

Gulliver on Trial: The Iraq War and Its Domestic Fallout in the United States

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The War after the War in Iraq and the Khaki Election

Sometimes “things fall apart” – and for the Bush Administration September 2003 has marked the “low point” of the President’s first term. The quick military triumph over the Baathist Regime last spring is proving to be his undoing at home as well as abroad. The American Gulliver, who only few short months ago bestrode the world like a military colossus, now finds himself bogged down in Iraq and on trial at home and abroad. The situation in post-war Iraq, where there are an average of 17 guerrilla attacks per day on “coalition forces”, comes as a shock to most Americans, and we have been “in denial” about the reality that now faces us – an Arab “sequel” to the Afghans’ War against the Soviet Army that might make Iraq our “Afghanistan” rather than another Vietnam¹. Beginning with strikes against water, power facilities and the Iraq pipelines, Baathist guerrillas have carried off massive attacks against the Jordanian Embassy and the UN Headquarters in Baghdad itself. Meanwhile the car-bomb assassination of the Shia leader, Ayatollah Muhammad Bukral-Hakim spread the mass killing to the Shiite area around Najaf and increased the chances of a full-blown, sectarian civil war. Somehow the media splash around the execution of Saddam’s two sons and his fourteen-year-old grandson by the 101st Airborne just didn’t compensate for the drumbeat of terrible news.

We might recall that it was only five, short months ago that President George W. Bush landed in a navy bomber on an aircraft carrier homeward bound from Iraq, and

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¹ See James Carroll, “Facing the Truth about Iraq,” *The Boston Globe*, September 2. 2003.

took a victory lap across her deck in an aviator's flight suit to the cheers of the assembled ship's company. Afterwards the President stood beneath a giant banner that read "Mission Accomplished," and boldly justified the conquest of Iraq as necessary payback for the loss of the Twin Towers. "The battle of Iraq" he declared "is one victory in the war on terror that began on September 11th" that removed "an ally of Al Qaeda" and guaranteed "no terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction [WMDs] from the Iraqi regime because that regime is no more²". These were big claims that still resonate – although perhaps not quite in the way the President intended. An opportune "photo op" that transformed a navy carrier on active duty into a television stage prop, the President's impersonation of a war hero was an image that threatened to haunt us over the next year in the form of endless campaign spots.

Clearly short quick wars abroad and frequent terror alerts at home were meant to be the central planks of Mr. Bush's "permanent campaign" to win the popular majority that eluded him in 2000. Appealing to our patriotism, Karl Rove and the Bush political consigliere were planning to anoint a "Commander in Chief" in 2004 rather than to elect a mere President³. The Republican strategy of holding a "khaki election" is one measure of how much American domestic politics has shifted since September 11th, 2001 – for the first time since the 1950s foreign threats to domestic security have become the central issue that will decide the outcome of the next presidential election. But today it is far from certain that the security issue will be a useful centrepiece for the Republican campaign⁴ or that America's servicemen will remain passive members of the supporting cast in President Bush's political theatre⁵. Instead of marking the launch of a winning election campaign, the photo

² See Elizabeth Bumiller, "For Bush, Cold Truths are Lurking After Pomp on Carrier," *The New York Times* (NYT), May 2, 2003, p. A1.

³ Francis X. Cline, "Karl Rove's Campaign Strategy: It's the Terror, Stupid," Op-Ed, *NYT*, May 10, 2003.

⁴ Dana Milbank and Mike Allen, "Security may no longer be a safe issue for Bush in 04," *The Washington Post*, August 22, 2003, p. A01.

⁵ See Christian Parenti's report on the dissatisfaction felt by the Frontline troops – especially the reservists, "Stretched Thin, Mistreated and Lied to: On the Ground with U.S. Troops in Iraq," *The Nation*, October 6, 2003. Their dissatisfaction is shared by military and reservist families back home and is beginning to make itself felt by the U.S. Military Brass Hats and by Congress.

image of Bush in his pilot suit might rather represent that “over the top” moment where our President lost the trust of America’s media elites⁶ and his political fortunes began to slide. Certainly we can say that August and September have brought enough tales of disaster from Iraq to make the President’s claims in May about the end of “combat operations” and a “Mission Accomplished” seem hollow.

Unfortunately for the Bush Administration conquering Iraq has proved far easier than occupying it. Since its “liberation” by “Coalition Forces”, Iraq has become a magnet for violence that draws Jihadi fighters from across the Muslim world – such as the 3,000 Saudis who reportedly crossed over into Iraq in the past two months. And the Mjuaheddin/Saddam alliance that was only a fiction when we launched our invasion with the British in March looks today like a troublesome reality that puts the plans for future reconstruction of Iraq at risk⁷. And even as we snare the occasional Islamist along with all the local resistance fighters we’ve killed in the Sunni Triangle, the number of American and British dead (304) keeps mounting and now exceeds our total losses in the war itself.

French Diplomats may be under strict orders never to say, “We told you so”, but Mr. Bush’s domestic critics suffer under no such constraint. In New York and London, French warnings that we were taking on more with our Iraq adventure than we could manage on our own, once seemed like insufferable Gallic insubordination, but now look increasingly like friendly advice that was “prudent even prescient⁸.” In Washington, however, it doesn’t help soothe bruised egos to learn that according to the latest polls in Baghdad, the Iraqis’ preferred country is France and their favorite leader is Jacques Chirac⁹. But this poll result coincides with other surveys that show that the invasion and occupation of Iraq have been a disaster for American public diplomacy around the world – but especially in the Muslim countries from the Middle East to Indonesia – where America’s disapproval rating was in the high 70% range

⁶ See Howard Fineman, “Tangled Up In His Flight Suit,” *Newsweek*, September 1, 2003, pp. 28-29.

⁷ See Maureen Dowd, “Magnet for Evil,” *NYT*, August 20, 2003, Op-Ed page.

⁸ See Christopher Dickey, “Iraq’s Mr. Popularity,” *Newsweek*, October 6, 2003, p. 33.

or higher¹⁰. A dramatic and rapid deterioration of America's image was revealed among the peoples of the Mid-east where everyone with the exception of the Israelis seem convinced of our evil intentions¹¹. Another clear casualty is the Euro-American relationship because the Iraq war has provoked shifts in European public opinion that could have long-term impacts. A June poll done in the immediate aftermath of the conquest of Baghdad showed that the darkening of America's image among her traditional allies was a general trend across the EU – outside of Poland and a few other former Warsaw Pact countries.

But the diplomatic fallout is not limited to public perceptions of U.S. policy or to Mr. Bush's image abroad. It also includes a major split between the United States and their French and German allies that marked a break in 50 years of transatlantic cooperation, and lead many in the U.S. to view these "erstwhile allies" as strategic adversaries¹². In addition the war did little to redeem the credibility of the UN as Mr. Bush brazenly claimed in his speech to the General Assembly this month. Rather the standing of the UN as a neutral world forum was hurt by the perception common to American conservatives that the Security Council was the defender of "Third World Tyrants¹³" and the conviction of many Arabs that it had become the cat's-paw of American imperialism. One could of course look at this sea shift in global attitudes toward the U.S. or our isolation within NATO and the UN Security Council and see evidence of under-handed French manipulation – as Thomas Friedman recently has done – but this explanation has much less general appeal today than it had last spring. Most American critics believe that the primary responsibility for this policy

⁹ Chiac beat out Mr. Bush by some 13 points, see Dickey, *op cit.* [8].

