 2002. Despite Rumsfeld's claims that the actions of the military police could not have been authorized by the chain of command, General Taguba found that, time and again, Graner in particular was commended for his treatment of detainees prior to MI interrogations. "Example statements," Taguba said, included "Good job, they're breaking down real fast. They answer every question. They're giving out good information. Finally, and Keep up the good work."

[37] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 546.

responsible for, can best be responded to by my resignation."[38] Bush again disagreed. Later

that day, in a public appearance, he remarked to Rumsfeld, "You're doing a superb job. You

are a strong secretary of defense, and our nation owes you a debt of gratitude."[39] It was a

profound display of public loyalty, typical of a commander-in-chief who valued the trait

above all else.[40] It was also an act of self-preservation. A change at the Pentagon, Cheney

advised Bush, "would be seen as an expression of doubt and hesitation" on Iraq. It would

only serve to embolden critics of the war, he argued, who would soon come for the president

himself.[41] With the scandal drawing international condemnation, Bush and his advisers found

themselves in an administration-defining public relations battle. The retention of Rumsfeld

was a signal of intent — a repudiation of governmental culpability. Instead, White House

officials posited, the scandal was the product of a few "bad apples"— the officers caught in

the crosshairs of the camera lens.[42] It was not a hard case to make.

Addressing a justifiably outraged Iraqi public on May 5, Bush promised swift and

resolute justice for the transgressions at Abu Ghraib. "People in Iraq must understand that I

view those practices as abhorrent," Bush solemnly declared in an interview with Arabic-

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[38] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown,* 550-51. On the subject of his resignation, Rumsfeld later stated his regret regarding his staying on as secretary of defense: ""I now believe this was a misjudgement on my part. Abu Ghraib and its follow-on effects, including the continued drumbeat of torture maintained by partisan critics of the war and the President became a damaging distraction. More than anything else I have failed to do, and even amid my pride in the many important things we did accomplish, I regret that I did not leave at that point." Nowhere in his memoir, however, does Rumsfeld accept direct culpability for the events at Abu Ghraib.

[39] Woodward, *State of Denial*, 306.

[40] Alexander Moens, *The foreign policy of George W. Bush: Values, strategy, and loyalty*. (Routledge, 2017): 2. For this President," Moens writes, "all politics are personal, and the glue is loyalty, trust and mutual responsibility between him and his advisers in the inner circle."

[41] Woodward, *State of Denial,* 367.

[42] "Deputy Wolfowitz Interview on the Pentagon Channel." *U.S. Department of Defense,* May 4, 2004. https://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=2970. "Bad apples" originated with Wolfowitz, who introduced the term during a May 4, 2004 interview on the Pentagon Channel. "I think everyone I know in uniform and out of uniform, for that matter, find the behaviour depicted in those pictures simply appalling. And I think the people responsible have really betrayed their fellow service men and women. It's exactly the opposite of what Americans have fought and died for to bring Iraq the opportunity for freedom," Wolfowitz argued. "That's why it's such a disservice to everyone else, that a few bad apples can create large problems for everybody."

language channel Alhurra. "Those mistakes will be investigated, and people will be brought to justice." When quizzed on the potential resignation of Rumsfeld — who unbeknownst to viewers submitted his first resignation earlier in the day — Bush expressed "confidence in the Secretary of Defense." "We're finding the few that wanted to try and stop progress toward freedom and democracy," he explained.[43] Specialist Graner, who became the face of the scandal in the media, guaranteed even less public sympathy for the military police involved. The *Los Angeles Times* described Graner as a "monstrous creep" guilty of abusing his ex-wife, Staci, who filed three protective orders against him. It was not hard to match Graner's morally reprehensible private life to the images of him beating detainees at Abu Ghraib.[44] With a record of defiance dating back to his time as a prison guard, he certainly fit Cheney's description of the culprits as "rogue soldiers."[45] The demonization of Graner, and by extension the 372nd MP Company, offered a seemingly simple solution to inflammatory circumstances.

The half-witted apology on Alhurra proved entirely unconvincing in the Arab states. "They will not be persuaded," Arab League ambassador Ali Muhsen Hamid professed. "They

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[43] White House interview with Alhurra Television. May 5, 2004. Accessed August 20, 2019. https://www.c-span.org/video/?181712-1/presidential-interview.

[44] Paul Lieberman and Dan Morain, "Unveiling the Face of the Prison Scandal; Chuck Graner, accused of leading the abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib was a polite boy. Only in adulthood did troubling signs appear." *Los Angeles Times,* June 19, 2004. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-jun-19-na-graner19-story.html. Details of Graner's personal life made for an unsympathetic public figure: in March 2001, Lieberman and Morain reported, Graner's wife "Staci filed for her third protective order, telling the court her former husband 'still considers me his wife and if I refuse to live with him as such, he considers me 'dead.' He yanked me out of ... bed by my hair, dragging me and all of the covers out into the hall and tried to throw me down the steps,'" Staci reported. "See what your mommy is doing to us?" Graner then said to his kids, who were present during the ordeal.

[45] The perception of Graner as a defiant, lone wolf within the military was argued at his courts-martial, where Master Sergeant Brian Lipinski argued that Graner "wore his hair too long, altered his uniform in violation of regulations and refused to stay away from Private England, despite being repeatedly told to do so." So "he didn't like to follow orders?" prosecutor Michael Holley questioned. "That's true sir," Lipinski replied. "He wants to do his own thing?" Holley added. "Yes, sir." The arbitrary argument that the necessary conditions for torturing prisoners somehow originated in Graner's past — or a predisposition to defy orders — extended the White House's theory that abuse at the prison boiled down to the actions of a few "rogue soldiers." See: "Abu Ghraib accused 'disobeyed orders." *The Guardian,* January 13, 2005. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jan/13/iraq.usa.

don't trust Americans."[46] In the Arabic world, Helga Tawil-Souri writes, the images from Abu Ghraib were indicative of the more "symbolic" aspects of the war in Iraq — as "torture and abuse directed towards the Arab and Muslim man."[47] Fouad Ajami, then director of Middle Eastern studies at Johns Hopkins, agreed: "This has become for many of these Arabs watching us and watching our war in Iraq, it's a referendum for them on the war." The administration's defense did little to temper interpretations of the scandal as symbolic of broader abuses of power in the region. For most, Ajami observed, "It's an evil policy in Iraq, not evil soldiers… what happened in Abu Ghraib… renders naked the American position in the Arab world."[48] Despite the administration's best efforts to pin the scandal on the 372nd MP Company — including a campaign of Arabic network interviews conducted by General Mark Kimmitt — the damage was done.[49] "I don't believe what Bush has promised," Dhurgan Khalid, a resident of Baghdad, concluded. "I don't believe the people that did this will go to jail. I don't even believe they will face justice."[50]

Domestically, the scandal became a referendum on the administration. On May 8, 2004, *The Economist* published a cover story titled "Resign, Rumsfeld" — accompanied by an image of a prison detainee attached to electrical wires. Two weeks later, former Vice President Al Gore delivered a scathing speech on the international position of the United States at New York University. "How did we get from September 12th, 2001, when a leading French newspaper ran a giant headline with the words 'We Are All American Now' and we had the good will and empathy of the world — to the horror that we all felt in witnessing the

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[46] Brian Whitaker, "Arab world scorns Bush's TV apology." *The Guardian,* May 6, 2004. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/may/06/broadcasting.iraqdossier.

[47] Helga Tawil-Souri, "The 'War on Terror' in the Arab Media." *Media & Terrorism. Global Perspectives. London: Sage* (2012): 249.

[48] Interview with Fouad Ajami in "Arab Reaction to Iraqi Prisoner Photos." *PBS News,* May 5, 2004. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/arab-reaction-to-iraqi-prisoner-photos.

[49] Octavia Nasr, "Abu Ghraib photos provoked shock, then anger, for Arabs." *CNN* May 21, 2009. https://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/05/21/iraq.abu.ghraib.impact/index.html

[50] Whitaker, "Arab world scorns Bush's TV apology."

pictures of torture at Abu Ghraib?" he questioned.[51] Describing the inner conflict expressed

by Specialist Graner — who had reportedly said: "The Christian in me says it's wrong, but

the Corrections Officer says, 'I love to make a grown man piss on himself'" — Gore attacked

the Bush administration's degradation of Christian values. "What happened at the prison," he

declared, "was a natural consequence of the Bush administration policy which has dismantled

those wise [Christian] constrains and made war on America's checks and balances." Gore

then called for the resignation of six high-ranking officials, including Rumsfeld, Rice and

Tenet.[52] In the face of mounting domestic and international scrutiny, Rumsfeld believed that

his resignation might "allow the administration and the Iraqi people to move beyond the

scandal."[53] Even after administration officials believed him to be a political liability,

however, Rumsfeld presented Bush with a quandary.[54] To accept accountability at the highest

levels of government would render Bush vulnerable to criticism — vulnerable to charges that

the administration had deserted the Christian values Bush often championed. The resignation

of Rumsfeld offered no clear solution to that issue.

General Taguba's report indicated that the abuses at Abu Ghraib were a consequence

of administration policy. Taguba concluded that the military police were, in fact, directed to

"set the conditions" for interrogations by Military Intelligence (MI) and the CIA.[55] The legal

stipulations for interrogations at the prison, which approved the use of stress positions,

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[51] Terence Neilan, "Gore Calls for Rumsfeld and Rice to Resign." *New York Times,* May 26, 2004.
https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/politics/gore-calls-for-rumsfeld-and-rice-to-resign.html.
[52] Neilan, "Gore Calls for Rumsfeld and Rice to Resign."
[53] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown,* 547.
[54] Julian Borger, "Rice leaves Rumsfeld hot under the collar." *The Guardian,* October 9, 2003. "They're
not happy with the Pentagon," Ralph Peters said of the White House attitude towards the Rumsfeld's
department. "They're unhappy with Rumsfeld… he is increasingly seen as a liability… Their trouble is if
you get rid of him prematurely you make it an admission of failure. If you do it too late you don't get the
benefits in time for the election."
[55] Taguba, Taguba Report, 11, 18. In his report, Taguba actually refers to the CIA under its euphemism at
the prison — "Other Government Agencies" (OGA) — which referred to the CIA and its paramilitary
contractors employed to facilitate interrogations at the prison. For more on the CIA's role in the prison,
and its covert cover as an OGA, see Mark S. Hamm, "High crimes and misdemeanours: George W. Bush
and the sins of Abu Ghraib." *Crime, Media and Culture* 3.3 (2007): 270-73.

environmental manipulation, sleep management and military working dogs, were modelled on Rumsfeld's prior authorization of "aggressive interrogation techniques" on suspected al-Qaeda detainees.[56] "We just do what they want us to do," Specialist Megan Ambuhl recalled. "If they want us to PT (physical training — exercise to the point of exhaustion) the guy, that's what we do. If they want us to keep him up, that's what we do."[57] Private England added: "We thought [the abuse] was unusual, and weird and wrong, but when we first got there, the example was already set, that's what we saw, I mean, it was okay."[58] The abuses at Abu Ghraib did not occur in a vacuum: the Bush administration rendered hundreds of so-called "enemy combatants" through extraordinary rendition (illegal under international law) to circumnavigate legal restrictions. As one federal court of appeals judge observed of the program, "the U.S. officials involved… have not generally tortured detainees themselves; instead, they outsourced it."[59] The actions of the military police at Abu Ghraib reflected the normalization of degrading practices in Army detention facilities, a culture which filtered through the chain of command.