¹⁰ See the Global Attitudes Project survey, "Views of a Changing World," The Pew Center for the People and the Press, June 2003, p. 13.

¹¹ See the official conclusion drawn by the U.S. Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim world, Steve Weisman, "U.S. Must Counteract Image in Muslim World, Panel Says," *NYT*, October 1, 2003.

¹² See Thomas Friedman, "Our War With France," *NYT*, September 18, 2003, Op-Ed page. Another consequence of the diplomatic conflict has been the emergence of a populist discourse in the United States that is violently Anti-European. See Timothy Garton Ash, "Anti-Europeanism In America," *The New York Review Of Books*, February 13, 2003.

¹³ See for instance, two highlights of the anti-UN campaign, the Neo-Con editorialist Charles Kruthammer's editorial denouncing the UN Security Council as an insurance company for tyrants, "Mr. Bush Forget them all," reprinted in *The Guardian*, March 26, 2003 and Richard Perle's

disaster is Mr. Bush's along with that of his national security advisors. But of course not all. Newt Gingrich, the neo conservative spokesman, for instance, carried out a "pre-emptive strike" against liberal critics this summer by calling for "top to bottom" reforms and a "culture shock" at the State Department – arguing that "State" has not been a loyal advocate for Presidential policies and American values and that this "disloyalty" is at the root of our failure to communicate with the rest of the world and to combat effectively rising anti-American feeling¹⁴.

President Bush and the Neo-Conservative faction that came to power with him in January 2001 gambled the success of his presidency and his chance for re-election on quick and decisive victories in his war against terrorism, and while they may have won some battles against Al Qaeda overseas and the State Department at home, in both the Iraq and Afghan theatres the war itself looks increasingly like a draw if not an outright loss. Overseas the conquest of Baghdad has proved to be the rock that nearly wrecked the premiership of Tony Blair and may yet break the spirit of Anglo-Saxon brotherhood that sent British, American and Australian troops off on the warpath together in Afghanistan and Iraq. At home, the shared losses of 09/11 and the triumphs of the short punitive campaign waged in Afghanistan that same winter created a bond of trust between President Bush and many ordinary Americans. Indeed one might date the real beginning of his Presidency from the day after the attacks when he stood in the rubble field of the Twin Towers, promising to punish "evil doers," and was acclaimed by the hundreds of New York Firemen, Police and Construction workers chanting: "USA, USA, USA!" In short, 09/11 was the catalyzing event that gave this Presidency a mission that went somewhere beyond obtaining tax cuts for America's wealthiest families.

But the "war after the war" in Iraq has broken apart the bipartisan patriotic front that emerged following the attacks on New York and Washington¹⁵. Already the sense of

article, "Thank God for the Death of the UN," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2003.

¹⁴ See Newt Gingrich "Rogue State Department," *Foreign Policy*, July 2003, pp. 42-48

¹⁵ See Ronald Brownstein, "Post Sept. 11th Solidarity Crumbles over the War in Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 15, 2003, www.truthout.org.

shared national purpose was weakening during the long diplomatic run-up to this spring's invasion of Iraq when one saw the first signs of a serious partisan divide between Democratic and Republican voters over Bush's war policy¹⁶. In late March 27% of Americans held firm to their belief that the war was a "mistake," and many Democrats didn't really rally behind the war until after victory in the battle for Baghdad was almost a foregone conclusion¹⁷. For other Independent and Republican voters support for Bush's war policy began to soften in the war's chaotic aftermath this summer¹⁸. As of September 2003, the latest polls show that 48% of American voters now believe that Bush's war "of choice" against Saddam Hussein was not worth the cost in American blood and treasure. The President's credibility on Iraq is hemorrhaging even as the military and civil costs of occupying Iraq (some \$100 billion) threaten to push this year's Federal deficit of \$ 455 billion further into the danger zone already created by Bush's enormous tax cuts in the Spring.

None of this is good news for the Administration. The latest *New York Times/CBS News* poll reflects a rapid fall in public confidence in the President's ability to deal with foreign policy crises – or to handle the situation in Iraq¹⁹. The results on domestic issues are even more troublesome for the President with 56% disapproving of his handling of the economy and agreeing that the "country is on the wrong track". Mr. Bush's overall job approval has now fallen to 50% – the lowest it has been since before 09/11²⁰. The only good news in the October poll was that two-thirds of the respondents still thought of Bush as a "strong leader" and believed in

¹⁶ As of the first week of the war in March 2003 only 50% of Democrats approved of it as opposed to 93% of Republicans and Independents. And in "cities of peace" like New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago, (i.e. the 151 cities on the two coasts and the northern tier where city councils voted antiwar resolutions before the war began), public opinion about the war remained radically polarized into pro and anti war camps that mirrored the distribution of partisan attitudes toward the Bush presidency. See for instance, Michael Wolff, "War and the City" *The New Yorker*, March 31, 2003. pp. 23-25.

¹⁷ Adam Nagourney and Janet Elder, "Support for Bush Surges at Home but Split Remains," *NYT*, March 22, 2003, p. A1.

¹⁸ Adam Nagourney, "Across the Nation Concern Grows about the Course of the War in Iraq," *NYT*, September 15, 2003.

¹⁹ On foreign policy respondents expressed disapproval by 45% to 44%; on Iraq the disapproval was 48% to 47%. See Todd Purdum and Janet Elder, "Poll Shows Drop in Confidence on Bush Skill in Handling Crises," *NYT*, October 3, 2003.

²⁰ See Jennifer Barrett, on recent Newsweek /Washington Post Polls "When is Enough Enough?"

his “basic honesty”. However comforting, public trust in Bush as a “straight shooter” could represent a future political liability, because Bush has lost the confidence of many liberal and moderate opinion makers who no longer find him credible²¹. Overall, then, it appears that the White House strategy of re-electing George W. Bush as our “War President” has suffered its first major setback.

The Conflict between the Stated Rationales for War and Its “Real Reasons”

At the end of September 2003 the President’s chief weapons inspector, David Kay, reported to Congress that after a six months search in the field in Iraq, American inspectors had yet to find a single banned chemical or biological weapon, but had determined that Iraq’s secret nuclear program was only at “the most very rudimentary stage²²”. While the President argued that these findings vindicated his decision to go to war, they contradict the claim he made last March that our “Intelligence [...] leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised”, or the claim he made in July that “We have found weapons of mass destruction”. Following closely on the President’s own admission on September 16th that “We have no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with the September 11th attacks²³”, Kay’s report meant that the two principal rationales for the pre-emptive invasion of Iraq had taken fatal hits with the media and in the court of public opinion. The President’s fumbled attempt to reconcile current facts with past pronouncements only ended up provoking hard questions about the real reasons why we went to war. This is a debate that is long overdue, because as Olivier Roy already pointed out last May,

Newsweek, Sunday August 24, www.truthout.org.