The grim evidence of detainee abuse in the care of the military police concealed a far more disconcerting reality in Iraq. In multiple instances, General Taguba found, members of the military police were commended by superiors for "softening" up detainees for

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[56] *Senate Armed Services Committee Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody.* December 11, (2008): xxviii. The committee concluded that "the abuse of detainees in late 2003 was not simply a result of a few soldiers acting on their own." Instead, they found, "Interrogation techniques such as stripping detainees of their clothes, placing them in stress positions, and using military working dogs to intimidate them appeared in Iraq only after they had been approved for use in Afghanistan and at GTMO. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's December 2, 2002 authorization of aggressive interrogation techniques and subsequent interrogation policies and plans approved by senior military and civilian officials conveyed the message that physical pressures and degradation were appropriate treatment for detainees in U.S. military custody." (xxix) This, of course, vastly undermined the argument of the White House, who popularized the narrative that the military police acted alone in torturing detainees at Abu Ghraib, much to the administration's surprise.
[57] Filmmaker interview with Megan Ambuhl in Errol Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure. Participant Media,* (2008).
[58] Filmmaker interview with Lynndie England in Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure.*
[59] Jules Lobel, "Extraordinary Rendition and the Constitution: The Case of Maher Arar." *Rev. Litig.* 28 (2008): 479.

interrogations.[60] However, Taguba added, the military police never participated in the interrogations themselves. "Someone caught our administration with their pants down," Sargent Javal Davis, a culprit in the scandal, explained:

> They're pissed off at that… Torture didn't happen in those photographs, that was humiliation, that was softening up. Torture happened during the interrogations. Guys going through interrogation, and they're dead, and they were killed, and they died. That's where the torture happened. We don't have any photographs of that.[61]

Far from the influence of a few bad apples, the institutionalization of torture during the war on terrorism started with Bush's refusal to grant al-Qaeda and Taliban detainees the protections afforded by the Geneva Convention.[62] In tandem with Rumsfeld's authorization of aggressive interrogation policies, the Senate Armed Service Committee found, "what followed was an erosion in standards dictating that detainees be treated humanely."[63] The brutality captured on film testified to the culture of violence condoned by interrogators.[64] The images failed, however, to adequately convey the impossible situation facing the lower-

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[60] Taguba, Taguba Report, 18.

[61] Filmmaker interview with Javal Davis in Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure*.

[62] The 1949 Geneva Convention prohibits the practice of "mutilation, cruel treatment and torture" upon "High Contracting Parties." Bush, advised by the Department of Justice, argued that the Conventions did not extend to al-Qaeda detainees because, as "enemy combatants," they did not constitute "a High Contracting Party to Geneva." The paradigm of war had changed, Bush argued, and as such, the wartime protections afforded by the Convention did not extend to al Qaeda detainees. In navigating domestic standards of conduct, the administration redefined the term torture. Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee drafted a legal opinion that torture only included pain tantamount to "serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death." Under this narrow interpretation, Bybee argued, the application of "sensory deprivation techniques" did not constitute torture because, while they were "cruel, inhuman [and] degrading," they did not produce a "pain and suffering of the necessary intensity to meet the definition of torture." In understanding the abuses at Abu Ghraib, it is clear that culpability extended all the way to the White House, and their legal justification of actions deemed illegal under the Geneva Conventions. See: Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Persons in Time of War, 1949. In John Ehrenberg, Patrice McSherry, José Ramón Sánchez, and Caroleen Marji Sayej, eds. *The Iraq Papers*. (Oxford University Press on Demand, 2010): 411. See also Jay Bybee, "Standards of Conduct for Interrogation Under 18 U.S.C. SS2340-2340A" August 1, 2002. in *The Iraq Papers,* 443-44.

[63] *Senate Armed Services Committee Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody,* xxix.

[64] Hamm, "High Crimes and Misdemeanours," 281. In a private conversation reported by a member of the military police, Graner expressed trepidation over the practices at the prison. "OGA [a euphemism for the CIA] are making me do things that are morally and ethically wrong… But I have no choice," Graner, Hamm notes, took his orders from the CIA, who also rained him "in the use of stress positions and the Palestinian hanging."

ranking members of the 372nd MP Company.[65] In a bid to document the abuse, the lowest-ranking officer on the midnight shift, Specialist Sabrina Harman, began taking pictures.

October 20, 2003. "I ended your letter last night because it was time to wake the MI prisoners and 'mess with them' but it went too far, even I can't handle what's going on," Harman wrote to her partner, Kelly, from the Abu Ghraib prison. "I took more pictures now to record what is going on… Kelly, it's awful and you know how fucked I am in the head — both sides of me think it's wrong."[66] Harman's attempts to document the abuses at Abu Ghraib were misunderstood by many. "These pictures," Sarah Boxer of the *New York Times* denounced, are "war photography as tourist snapshots. Soldiers cheerfully tormenting their captives for the camera."[67] Harman's ill-advised smiling throughout the gallery made it difficult, if not impossible, to separate her actions from the likes of Graner. However, at her courts-martial, expert witness Stjepan Mestrovic reasoned that the smiling was indicative of learned helplessness. Harman, he argued, scored "very high in anxiety, depression and dependency, all of which would be consistent with… somebody smiling in a situation that is very uncomfortable as a way to try to please others or to just get along."[68] There was

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[65]Filmmaker interviews with Harman, Davis and Ambuhl in Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure.* Lower-ranking members of the 372nd MP Company recalled that conditions in the prison made it difficult for them to operate against the status quo. "I don't know what I could have done different," Harman reflected in an interview with Morris. "I could've said screw it I'm not working here and just gone to jail for abandoning orders, I guess… I just don't know what I would have done different put in the same situation." Upon entering the prison, Sergeant Davis recalled: "I know what I can do, and I think I know what I can't do, but I see these guys doing this… I see the CIA guys coming in doing this… after a while, it's like, you know what, its free reign, just don't kill 'em." The pictures failed to capture this unique culture of compliance within the prison. Ambuhl added: "You're taught from the very beginning that you have to follow your orders, and if you don't, you're gonna' in trouble; and if you do, obviously you end up in trouble. It's easy for retired majors and whatever to stand there and say these people should've known illegal orders and stood up to these majors, but in a warzone where lives were at stake, it's just unrealistic to think that that would happen."
[66] Sabrina Harman's Letter to Kelly Bryant, submitted as evidence in Sabrina Harman Courts-Martial, October 20, 2003 in Ryan Ashley Caldwell, *Fallgirls, Gender and the Framing of Torture at Abu Ghraib.* Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. (2012): 111.
[67] Sarah Boxer, "Humiliating Photographs as Trophies of War." *New York Times,* May 20, 2004. https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/20/arts/critic-s-notebook-humiliating-photographs-as-trophies-of-war.html.
[68] Stjepan Mestrovic quoted in Caldwell, *Fallgirls,* 142.

certainly no indication that Harman took pleasure in the suffering of detainees — at times, she actively intervened in their defense.[69] Ironically, the images she hoped would put an end to the abuse resulted in her own imprisonment.[70] "Shame on the Army for putting an ill-equipped, ill-trained junior specialist in a position where she had to challenge her leadership to do the right thing," defence lawyer Frank Skinner denounced after Harman's conviction.[71] "They're passing the buck, putting it all on the little kids," Robin Harman, Sabrina's mother, added as Rumsfeld testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 7, 2004. "That's what makes me so mad."[72]

Of all the images taken at the prison, arguably the most infamous captured Harman posing over the distressed, ice-packed corpse of Manadel al-Jamadi. "I didn't realize he had just been murdered," Harman recalled of the photograph. "I was curious at the time and looking back I find it more on the line of me being an idiot. I don't regret going in there, but I regret not being more respectful. No, I did not have anything to do with his death."[73] In fact, al-Jamadi died after being interrogated by the CIA, who subjected him to thirty minutes of Palestinian hanging torture, a method prohibited by the Geneva Convention.[74] "They [the CIA] stressed him [al-Jamadi] out so bad that the man passed away," Staff Sergeant Ivan Frederick wrote to his family from the prison in November, 2003. "They put his body in a

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[69] Caldwell, *Fallgirls,* 190. Sabrina Harman made the following statement under oath on February 26, 2004, before the scandal broke in the United States: Q: "At any time did you attempt to stop the incidents in this investigation?" Harman: "Yes, there was an inmate with a messed-up hand, I would not let anyone get close to him because I felt sorry for him."
[70] Caldwell, *Fallgirls,* 189. Again, under oath, Harman argued that she took the photographs to "show what was going on… to the media," with the intent to "make it [the abuse] stop."
[71] Skinner quoted in "Abu Ghraib Sentence: Six Months." *CBS News,* May 17, 2005. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/abu-ghraib-sentence-six-months/
[72] Robin Harman quoted in Jackie Spinner, "Soldier: Unit's Role Was to Break Down Prisoners; Reservist Tells of Orders from Intelligence Officers." *Washington Post,* May 8, 2004. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2004/05/08/soldier-units-role-was-to-break-down-prisoners/0c567e31-56fb-4533-ba00-e7dcdff1137a/
[73] Author interview with Sabrina Harman in Caldwell, *Fallgirls,* 180
[74] Hamm, "High Crimes and Misdemeanours," 274-5. The Palestinian hanging, Hamm explains, involved suspension from the wrists, with the arms hyper-extended behind the back—a method condemned by international human rights groups. "Human rights workers suspect that it was an 'enhanced interrogation technique' approved by the Bush administration," Hamm writes.

bag and packed him in ice for approximately twenty-four hours in the shower… The next day, the medics came in and put his body in a stretcher, placed a fake IV in his arm and took him away."[75] Without Harman's pictures, the death would likely have passed unremarked. "It was pretty much supposed to be hush hush," recalled Specialist Jeffrey Frost, who aided in the cover-up. "We didn't want the word to be spread around."[76]

Al-Jamadi's distressed corpse symbolized the grisly consequences of decisions made at the highest levels of government. According to multiple sources, *ABC News* reported, "it was members of the National Security Council's Principals Committee," which included Cheney, Rice, Rumsfeld, Powell and Tenet, who "not only discussed specific plans and interrogation methods but approved them."[77] The full weight of criminal responsibility, however, fell on the low-ranking officers caught on camera.[78] "Sacrifice the little guys," Sargent Davis lamented. "That's how they cover it up."[79]

Conveniently, for many, the abuse at Abu Ghraib started, and ended, with the actions of the 372nd MP Company. "They were all acting together in their own amusement," Captain Chris Graveline remarked after Harman's conviction. "There was no justification for what they did that night. [They took the pictures] so they could remember the night, so they could laugh at these men."[80] The demonization of the 372nd MP Company provided a comforting

[75] Seymour Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib." *New Yorker,* April 30, 2004. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/10/torture-at-abu-ghraib.

[76] Filmmaker interview with Jeffrey Frost in Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure.*

[77] Crawford Greenberg, Jan et al. "Top Bush Advisors Approved 'Enhanced Interrogation.'" *ABC News,* April 14, 2009. https://abcnews.go.com/TheLaw/LawPolitics/story?id=4583256&page=1.