²¹ See Bob Herbert’s op-ed, “The Art of False Impression,” *NYT*, August 11, 2003.

²² Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, “Search in Iraq Finds No Banned Weapons,” *The Washington Post*, October 3, 2003, p. A01.

²³ See David Sanger, “Bush Reports No Evidence of Hussein Tie to 09/11,” *NYT*, September 18, 2003, p. 22.

“Washington’s stated war goals were not logically coherent, and its more intellectually compelling arguments were usually played down or denied²⁴”.

Over the course of the past year the Bush Administration and the Blair Government stated several different official rationales for the war – the search for WMDs, the suspected connection between Saddam and Al Qaeda, or the humanitarian rescue of the Iraqi people – that sometimes conflicted with each other and often shifted depending on their intended audience. The “imminent threat” of WMD’s argument was emphasized for the British and international publics, while links to “Al Qaeda-like terrorism” were stressed at home. In quick succession last Spring, the Bush Administration tried to sell the war on the basis of claims that relied on forged evidence – such as the claim that Iraq attempted to buy 500 pound of yellowcake uranium from Niger²⁵ – or that were outrageous – such as the claim that Iraqi drone aircraft were a direct threat to the American homeland – or simply nonsensical – such as the claim that Saddam’s regime and Al Qaeda were strategic allies, and not every American bought it²⁶. But by this summer the fiction that Saddam was directly involved in the September 2001 attacks was the rationale that struck home with domestic opinion, and, embedded in the national consciousness by dint of constant repetition, that was still firmly believed by 69% of the American public this August²⁷. Apparently Americans could tolerate the idea of missing WMDS as long as we could still tell ourselves that Baghdad’s fall was justified “payback” for the fall of the Twin Towers. But since the President’s admission in September, we can no longer pretend that this is so – although Vice President Dick Cheney and a good portion of the American public are still trying hard not to let this idea die a natural death²⁸.

²⁴ On the conflict between the official U.S. diplomatic line and real strategic rationale for the invasion see Olivier Roy’s Op-Ed column, “Europe will not be fooled again,” *NYT*, May 13, 2003.

²⁵ See Robert Sheer report about Ambassador Joseph C. Wilson’s dismissal of the Niger letter as a crude forgery, “A Diplomat’s undiplomatic truth: They lied,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 2003.

²⁶ See Christopher Sheer, “Ten Appalling Lies We Were Told About Iraq,” *AlterNet*, June 27 2003, www.alternet.org.

²⁷ For the latest polls concerning this “urban legend,” see Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane, “Hussein link to 9/11 Lingers in Many Minds,” *The Washington Post*, September 6, 2003, p. A01.

²⁸ See Anne E. Kornblut and Byran Bender, “Chey Link of Iraq, 9/11 Challenged,” *The Boston Globe*, September 16, 2003.

Not to do so would be to continue to ignore the fact that 15 out of 19 hijackers on 09/11 were Saudi nationals, but then that may be the very reason for the longevity of this fiction. It diverts public attention from inconvenient facts concerning the role played by some Saudi nationals and officials in the planning and funding of the 09/11 attacks. As John O'Neil, the FBI top expert on Al-Qaeda said shortly before his death at the World Trade Center on 09/11: "All the answers, everything needed to dismantle Osama Bin Laden's organization can be found in Saudi Arabia²⁹." But the Bush Administration is reluctant to see this hidden dimension of the 09/11 attacks discussed³⁰, just as they are reticent to see any discussion of the Administration's cooperation with the Saudi Royal Family in spiriting members of the Saudi community out of the U.S. on September 12th, 2001 before they could be interviewed by the FBI³¹. Not surprisingly, all 28 pages that deal with the Saudi connection in the report of the Congressional Joint Intelligence Panel on the 09/11 attacks were blacked out of the published version at the insistence of the Administration.

Today little remains of the official arguments that were deployed last spring to convince us of the urgent need of preempting Iraq's WMDs capabilities because clearly the threat had already been contained by UN Inspections and the embargo that kept the Iraqis, and their armed forces, on short rations for 12 years. The only official reason for our invasion that's left standing is the claim that our invasion was motivated by a sincere desire to rescue the Iraqis from an evil dictator. Given the discovery of mass graveyards with hundreds of thousands of victims; torture chambers, or the fact that Uday was authorized to loot Iraq's Central Bank in March, there's little doubt that Saddam was an evil tyrant and his two sons sociopaths, and certainly these are sufficient reasons to justify the American overthrow of the

²⁹ See Seth Ackerman, "Who Knew?: The Unanswered Questions of 09/11," *In These Times*, September 29, 2003, p. 22.

³⁰ See Gerald Posner's explosive book on the U.S.-Saudi connection, *Why America Slept*, Random House, New York, September 2003.

³¹ See Michael Steinberger, Bush's Saudi Connections, *The American Prospect*, September 19, 2003.

Hussein regime to many Iraqis³². But seen from New York or London, the humanitarian argument looks too much like a hasty rewrite of the history of Iraqi-American relations to be entirely believable. So we are left without any satisfactory explanation of why the invasion really happened, of how to reconcile it with our constitutional procedures or international law, or any clear idea of what the Bush Administration's objectives in Iraq are for the near future? These questions have inspired a search for the "real reasons" for the Iraq War that make Mr. Bush and his Administration look either dishonest or "ideology driven".

The Battle over Intelligence and The Neo-Cons War with "State" and the CIA

But even before Mr. Bush's recent admissions and attempts to recalibrate earlier "mis-statements", U.S. claims about Iraq weapons and terrorist ties were already much in doubt. Both on the ground in Iraq where American weapons inspectors were withdrawn after a fruitless search for the missing chemical and nuclear arsenal³³ and in London and Washington where this "intelligence failure" became a major political scandal this summer. In June the media flap over missing WMDs triggered a flood of leaks from the CIA, the DIA and the State Department – as the battle between Rumsfeld's Neo-Conservative warriors in the Pentagon and the "realists" in Powell's State Department and the CIA broke into the public arena.³⁴ Very quickly press attention focused on the fact that Donald Rumsfeld had set up his own in-house intelligence service, The Office of Special Plans, to compete with both the CIA and the DIA – which were accused by him and Vice-President Cheney of showing excessive caution in their estimates of Saddam's weapon programs and ties to Al Queda's terrorist network³⁵. During the policy battles that raged throughout the summer and fall of 2002 within an Administration deeply divided over its Iraq policy,

³² See Patrick Tyler's report from Baghdad, "Staying the Course May Be The Hardest Battle," *NYT*, October 5, 2003, Section 5, p. 4.

³³ Barton Gellman and Walter Pincus, "Depiction of Threat Outgrew the Evidence," *The Washington Post*, August 10, 2003, p. A1.

³⁴ See Sonni Efron, "Diplomats on the Defensive," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 2003.

³⁵ Seymour M. Hersh, "Selective Intelligence," *The New Yorker*, May 5, 2003, pp. 1 & 2.

this Pentagon group and its occasional allies in the State Department and the White House won almost all of the policy fights and succeeded in getting their war policy accepted by President Bush in August 2002.

The “Get Saddam” faction was made up of a network of Administration officials with ties to conservative policy research think tanks such as the *American Enterprise Institute* and the *Heritage Foundation* and to neo-conservative journals such as *The Weekly Standard* edited by Bill Kristol. The most important members of this policy faction were: Paul Wolfowitz, the Under Secretary of Defense, Richard Perle, the Chair of the National Defense Policy Board, Elliot Abrams, Chief Policy Advisor to the White House, John Bolton, Under Secretary for Arms Control at the State Department, Douglas Feith, Under Secretary of Defense, Stephen Cambone, the Under-Secretary of Intelligence, and Adam Shulsky who headed Donald Rumsfeld’s Office of Special Plans³⁶. Most were policy makers who had served together in government since the Reagan Administration and been involved in policy battles with the CIA in the late 1970’s when they had fought with them over intelligence estimates of Soviet nuclear capabilities³⁷. Some had also belonged to the policy cabal in the Reagan Administration (Elliott Abrams, Richard Perle, John Poindexter and Otto Reich) that had promoted the Contra War against the Sandinistas and who had lost their influence as a result of the Iran-Contra investigation at the end of the Reagan years. Others sat out their political exile during Clinton years in academia or institutes like the AEI. All of them were returned to national office with the arrival of the Bush Administration³⁸. Vice President Dick Cheney is credited with their political resurrection by placing these men in key positions in the Pentagon when he managed the transition between the Clinton and Bush in 2001³⁹.

³⁶ William Pfaff, “The Long Reach of Leo Strauss,” *The International Herald Tribune*, May 15, 2003.

³⁷ See Elizabeth Drew, “The Neo-Cons in Power.” *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 50, No. 10, June 12, 2003, p. 2.

³⁸ Jim Lobe, “Iran-Contra, Amplified,” *Inter Press News Agency*, August 9, 2003.

³⁹ See Glenn Kessler and Peter Slevin, “Cheney is Fulcrum of Foreign Policy,” *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2001, p. A13.

But by spring 2003 senior diplomats at the State Department were up in arms over what they saw as the hijacking of U.S. foreign policy making by Rumsfeld's Pentagon and by his efforts to under cut their boss, Secretary of State Colin Powell. One veteran Foreign Service Officer explained the shift in policy making power in these terms: "I just...tell myself, 'There's been a military coup,' and then it all makes sense⁴⁰." They were joined in their dissent by retired officers from the CIA who voiced loud complaints to the press that Rumsfeld's Pentagon had fed "cooked intelligence reports" from Iraqi defectors around Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress directly to the White house⁴¹, and had "grossly manipulated" intelligence data to shape public opinion⁴². In the view of groups like Veteran Intelligence Agents for Sanity, Rumsfeld's decision to create his own back channel to the White House had set the stage for "hying" to the national media whatever reports supported his line on Iraq⁴³ and eventually to passing off forged documents like the infamous Niger uranium memo to the highest levels of the Administration and the Congress⁴⁴.

Charges that U.S. Intelligence had been compromised were inadvertently reinforced by Under-Secretary Paul Wolfowitz who had tried to downplay the importance of the missing WMDs by telling an interviewer from *Vanity Fair* that the issue of Iraqi WMDs had only been emphasized "for bureaucratic reasons. It was the one reason everyone could agree on⁴⁵". This effort at damage control backfired and in a matter of days, the missing WMDs became the lead story for *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*⁴⁶. And by June the press was circling Rumsfeld's Pentagon in what looked like a remake of the Iran-Contra scandal of the Reagan's years.

⁴⁰ See Sonni Efron, "Diplomats on the Defenseive," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 2003.

⁴¹ See Spencer Ackerman and John B. Judis on the battle over intelligence, "The Selling of the Iraq War," *The New Republic*, June 30, 2003, pp. 15-17.

⁴² Nicholas Kristof, "Missing in Action: Truth," Op-Ed, *NYT*, May 6, 2003, p. A31.

⁴³ See Ray McGovern's analysis (a 27 year veteran of the CIA) of the political manipulation of intelligence data, "Intelligence Shouldn't Exist Just To Serve Policy," *The Miami Herald*, August 5, 2003, www.truthout.org.

⁴⁴ Kristof, "Save Our Spooks," *NYT*, May 30, 2003, Op-Ed. p. A27.

⁴⁵ See the full text of Wolfowitz's *Vanity Fair* Interview, May 15, 2003, "Truth in Politics", www.thetip.org.

⁴⁶ Michael Iskoff, "The Mideast: Neo cons on the line," *Newsweek*, June 23, 2003, pp. 29-35

This intense bureaucratic warfare between the Pentagon and the CIA and State Department over false intelligence spilled over into the courts and criminal justice system with the revelation in September 2003 that the White House had retaliated against one retired official, Ambassador Joseph Wilson, (an African expert who is a specialist in the minerals industry), who had exposed the Niger Uranium Memo as a hoax. He was originally sent by Vice President Dick Cheney in February 2002 on a private mission to Niger to confirm the authenticity of this memo that purported to detail Iraqi efforts to obtain 500 pounds of uranium yellowcake. Wilson had reported back to the Vice President office in March 2002 that the claim was bogus. Disturbed when the Administration kept citing this memo throughout the Fall, and then outraged when it finally found its way into the President's State of the Union address in January, Wilson responded by writing a letter to *The New York Times* where he denounced both the hoax and the Administration for presenting the memo as evidence of Iraqi nuclear activity long after it had been exposed a forgery⁴⁷.

This July senior officials at the White House retaliated against him by calling six Washington journalists with the information that Wilson's wife, Valerie Palme, was a covert operative for the CIA. Robert Novak, a nationally syndicated conservative columnist, printed this information and publicly identified her as a CIA agent under deep cover and gave out her name – there by exposing her and all her network of field contacts.⁴⁸ This affair is the most dangerous twist yet in the bureaucratic warfare between the CIA and the Hawks in the Bush White House. "Outing" a CIA agent in print has been a federal felony punishable by ten years in prison since the Phillip Agee Act was passed under President Bush Senior.

Now that persons unknown on the White House staff have committed a federal crime, it must be investigated and prosecuted by the Justice Department. But no Congressional Democrat is ready to trust Attorney General John Ashcroft to pursue the case aggressively. So they are demanding the naming of a Special Prosecutor

⁴⁷ Joseph C. Wilson, "What I Didn't Find in Africa," *NYT*, July 6, 2003, Op-Ed page.

⁴⁸ See David Rosenbaum, "First a Leak, Then A Predictable Pattern," *NYT*, October 3, 2003.

just as they did in the Watergate and Iran Contra affairs. Most seriously for Mr. Bush, the person suspected of “leaking” Valerie Palme’s name to the press is Karl Rove, President Bush’s chief of staff and the head of his presidential campaign organization. Rove is a conservative political operative who was trained in the Lee Atwater School of attack politics⁴⁹, and one of his trademarks is engineering the political destruction of an adversary without leaving any of his own fingerprints on the deed. This is known in Washington as the “Mark of Rove⁵⁰”, but this time he apparently left his fingerprints behind. Rove (nicknamed by the press as “Bush’s Brain”) is a central player in the Bush White House who has been at Bush’s side at every stage of his state and national political career. His resignation or prosecution would represent a devastating loss to the Bush White House.