[78] Iraq Prison Abuse Scandal Fast Facts." *CNN,* March 22, 2020. https://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/30/world/meast/iraq-prison-abuse-scandal-fast-facts/index.html. Sargent Javal Davis received six months in a military prison. Private Lynndie England received a three-year prison sentence. Staff Sargent Ivan Frederick received an eight-year sentence after pleading guilty to conspiracy, dereliction of duty, maltreatment of detainees, assault and committing an indecent act. Specialist Graner received the greatest sentence, ten years. Harman was sentenced to six months in prison. High ranking officers Col. Thomas Pappas of the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade, and Col. Jerry Phillabaum of the 320th Military Police Battalion, however, managed to avoid prison sentences entirely.

[79] Filmmaker interview with Javal Davis in Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure.*

[80] "Abu Ghraib Sentence: Six Months." *CBS News,* May 17, 2005. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/abu-ghraib-sentence-six-months/.

answer to an unnerving question: had the United States adopted the barbarous practices it once denounced? "These acts could not conceivably have been authorized by anyone in the chain of command, nor could they have been part of an intelligence-gathering or interrogation effort," Rumsfeld defended in his memoir, *Known and Unknown*. "Rather, they were the senseless crimes of a small group of prison guards who ran amok in the absence of adequate supervision."[81] In a war founded upon America's exceptionalism, it was far easier to blame a few bad apples, than to accept the whole cart was rotten.

Far from a bad apple, however, Harman's colleagues described her as a soldier committed to the wellbeing of the Iraqis she connected with. During her time serving in Al Hillah, before being reassigned to Abu Ghraib, Harman purchased a mattress and refrigerator for a local family. "The people there were amazing," Harman recalled of the Iraqi city, forty-five minutes from Abu Ghraib. "They were important to me and I was around them almost every day."[82] At her courts-martial, Captain Donald Reese, Harman's superior officer in Al Hillah, testified: "I judge a lot of things off how the kids react to people and they loved her and looked forward to seeing her."[83] Few paused to consider why an otherwise timid and caring soldier might contribute to the abuse of detainees — General Taguba did. He concluded that the military police were "actively requested" by their superiors to "set the physical and mental conditions for favourable interrogations," and received no training on the rules of the Geneva Convention.[84] While the photographs from Abu Ghraib exposed the world to the dark side of the war, they also implicitly solved the moral crisis, evident in the smiles of the military police. Their demonization shielded the nation from a far more disconcerting reality — that torture had become standard operating procedure.

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[81] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown,* 545.
[82] Author interview with Sabrina Harman in Caldwell, *Fallgirls,* 173.
[83] Testimony of Captain Donald J. Reese, U.S. Army, Sabrina Harman Courts Martial in Caldwell, *Fallgirls,* 49.
[84] Taguba, Taguba Report, 19-20.

When General Taguba arrived in Baghdad for the investigation, he quickly determined that the abuse at Abu Ghraib was systemic. "From what I knew," Taguba remembered, "troops just don't take it upon themselves to initiate what they did without any form of knowledge of the higher-ups." However, the strict legal parameters imposed by the investigation limited Taguba's jurisdiction to the lower-ranking members of the military police. "I was legally prevented from further investigation into higher authority," he recalled. "I was limited to a box."[85] For his forthright investigation, Taguba became yet another casualty of the administration's self-denial over the torture question. In January of 2006, without reason, he was ordered to retire. "They always shoot the messenger," Taguba assessed. "I was being ostracized for doing what I do."[86] "I know that my peers in the Army will be mad at me for speaking out," he continued to the *New Yorker*'s Seymour Hersh. "But the fact is that we violated the laws of land warfare in Abu Ghraib. We violated the Geneva Convention. We violated our own principles… I believe, even today, that those civilian and military leaders responsible should be held to account."[87] Despite occupying polar opposites of the scandal, both Taguba and Harman suffered for exposing an issue which gravitated up the chain of command. In the White House, at least, denying that possibility supplanted the importance of unearthing the roots of the abuse.

On November 22, 2011, the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Commission, established by former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, determined that Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and their legal advisers were all guilty of war crimes in Iraq.[88] The tribunal heard

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[85] Seymour Hersh, "The General's Report." *New Yorker,* June 17, 2007.
https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/06/25/the-generals-report
[86] Hersh, "The Generals Report."
[87] Hersh, "The Generals Report."
[88] Yvonne Ridley, "Bush Convicted of War Crimes in Absentia." *Foreign Policy Journal,* May 12, 2012.
https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2012/05/12/bush-convicted-of-war-crimes-in-absentia. Detailing the crimes of the group, tribunal president Tan Sri Dato Lamin bin Haji Mohd Yunus Lamin asserted that, beyond "reasonable doubt the accused persons, former President George Bush and his co-conspirators engaged in a web of instructions, memos, directives, legal advice and action that established a common plan and purpose, joint enterprise and/or conspiracy to commit the crimes of Torture and War Crimes,

the harrowing testimony of Jameelah Abbas Hameedi, a former detainee at Abu Ghraib, who

described being stripped, humiliated, and treated as a human shield while in the custody of

American forces.[89] Despite the deciding being purely declaratory in nature, it articulated a

growing sense of frustration over the administration's apparent impunity. "I think things that

they authorized probably fall within the area of war crimes," Richard Clarke observed in an

interview with *Democracy Now*. "It's clear that things that the Bush administration did — in

my mind, at least, were war crimes."[90] At Abu Ghraib, however, criminal responsibility fell

solely on the soldiers of the 372nd MP Company. From "the moment that the White House

accused the soldiers in the Abu Ghraib drama as 'rotten apples,'" writes Ryan Caldwell,

"their fates were sealed, and the full horizon of possible explanations for the scandal was

closed with the exclusive focus on them, and not their superiors."[91] The cover they provided,

however, proved temporary. Any illusions of governmental innocence were shattered when

the Senate Select Intelligence Committee released its more-than six-thousand-page report on

the CIA's use of torture during detainee interrogations.

Never Again? The Torture Report and The God War's End

September 6, 2006. "This program has been, and remains, one of the most vital tools

in our war against the terrorists," Bush concluded of the CIA's Detention and Interrogation

Program from the East Room of the White House. "Were it not for this program, our

intelligence community believes that al-Qaeda and its allies would have succeeded in

launching another attack against the American homeland. By giving us information about

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including and not limited to a common plan and purpose to commit the following crimes in relation to the
"War on Terror" and the wars launched by the U.S. and others in Afghanistan and Iraq."
[89] For details on the testimonies of Jameelah Abbas Hameedi, and Moazzam Begg, an ex-Guantanamo
detainee, see Ridley, "Bush Convicted of War Crimes in Absentia."
[90] Richard Clarke interview with Amy Goodman on May 28, 2014, available on the Democracy Now!
Website: https://www.democracynow.org/2014/5/28/former_counterterrorism_czar_richard_clarke_bush
[91] Caldwell, *Fallgirls,* xvi.

terrorist plans we could not get anywhere else, this program has saved innocent lives."[92] As

the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks approached, Bush launched a public defense of the

detention program, and by proxy, his administration. "I want to be absolutely clear with our

people, and the world: The United States does not torture. It's against our laws, and it's

against our values," Bush declared.[93] In March of 2009, the Senate Select Intelligence

Committee, led by Senator Diane Feinstein, tested the president's defense through a

comprehensive investigation into the detention and interrogation program. The damning final

report, made available to the public on December 9, 2014, revealed the brutality of American

practices during the war on terrorism. "Nobody wants to do something that is going to bring

on any kind of attack," Feinstein reasoned from the Senate floor on December 9. "But I came

to the conclusion that America's greatness is being able to say we made a mistake and we are

going to correct it and go from there."[94] Over a decade removed from the abuses at Abu

Ghraib, the so-called "Torture Report" shattered the "bad apple" narrative once and for all.

The report left little room for ambiguity. "It is my personal conclusion," Feinstein

wrote, "that under the common meaning of the term, CIA detainees were tortured. I also

believe that the conditions of confinement and use of authorized and unauthorized

interrogation and conditioning techniques were cruel, inhumane and degrading. I believe the

evidence of this is overwhelming and incontrovertible."[95] Under Sections 2340-2340A of the

U.S. Criminal Code, torture is defined as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether

physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted for such purposes as obtaining… a confession."[96]

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[92] George W. Bush, "Address on the Creation of a Military Commissions to Try Suspected Terrorists." In *Selected Speeches,* 416.

[93] Bush, George W. "Address on the Creation of a Military Commissions to Try Suspected Terrorists," 417.

[94] Diane Feinstein quoted in Carl Hulse, "For Dianne Feinstein, Torture Report's Release is a Signal Moment." *New York Times,* December 9, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/10/us/politics/for-dianne-feinstein-cia-torture-reports-release-is-a-signal-moment.html.

[95]*The Senate Intelligence Committee Report on Torture: Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program.* Melville House, (2014): vii

[96] "U.S. Criminal Code, SS2340 and 2340A" in *The Iraq Papers,* 412.

Investigators concluded that the "enhanced interrogation techniques" employed by the agency, particularly waterboarding and sleep deprivation, resulted in severe physical and mental harm.[97] CIA officers, investigators found, "threatened at least three detainees with harm to their families," including "threats to harm the children of a detainee, threats to sexually abuse the mother of a detainee, and a threat to cut a detainee's mother's throat."[98] Claims that such practices garnered actionable intelligence also proved false. Of the twenty foremost examples of "purported counterterrorism successes that the CIA has attributed" to the program, investigators concluded, all were "wrong in fundamental respects."[99] Not only did the program undermine American values — it proved fruitless in the process.

The images from Abu Ghraib hinted at a darker side to the war on terrorism unexposed to the American public. It proved far easier to blame the scandal on the actions of a few bad apples than to accept the nation had turned its back on its core principles. The Torture Report proved that, beyond reasonable doubt, the nation had resorted to torture during the war — an unnerving but necessary reality to confront. Condemnation of such practices was bipartisan. "People who have worn the uniform and had the experience know that this terrible and odious practice [waterboarding] should never be condoned in the United States," Republican Senator John McCain remarked at Dordt College on October 25, 2007. "We are a better nation than that."[100] Senator Feinstein, too, believed that transparency on torture would benefit the nation. "My words give me no pleasure," she avowed, "But history will judge the nation by its commitment to a just society governed by law and the willingness

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[97]Feinstein, *Report on Torture,* xii. In cases of waterboarding, the committee found, "The waterboarding technique was physically harmful, inducing convulsions and vomiting. Abu Zubaydah, for example, became completely unresponsive, with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth."
[98] Feinstein, *Report on Torture,* xiii.
[99] Feinstein, *Report on Torture*, xi.
[100] John McCain quoted in Robert Farley, "McCain Consistently opposed to torture." *The Poynter Institute.* August 18, 2008. https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2008/aug/18/john-mccain/mccain-consistently-opposed-to-torture/.

to face an ugly truth and say, 'Never again.'"[101] The sentiment marked a stark departure from

previous conceptions of national exceptionalism, as Pease observes, "the fantasy of American

exceptionalism eradicated the difference between the national ideal citizens wanted and the

faulty nation they had, by representing America as already having achieved all that a nation

could be." Humbled by the nation's actions, figures like Feinstein and McCain repackaged

notions of American exceptionalism as a doctrine to aspire to — though not yet attained.[102]

From Woodrow Wilson to Franklin Roosevelt, there persists a notion throughout

American history that when America resorts to war, it does so in the interests of freedom,

democracy and faith. In approaching his war on terrorism, Bush remained consistent with his

predecessors, casting the conflict as a good war in both faith and morals. The images from

Abu Ghraib challenged those convictions on an international scale, and exposed that America

was perhaps especially susceptible to the evils of warfare given the Manichean origins of the

war itself. In her foreword to the Torture Report, Feinstein recognized that, after the 9/11

attacks, the CIA faced intense public pressure to prevent further attacks upon the nation.