Less than three years into its first term, the Bush Administration finds itself saddled with responsibility for three major intelligence failures – the failure to anticipate the 09/11/01 attacks⁵¹; the failure to accurately assess the true scale of Iraq’s weapons programs⁵² and the failure to anticipate political resistance in occupied Iraq⁵³. So far Republican Committee Chairmen have been able to keep the Congressional inquiries into these affairs under tight control but only at the price of feeding a broader crisis of credibility that now touches almost every Administration pronouncements on domestic and foreign policy making. In brief, the afterglow from Bush’s moment of triumph on the carrier Abraham Lincoln has barely lasted a few months⁵⁴, and public opinion has begun to polarize anew along sharply partisan

⁴⁹ Atwater was the Republican consultant who first targeted Bill Clinton for elimination in 1989, See Joe Conason & Gene Lyons, *The Hunting of the President: The Ten-year Campaign to Destroy Bill Clinton*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2000, pp. 1-5.

⁵⁰ See Nicholas Lemann, “The Controller,” *The New Yorker*, May 5, 2003, pp. 4-6.

⁵¹ Molly Ivins, “09/11 Inquiry Offers Findings that Were Obvious From the Get-go,” *Creators Syndicate*, August 3, 2003.

⁵² See Douglas Jehl and Judith Miller’s article which is also Miller’s mea culpa, “Draft Report Said to Cite No Success In Iraq Arms Hunt,” *NYT*, September 25, 2003, p. A1.

⁵³ See Jacques Isnard, “Self-Criticism and Introspection at British and American Intelligence Services,” *Le Monde*, September 16, 2003, English translation, www.truthout.org.

⁵⁴ See Howard Fineman, “Tangled Up In His Flight Suit,” *Newsweek*, September 1, 2003, pp. 28-29.

lines – and this only months before the primaries in New Hampshire and Iowa that mark the opening of the 2004 presidential campaign season⁵⁵.

The Real Reasons for the Iraq Campaign?

These developments have strengthened the hand of the anti war critics which in turn weakens political support for the Administration's plans to assume the costs of reconstructing largely Iraq on its own. But as James Woosley has made clear, the Bush Administration still sees itself as engaged in a "Fourth World War" with Political Islam⁵⁶. According to Mr. Bush, the reason America must stay the course and not hand off Iraq to some international authority like the UN is that it has become the "central front" in our war against terrorism. But absent the missing WMDs or some concrete link between Saddam and Al Qaeda, the notion that Iraq was this war's "central front" more than Pakistan or Afghanistan, ignores fact that Baathist Iraq was the only Arab state in the Mid-east where Islamist terrorists couldn't and didn't operate. It was only under Anglo-American occupation that Iraq has emerged as a theatre for Islamist campaign against the West because it is the resistance to the occupation itself that supplies the necessary recruits, motivation and American targets to make such a campaign even thinkable⁵⁷. Confronted with this sad reality, President Bush could only taunt the bad guys with a challenge: "Bring'em on!"⁵⁸

While this maladroit remark infuriated frontline troops and their families back home⁵⁹, it faithfully reflected the Neo-conservatives' latest game plan for managing the "war after the war." Around Washington this is known as the "flypaper theory" that hopes

⁵⁵ In the latest ABC poll released last week, overall support for the Iraq war has declined from 70% to 54% with 60% of Democrats saying we should have never gone to war in Iraq and with 75% of Republicans still in support of the War policy. Brownstein, *op cit.* [15], www.truthout.org.

⁵⁶ Voir Charles Fledman, "Ex-CIA director: U.S. faces 'World War IV'", *CNN.usnews*, April 3, 2003.

⁵⁷ See Joseph Wilson, "Seeking Honesty in U.S. Policy," *San Jose Mercury News*, September 15, 2003, www.truthout.org.

⁵⁸ See Steve Holland, "Bush Taking Heat for 'Bring'em on Remark," *Reuters*, July 3, 2003.

⁵⁹ It also prompted one retired officer to remark that "Only a Frat boy who has no idea what it's like to have his ass under fire would say that," see Jason Vest, "Shifting Sands of Neoconservative logic," *The American Prospect*, August 28, 2003. www.tap.org.

that by turning Iraq into the “central front” in its war against terrorism, the U.S. can also transform it into a killing field for Jihadi from all over the Mid-east⁶⁰. This view now competes with the earlier “domino theory” promoted by the Neo-conservatives last spring according to which Iraq - after short post Saddam transition – would become a showcase for Western democracy and help transform all the dictatorships in the neighborhood beginning with Iran and Saudi Arabia⁶¹.

Both theories say something about the real rationales for the Iraq War that have relatively little to do with WMD's; only something to do with oil and quite a lot to do with the duel with Al-Queda over perceptions of relative strength and weakness in the Arab world. Frequently discussed in the Neo-Conservative press close to the Administration, these reasons went unstated officially until Bush said in an address last month that our basic strategic problem was “That for a generation leading up to September 11th 2001, terrorists... attacked innocent people in the Middle East and beyond without facing a sustained and serious response”, and that “we have learned that terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness⁶²”. This suggests that the U.S. analysis of the strategic situation parallels that of Al Queda and that Washington agrees with Bin Laden that the main issue in the war is the Islamic perception of American weakness⁶³. The remedy is to counterattack forcefully. As President Bush himself remarked to Vice President Cheney on the morning of 09/11, “we’re going to find out who did this and we’re going to kick their Asses⁶⁴”. But when the search for Al Queda across some sixty countries proved too difficult, the plan became one of countering Al Queda and Islamist terrorism generally by striking at its strategic “center of gravity.” From the Administration’s point of view then, as a STRATFOR analyst wrote last August:

⁶⁰ See Oliver Burkeman, “Vision of the neo-cons stays fixed on making hard choices,” *The Guardian*, September 23, 2003, p. 1, www.guardian.co.uk.

⁶¹ See for instance, Joseph Cirincione, “The Origins of Regime Change in Iraq,” *Proliferation Brief*, Vol. 6, No. 5, Carnegie International Endowment for Peace, March 19, 2003, p. 3, www.ceip.org.

⁶² Nicholas Lemann, “Real Reasons,” *The New Yorker*, September 22, 2003, pp. 81-82.

⁶³ George Friedman, “Two years of War,” *STRATFOR*, September 9, 2003, p. 3, www.stratfor.com.

⁶⁴ Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2002, p. 18.

“Washington’s problem is psychological. There is no certain military or covert means to destroy Al Queda... There may however be a way to undermine their psychological foundations by reversing what radical Islamists portray as the inherent inevitability of their cause... if the sense of manifest destiny can be destroyed then the foundations of the movement can be disrupted. Hence Iraq⁶⁵.”

For the Bush Administration striking at the psychological center of gravity of Al Queda meant taking out and occupying Iraq, the strongest Arab nationalist regime located in the historical center of the Muslim world⁶⁶. As Thomas Friedman wrote with brutal candor in June: “The real reason for this war, which was never stated, was that after 09/11 America needed to hit someone in the Arab-Muslim world... We hit Saddam for one simple reason: because we could, and because he deserved it, and because he was right in the heart of that world.⁶⁷” One might add that we also hit Saddam’s army because we knew we could defeat it – having already done it once in 1991. Seeking a sort of modern day “Omdurman effect” in Iraq, the Bush Administration aimed at breaking the morale of the Islamist Jihadi and killing the charisma of the new day Mahdi, Osman Ben Laden, by demonstrating once and for all that Bin Laden could never win militarily against the United States – even if they couldn’t kill him in the flesh⁶⁸.

In the view of the dominant Neo-conservative strategists in Washington like Joshua Muravchik of the American Enterprise Institute, the Iraq war was also to be a “bold and daring project” to reshape the map of the Middle East by applying the “shock and awe” of battle to break down barriers to westernization – as though western armies from Napoleon to Dayan hadn’t already tried the application of brute force. For the Neo-Con theorists’ warfare was the preferred means for administering shock therapy to begin what was to be, according to Condoleezza Rice, a “generational long project” of social transformation and modernization in the Mid East⁶⁹. A related reason was that the conquest of Iraq would allow us to increase our leverage over

⁶⁵ STRATFOR analyst, “The Iraq Obsession,” *STRATFOR*, August 12, 2002, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁶ George Friedman, *op. cit.* [63].

⁶⁷ Thomas Friedman cited by Lemann, *op. cit.* [62].

⁶⁸ See Nicholas Lehman, “Real Reasons,” *The New Yorker*, September 2003.

the Saudis by relocating our military bases outside the Kingdom but close to its borders, even as we took over Iraq's oil production in order to privatize its oil industry and take Iraq out of OPEC⁷⁰.

There were of course other targets in this campaign – some of them overseas but others quite close to home. For the Neo-Conservative faction that dominates policy making within the Bush Administration, the attacks of 09/11 were a golden opportunity to put American foreign policy back on the right track after it had lost its way during the Clinton and Bush Senior Presidencies. This to say that 09/11 was the “catalyzing event”, the new “Pearl Harbor,” for which the neo-conservative authors of *Project for a New American Century* had apparently been waiting for some time⁷¹. For National Security Advisor Condi Rice, 09/11 was a “transformational moment” which dissolved the international system inherited from the Cold War and that now allowed for a diplomatic re-alignment of forces. This was to begin with the full integration of Russia into the Western Alliance and would continue with the political transformation of the Arab and Iranian regimes- through the application of overwhelming force in Afghanistan and then Iraq⁷². More generally, for the neo conservative strategists around Bush, the rapid and apparently complete victories in Afghanistan and Iraq were the opening round in a series of “preventive” wars where blitz warfare would be used by the United States as a routine tool in a new coercive diplomacy – without the participation of the armed forces of America's traditional allies or their say so either⁷³. The Iraq War was only one part of this larger campaign which was intended both to break the will of Radical Islam and to demonstrate to our allies and the international community the Administration's determination to create a

⁶⁹ See Joseph Cirincione, *op cit.* [61], www.ceip.org.

⁷⁰ See Jeffery Sachs' argument, “Saudi Arabia, the real target of the Iraq War,” *The Financial Times*, August 13, 2003, www.ft.com.

⁷¹ See the Web site of the project www.newamericancentury.org. Where one can find their report *Rebuilding America's Defenses* from September 2000. An impressive number of their members recruited directly into the Bush Administration by Vice President Cheney during the presidential transition. They are present above all among the civilian consellers of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon.

⁷² Nicholas Lemann's article, “The New World Order,” *The New Yorker*, January 4, 2002, p. 3, www.newyorker.com.

⁷³ Voir Richard Dreyfus, “Just the beginning: Is Iraq the opening salvo in a war to remake the

unipolar world system organized around a new set of rules – and to force them to choose sides. For, as Bush declared there could only be two sides in this “Fourth World War”: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

In this new world system organized around the twin doctrines of preemption and global dominance, the post-war, “liberal hegemony” of the United States – where the U.S. was the leader of an alliance of states that remained both sovereign and formally equal – will be replaced by an international power hierarchy where the US will be at the top surrounded by clients dependent on its “benign” military protection⁷⁴. Outside the privileged circle of several close military allies such as the United Kingdom, Israel and Australia, the new hierarchy is made up faithful but subordinate clients such as Spain and Poland, fractious “erstwhile allies” such as France and Germany, and the “rogue states”, which are the designated enemies of the new American order such as North Korea, Iran and Syria. In this new system of international relations, then, influence is no longer measured in terms of national independence but rather in terms of proximity to or distance from the new imperial center – which is centered for the moment on the Bush family ranch in Crawford, Texas⁷⁵. This new America, seduced by a neo-imperial temptation, is also an “illiberal America” because she wants to free herself from the international order that was created by American statesmen in the years immediately after World War II. The irony is that this patriotic and “souverainiste” America is also the “enemy” of the neo liberal, economic globalization of the Clinton era. It’s not surprising then that opposition to the Administration’s foreign policy has been concentrated on the two coasts in the bobo milieux that benefited most from America’s cultural and economic opening to the outside world.

world,” *American Prospect*, Vol. 14, No. 4, April 1, 2003.

⁷⁴ See Stephen Peter Rosen, “An Empire, if you can keep it,” *The National Interest*, No. 71, Spring 2003.

⁷⁵ See Justin Vaisee, « From Transatlanticism to post Atlanticism, » *The National Interest*, July 3, 2003. Brookings Center on The United States and France, www.brookings.edu.

The Elite Dissensus over Global Unilateralism and the Doctrine of Pre-emption

In two years since 09/11, the Bush Administration has fought two “preventive wars” without bothering to ask Congress to officially declare either of them⁷⁶, and the “War on Terrorism” remains the exclusive lens through which the Administration filters all foreign and security policy decisions to the exclusion of anything else – except possibly domestic politics⁷⁷. Having fully invested itself in fighting a “Fourth World War” against Political Islam⁷⁸ the Bush Administration now seems to be losing “the war after the war” on both the Iraqi and Afghan fronts⁷⁹. Faced with the difficult and costly task of occupying its new Iraqi conquest and the renewal of attacks by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the neo-conservative architects of the war policy in Rumsfeld’s Pentagon suddenly find themselves on the defensive while the rest of the American foreign policy elite urgently calls for a “mid-course correction” – a correction which perhaps might open some of the policy doors that were closed in the wake of 09/11⁸⁰. The tension between competing approaches can be seen in the “bi-polar syndrome” that the Bush Administration demonstrates where foreign policy decision-making seems to seesaw from week to week between two poles – Donald Rumsfeld’s Pentagon Neo-Cons and Powell’s Foreign Service Professionals.

These internal divisions over foreign policy reflect a broader dissensus among policy making elites that Leslie Gelb, the former President the Council on Foreign Relations, described in an open letter to President Bush: “From the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001... the United States has not had a consistent national security strategy that enjoyed the support of the American people and our allies. This situation is markedly different from the Cold War era, when the

⁷⁶ Kevin Baker, “We’re In The Army Now: The G.O.P.’s plan to militarize our culture,” *Harpers*, October 2003, p. 39.