"Nevertheless," she commented, "such pressure, fear and expectation of further terrorist plots

do not justify, temper or excuse improper actions taken by individuals or organizations in the

name of national security." The report, she hoped, demonstrated that, "regardless of the

pressures and the need to act, the intelligence community's actions must always reflect who

we are as a nation and adhere to our laws and standards."[103] The document went public at a

critical juncture: American support for torture had incrementally swelled to a majority

position.[104] The report served as a timely reminder of the nation's fundamental values —

values both Republicans and Democrats were keen to uphold.

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[101] Hulse, "For Dianne Feinstein, Torture Report's Release is a Signal Moment."
[102] Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism,* 22.
[103] Feinstein, *Report on Torture*, v.
[104] Brittany Lyte, "Americans Have Grown More Supportive of Torture." *ABC News,* December 9, 2014.
https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/senate-torture-report-public-opinion/. In Pew's 2011 report on support

Conclusion

> We are, as a matter of empirical fact and undeniable history, the greatest force
> for good the world has ever known... We did not seek the position. It is ours
> because of our ideals and our power, and the power of our ideals. In the words
> of British historian Andrew Roberts, 'In the debate over whether America was
> born great, achieved greatness, or had greatness thrust upon her, the only
> possible conclusion must be — all three.'

- Dick Cheney, *Exceptional: Why the World Needs a Powerful America,* 2016.

The words of Dick Cheney in his most recent book, *Exceptional,* reflect a strain of American exceptionalism central to the administration's foreign policy. It is a sentiment manifest throughout the Bush doctrine, with it's "overriding sense that peace and stability require the United States to assert its primacy in world politics."[105] As the abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib and the systemic implementation of torture during the war on terrorism show, however, the world requires both a powerful, and accountable, United States. As Pease cautions, the history of American exceptionalism often fills the gaps between reality and fantasy, displacing citizens' "normal national desire — to achieve an ideal nation — with the abnormal desire to propagate the U.S. model of nationalism."[106] The brutality on show at Abu Ghraib certainly contradicted the promises made to the Iraqi people — that the United States would liberate them from Hussein's totalitarian regime. Certainly, for many Arabs watching, it was one oppressor replacing another — a far cry from the sanctimonious rhetoric pushed by Bush during his first term in office. While figures like Bush were willing to justify torture through inflated claims regarding its effectiveness, figures like Feinstein and McCain were willing to expose America's failures to the world, with the hope that doing so would result in a brighter future for the nation.

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for torture, the most proximate to the release of the Senate Committee's findings, 53% of Americans said that the "governments use of torture against suspected terrorists to gain information can often (19%) or sometimes (34%) be justified."

[105] Jervis, "Understanding the Bush doctrine," 365.

[106] Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism,* 22.

There is something inherently paradoxical about Bush's marriage of faith and warfare. As Stanley Hauerwas writes, "if there is something to this Christian stuff, it must surely involve the conviction that the Son would rather die on the cross than for the world to be redeemed by violence… The defeat of death through the resurrection makes possible as well as necessary that Christians live non-violently in a world of violence." On his own response to the terrorist attacks, Hauerwas, a Christian pacifist, wrote: "I confess it never crossed my mind that… my response to September 11 [would be] quite different from that of the good people who sing 'God Bless America'— so different that I am left in saddened silence."[107] The war on terrorism thrived not on a commitment to God, but the nation. "Some have said the most revealing remark about [Bush] was when he said he listened to a 'higher father,'" Lawrence Wilkerson expressed in an interview with Thomas Preston:

> it's my firm view, buttressed by some experience up close and personal, but more, my thirty-five years in the government and understanding how these things work bureaucratically, that oftentimes, the predisposition was influenced not by God, but by Dick Cheney. And the fact that Dick Cheney is the most unprecedentedly powerful vice president we've ever had. Steeped in defense, and military-industrial complex, congressional issues. The president isn't. He's the gray eminence, if you will, the president isn't. He's the guy whose done foreign policy before, national security policy, the president hasn't… So, I think a lot of the president's predisposition was not necessarily, exclusively the vice president's influence, but if there was a single influence that hardened… rather than created that predisposition, it was the vice president.[108]

While the administration's goals in Iraq were often articulated by Bush in terms of Christian values, that commitment was rivalled only by Bush and Cheney's subscription to a uniquely American religion: American exceptionalism. The "bad apples" narrative demonstrated the administration's hope that, once again, the fantasy of America's exceptionalism would paper over the cracks of an unflattering reality, a reality wholly incongruous with the evangelical tone of the war on terror. The images did, however, match the twisted vision of American exceptionalism extended by the Bush Doctrine: a "drive towards an aggressive unilateralism

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[107] Hauerwas, *September 11, 2001: A Pacifist Response*, 426
[108] Author interview with Lawrence Wilkerson in Preston, *Pandoras Trap,* 42.

in which the U.S. threatens to unravel the international system of institutions and legal precedents built up over fifty years'… [including] the failure to abide by the Geneva Conventions," Neil MacMaster argues.[109] The scandal at Abu Ghraib, and the Torture Report that followed, signal which system ultimately won out during the war on terrorism.

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[109] Neil MacMaster, "Torture: From Algiers to Abu Ghraib." *Race & Class* 46, no. 2 (2004): 16.