⁷⁷ See Dana Milbank, “For Bush, War Defines Presidency,” *The Washington Post*, March 9, 2003, p. A01.

⁷⁸ See Charles Feldman, “Ex CIA Director: U.S. Faces World War IV,” *CNN*, April 3, 2003.

⁷⁹ See Amy Waldman and Dexter Filkins, “2 U.S. Fronts: Quick Wars but Bloody Peace,” *NYT*, September 19, 2003, p. A1.

⁸⁰ See the editorial, “An Unsustainable Policy on Iraq,” *NYT*, September 14, 2003, p. A 31

United States had a clear, coherent, widely supported strategy.⁸¹” In the supporting document for a Council Policy Initiative that aims at stimulating public debate on the future of American security, Laurence Korb describes three contending policy positions that pose three different choices “each of which would lead our country in a different direction”. Korb continues: “In brief, these choices call for [1 unilateralist] leveraging American dominance with preventive military action, [2 neo-realist] creating stability by using American military superiority for deterrence and containment, and [3 internationalist] working toward a more cooperative, rule-based international system backed by American power that is used in genuine concert with our friend and allies. The first of these policy thrusts is advocated mainly by those identified as “neo-conservatives” and a number of conservatives as well; both groups are found principally within the Republican Party. The second thrust is associated with those called ‘moderates’ – *i.e.* some moderately conservative Republicans and most moderate liberals within the Democratic Party. The third thrust is advocated primarily by people with a liberal approach, most of whom identify themselves as Democrats⁸².”

Clearly Korb sees the first approach based on “preventive military action” as that of a minority faction of the American foreign policy establishment that is only one element within the majority coalition of the Republican Party. However, despite their minority status, its neo-conservative partisans have won most of the foreign policy battles within the Bush Administration but the other currents of elite opinion aren’t entirely absent within the councils of the Administration – especially coming from within Colin Powell’s State Department – as can be seen in the bitter interagency battles between contending factions. More generally, elite opinion makers outside the Administration increasingly resent what they perceive to be the Neo-Conservative attempts to “hijack” the direction of U.S. foreign policy without allowing any substantive debate in Congress or within the elite policy making community itself.

⁸¹ Leslie Gelb, “Introduction to the Council Policy Initiative for a New National Security Strategy,” Council on Foreign Relations, August 2003, p. V, www.cfr.org.

⁸² Laurence Korb, “Memorandum to the President,” Council Policy Initiative for a New National Security Policy, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, pp. 1-3, www.cfr.org.

This “policy hijack” is something the “Neo-Cons” hawks have carried through with remarkable success for two long years now and all foreign policy decisions have been subordinated to their vision of the “war on terror.” But as Joseph Nye observes this means that only one dimension of power has been relevant to them – that of the interstate balance of power understood strictly in military terms. From this cold geo-political point of view, only military power counts, and diplomacy means little without it – because, as Donald Rumsfeld once remarked “Nice words backed up by a gun go a lot farther than nice words alone”. By this criteria the U.S. – whose military spending in 2000 already exceeded the combined spending of the next fifteen most important military powers and whose total spending of over \$500 billion next year will surpass all the other nations on the planet – is in a class by itself. But Nye argues that this amounts to an overvaluation of “hard power” that leaves economic and cultural “soft power” out of the equation. The one dimensional geo-strategic concept of power that prevails in Bush’s Washington transforms a chessboard that played on three dimensions into a one-dimensional as well as a unipolar game. It ignores the second dimension of power which is that of the regional trading blocs as well as the third level of the asymmetric threats that can be generated by “failed nations” whose internal chaos affords a sheltering environment where various pirates, drug lords and terrorist war bands can take root and find bases⁸³.

The neo-realist and internationalist critics of Rumsfeld, Cheney and Bush focus on these blind conceptual spots that have distorted the vision of the Administration and lead to an accumulation of diplomatic and economic policy errors. The first of these was the disastrous diplomacy that left the United States virtually alone with a “Coalition of Two” and an “Army of One” in its campaign to overthrow the Iraqi regime. The failure to synchronize the American diplomatic campaign to win international support at the UN with Rumsfeld’s timetable for the deployment of American military forces meant that the U.S. military ended up dictating to the State

⁸³ Joseph Nye, “U.S. Power and Strategy After Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 82., No. 4, July/August 2003, p. 65.

Department the timeframe permitted for diplomatic negotiation with our allies⁸⁴. Opportunities for a diplomatic compromise with France, (who was avidly seeking a face saving formula for avoiding a showdown with Washington), were thrown away – giving the Neo-Conservatives a political victory against their bureaucratic enemies at State and the CIA but at tremendous cost. Their 21-day blitz marked a military triumph over Iraq but one that was realized under the worst possible diplomatic conditions and led to an historic break in the post Cold War alliance between Washington and its principal European allies. Viewed from this angle, the importance of the Iraq war was as much the dissolution by a coup de force of the body of international law built up over the 20th century⁸⁵ as it was the destruction of the Iraqi dictatorship itself. The Bush Administration's unipolar challenge to the international system has, of course, economic as well as political implications.

Rumsfeld's Pentagon planners assume that we're better off fighting wars alone without allied armies to get in our way on the battlefield, but this ignores our growing economic dependence on China, Japan and the EU. With a trade deficit that's approaching \$500 billion, we now consume 5% more from abroad than we produce and are highly dependent on foreign suppliers and creditors⁸⁶. Today 46% of America's debt is owed to foreign lenders, and our largest creditor is China⁸⁷. One can imagine that this will remain a "non issue" until the day that our creditors in China, the EU and Japan finally decline to finance our deficits with their savings to the tune of some 2 billion U.S.D a day⁸⁸. But given the shadow cast over the New York stock market by its historic 40% decline of three years ago; corporate accounting scandals like the Enron bankruptcy that casts doubt on the productivity gains of the Clinton "bubble", and the general lack of confidence in the Bush

⁸⁴ See James Rubin, "Disasterous Diplomacy: Stumbling Into War," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 82, No. 5, September/October, 2003, p. 47 and pp. 56-57.

⁸⁵ Voir Peter Howard, "End Games: Washington, UN, and Europe," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February 28, 2003, www.fpif.org.

⁸⁶ See Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Incredible Shrinking Eagle: the End of Pax Americana," *Foreign Policy*, July/August, 2002, pp. 60-68.

⁸⁷ See Peter Goodman, "U.S. Debt to Asia, Swelling," *The Washington Post*, September 13, 2003, p. E01.

⁸⁸ See Anne Pettifor, "An Empire Living On Credit," *The Guardian*, Letters, February 3, 2003.

economic team, one can't assume that the day of reckoning for the dollar and U.S. capital market is very far off⁸⁹.

Critical views of the Administration's foreign policy are held not only by "liberals" but by moderates as well. For example, the September/October issue of *Foreign Affairs*, has "article after article expressing well-documented alarm at the hijacking of American Foreign policy. This is not how the Council ordinarily speaks."⁹⁰ The highly charged domestic atmosphere gives the current debates over foreign policy a public visibility and intensity that is a rare for American politics where international issues and organizations usually take a backseat to domestic concerns⁹¹. But given the growing elite disagreement over America's failed diplomacy in the run up to the Iraq invasion and then in its disastrous aftermath, foreign policy disputes have become highly visible in pre-presidential primary season – at least for the ten democrats who are actively seeking the nominations of their party and especially for the three self-declared anti-War candidates: Wesley Clark, Howard Dean, and Dennis Kucinich.

Gulliver on Trial and the Return of Politics by Other Means

While there's still time for a recovery in popularity should his luck improve overseas - as with the capture of either Saddam Hussein or Osman Bin Laden – George Bush's has hit hard the "third year low point" that often comes in a President's first term. Currently he's bedeviled by a steady stream of revelations in the press concerning domestic and foreign setbacks, corruption scandals and public "misstatements of fact"⁹². Clearly sometime this summer the national press corps in Washington, New York and Los Angeles caught on to his credibility problems and adopted an attitude of aggressive skepticism concerning every public statement this Administration

⁸⁹ Will Hutton, *A Declaration of Interdependence; Why America Should Join the World*, W.W. Norton & Co. New York, 2003, pp. 171-172.

⁹⁰ See Robert Kuttner, "Neo-Con Jobs," *The American Prospect*, September 11, 2003, www.prospect.org.

⁹¹ See the 2002 report, *America and the World*, The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, p. 3.

⁹² See for instance, Robert Scheer, "White House Cynical Iraq Ploy: 'Misspeak' First, 'Correct' it

makes. But one can't say that the Administration didn't invite this reaction by showing "questionable honesty", for as Paul Krugman⁹³ remarked on NPR this September: "The central thing about this Administration is that they lie all the time"⁹⁴.

Worse yet, a good number of liberal pundits, Hollywood media personalities, Democratic officials and fund-raisers in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York have developed what Michael Wolf has described as "a world class presidential hatred [...] a Nixon and Clinton level hatred" of the current President and his Administration⁹⁵. George Soros expressed the prevailing view when he told Bill Moyers: "I think that we have an extremist element in government... and that President Bush has been captured by these people as a result of 09/11"⁹⁶. Soros is not alone in making this kind of harsh assessment of Mr. Bush. Other liberal critics say that the President has not been so much "captured" by extremists as he's committed to them "heart, body and soul". In this view, as Harold Meyerson wrote last May, our first "southern conservative President since the Civil War" turns out to be the "most dangerous... since Jefferson Davis"⁹⁷ and "a warrior for a region, a faction, a part of America"⁹⁸.

More generally American domestic politics is roiled by accusations of treachery from the conservative media directed against liberal critics of the President⁹⁹ and counter

later," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2003, www.truthout.org.

⁹³ Krugman is an economics columnist for the *NYT* who's one of the severest critic of the Bush Administration.

⁹⁴ Krugman's interview with *WNYC*'s Brian Lerher, *op cit*.

⁹⁵ See Michael Wolff, "Candidate Who?" *New York Magazine*, August 4, 2003, p. 12. See also David Brooks, "Presidency Wars," *NYT*, September 30, 2003, Op-Ed.

⁹⁶ See Bill Moyers, "Interview with George Soros," *NOW This Week*, *PBS*, September 12, 2003, www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript234_full.html.

⁹⁷ N.B. the first and last president of the Southern Confederacy –1861-1865.

⁹⁸ See Harold Meyerson, "The Most Dangerous President Ever," *The American Prospect*, Vol. 14, No. 5, May 1, 2003, www.tap.org.

⁹⁹ See for instance the latest attack from Anne Coulter, the favorite "shock jock" of the right wing media, *Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terrorism*, Crown Publishing Group, June 2003. Her accusations about unreliability and defeatism of America Democratic political and cultural elites have been strongly echoed by John Podhoretz in the editorial pages of *The New York Post*, "Why We Fight," September 6, 2003, and by Laurence Kaplan, "Will power: Why the Public Can Stomach Casualties and Elites Can't," *The New Republic*, September 8, 2003, p. 22.

charges from the left about the deceit and ineptitude of the “Great Misleader¹⁰⁰” and the Neo-Cons “cabal” in the Pentagon who took us down the wrong path by invading Iraq. An important difference here is that the conservative charges were picked up and broadcast by the major cable news media, while Liberal criticism until this summer was largely confined to the editorial pages of the national print press such as *The New York Times* or to the alternate media outlets on the Internet such as www.truthout.org or www.commondreams.org. But increasingly the liberal critics are breaking through and influencing the editorial line in major newspapers such as *The Boston Globe* and the *Los Angeles Times* as well as the major newsweeklies like *Newsweek* and *Time*. Too many this cacophony of charges and counter charges sounds like a call for a purge of our foreign policy establishment – only with different targets in mind depending on one’s factional identity¹⁰¹.

The Bush Administration now faces the prospect that serious Congressional inquiries and eventual legal prosecutions may follow press revelations of wrongdoing or incompetence. Some Democratic Congressman are already calling for the resignation of the Secretary of Defense, Mr. Rumsfeld and of his Under-secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz¹⁰² in a campaign that has been embraced by the cyber-organizations of the Democratic opposition such as www.moveon.org and www.truemajority.org¹⁰³ as well as by Democratic presidential candidates Howard Dean and John Kerry. And in mean time the media is hounding Mr. Bush’s most trusted advisor, Karl Rove; and there’s talk of another special prosecutor in the air.

¹⁰⁰ See for instance the new website from Move-On, the opposition group with some 2 million virtual members, www.misleader.org which features daily reports on the latest misstatements of fact by the Bush White House.

¹⁰¹ See Jim Lobe, “Neo-cons attack State Department,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, April 23, 2003.

¹⁰² Representative David Obey, Democrat from Wisconsin, wrote a letter to the President Sept. 5, 2003 demanding their resignations available at www.prospect.org. His call has been since become the focus of petition campaigns to Congress calling for resignations by both www.move.on.org and www.truemajority.org –two of the larger cyber-organizations of the Democratic opposition to Bush.

¹⁰³ Moveon.org is a cyber organization that grew from of an email list of opponents to Clinton’s impeachment in 1998. Backed by a Silicon Valley entrepreneur it lead mobilization campaigns for the Democrats in the 2000 election and anti-war campaigns in the run-up to the outbreak of the Second Iraq War. By the summer of 2002 it had 500,000 subscribers. Today it has over 2 million and has become a major force in the Democratic primaries where its support has mainly gone to Governor John Dean’s campaign for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 2004.

Americans old enough to remember the Nixon and Reagan Presidencies know we've been through this RIP process (*Revelation-Investigation and Prosecution*) before with Watergate, Iran Contra and Monicagate¹⁰⁴. And they know where it could lead if this particular dynamic really takes hold in the press, the Congress and the courts – to the President's impeachment or electoral defeat in 2004. Both of these outcomes are now plausible possibilities. If either comes to pass, America's two-year flirtation with global unilateralism and preemptive wars will have proven to have a very short career. It will, of course, take us much longer to recover from the damage that has been inflicted on our alliances and our good standing in the world.

¹⁰⁴ See my discussion of this type of partisan combat waged by "politics by other means" in *RAMSES* 1998, 1999 and 2000.