EPILOGUE

While the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 destroyed buildings, they failed to shake the nation's understanding of itself. Indeed, in war, the nation reclaimed a familiar wartime identity lost to the conclusion of the Cold War. "America is always at her best when she is on a permanent war footing," Stanley Hauerwas sardonically observed in 2002. "Bin Laden has given Americans what they so desperately needed — a war without end. America is a country that lives off the moral capital of our wars… Wars make clear we must believe in something even if we are not sure what that something is, except that it has something to do with the 'American way of life.'"[1] The rush to relate the post-9/11 moment to the good war against fascism signals the centrality of warfare to configurations of national identity. The good war reminded Americans of an exceptional past, and the nation's duty to continue on in that tradition through yet another conflict. There was little doubt over the role that America would play on the world stage — much like the painting Bush so adored, America would lead the way as "freedom's defender." "America did not change on September 11," Robert Kagan observed. "It only became more itself."[2]

Throughout President Trump's first term in office, scholars and journalists have increasingly popularized the term "post-truth" to explain the current moment in American politics.[3] In the age of Trump, the president's eagerness to hit his political opponents below

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[1] Hauerwas, "September 11, 2001: A Pacifist Response," 430-31.

[2] Robert Kagan, Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003): 85.

[3] Ralph Keyes, *The post-truth era: Dishonesty and deception in contemporary life*. Macmillan, 2004. The "post-truth era" Keyes explains, is an era in which "we don't just have truth and lies but a third category of ambiguous statements that are not exactly the truth but fall just short of a lie." Numerous texts have been published about post-truth politics since Trump's ascendency to the presidency, as well as articles published by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post.* While the term has been around since 2004, Trump, and his over 20,000 false claims since becoming president, of course lend new meaning to the term and its relevancy to contemporary politics.

the belt, and dismissal of criticism as "fake news," has resulted in a distorted political-media

discourse where public attitudes reign supreme and facts rarely matter. During the first

fourteen weeks of the coronavirus pandemic alone, Trump made six-hundred and fifty-four

false or misleading claims.[4] With his failures now measured in lives lost to the virus (some a

direct consequence of his own misguided claims regarding the efficacy of

hydroxychloroquine as a cure), public confidence in the national leadership has plummeted.[5]

On key issues of economy, health care, racial inequality and the coronavirus response, voters

now overwhelmingly favor Democratic nominee Joe Biden.[6]

 As Trump's legacy continues to spoil, his Republican predecessor is enjoying a

presidential rehabilitation. After exiting the White House as the most unpopular president in

the nation's history, George W. Bush now holds a sixty-one percent favourability rating:

among democrats, that number has improved from just eleven percent to fifty-four percent. [7]

Trump's failure to rise to the coronavirus challenge has resulted in Bush's unlikely re-

emergence as a voice of hope and exemplar of leadership. On May 2, 2020, the Bush

Presidential Library released a video showing frontline workers battling the virus, images

from 9/11, and a message from Bush calling for national unity:

> Let us remember we have faced times of testing before, following 9/11 I saw a
> great nation rise as one to honor the brave, to grieve with the grieving, and to
> embrace unavoidable new duties… Let us remember that empathy and simple
> kindness are essential, powerful tools of national recovery... In the final analysis,
> we are not partisan combatants, we are human beings, equally vulnerable and
> equally wonderful in the sight of God.[8]

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[4] Daniel Dale and Tara Subramaniam, "Fact Check: Breaking down Trump's 654 false claims over 14 weeks during the coronavirus pandemic." *CNN,* May 29, 2020. https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/29/politics/fact-check-trump-coronavirus-pandemic-dishonesty/index.html

[5] Sarah Boseley, "Hydroxychloroquine: Trump's Covid-19 'cure' increases deaths, global study finds." *The Guardian,* May 22, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/may/22/hydroxychloroquine-trumps-covid-19-cure-increases-deaths-global-study-finds.

[6] "Biden Widens Lead Over Trump to 15 Points in Presidential Race; Trump Job Approval Rating Drops to 36 Percent." *Quinnipiac University Poll,* July 15, 2020. https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=3666

[7] Ryan Struyk, "George W. Bush's favorable rating has pulled a complete 180." *CNN,* January 23, 2018. https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/22/politics/george-w-bush-favorable-poll/index.html

[8] "Listen to George W. Bush's message about Covid-19." *CNN on Youtube,* May 4, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiS1J1hjQK4.

To some, the video served as a reminder of Trump's own incompetence as a leader. "Whereas previous presidents, including Bush, sought to heal divisions in the country following crises," Chandelis Duster argued for *CNN,* "Trump has… frequently cast the nation's recovery from the pandemic in the context of his re-election."[9] Forgiven, or seemingly forgotten, is Bush's own legacy as a post-truth president: the lies told with impunity; the loss of moral standing; the degradation of respect for human rights. While Bush calls for humanity in the present, it is important to remember that his own administration failed to treat "enemy combatants" as human beings with legal protections under the Geneva Conventions. Indeed, as America recovered from the terrorist attacks, war was not an unavoidable duty, but a deliberate and calculated attack fuelled by grudges, unreliable intelligence, fearmongering and lies.

One president's failures should not erase another's. Indeed, Bush paved the way for the current state of American politics: the choices made by his administration after 9/11 foreshadowed the dishonesty plaguing political discourse today. To rewrite that legacy through the lens of nostalgia fails to hold the national leadership accountable for their errors, if only in the history books. As the nation enters a new period in its history, fighting an enemy impervious to guns and missiles, the presidency of Bush should serve as a warning that false or misleading claims have dire consequences. Now is not the time to forget that legacy but to learn from it, if only in the hope that we can hold our leaders to a higher standard than has been set in the past.

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[9] Chandelis Duster, "Trump attacks Bush after 43rd president offers message of unity." *CNN,* May 4, 2020. https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/03/politics/george-w-bush-coronavirus-partisanship-trump/index.html

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