Constructivism, Strategic Culture, and the Iraq War

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According to constructivists, the United States went to war in Iraq because the dominant strategic cultural norm, that of seeking geopolitical stability through multilateral deterrence, appeared bankrupt to the Bush administration after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11). This led elites in the administration to view democratic regime change in Iraq as imposing an international norm of hegemonic global policing through unilateral preventive war. Given shortcomings in the existing literature, this article makes the constructivist case for explaining the Iraq War. For constructivists, a proposed normative shift in American strategic cultural ideas played a causal role in the US invasion of Iraq. For those constructivists who take an ambitious perspective, the attempt to shift the norms of America's strategic culture—and thus its national security policy—precipitated that invasion. A more cautious analyst would contend that the normative shift advocated by the Bush administration worked in tandem with interest-based calculations, such as geopolitical logic, in leading to that military action. The Iraq War was supposed to prove the viability of a new norm—unilateral preventive war—advocated by neoconservative norm entrepreneurs and traditional conservative converts as well as sympathizers in the Bush administration. This was part of a larger strategic cultural vision advocating the hegemonic promotion of democracy through force. Advocates intended that a new perspective on war, the hege-

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monic paradigm, would replace the Cold War–era paradigm which encompassed strategies of multilateral containment and maintenance of the geopolitical status quo. In its place, they put forth a revolutionary strategy stressing preventive war as part of a larger strategic cultural vision advocating the hegemonic promotion of democracy through force. Thus, the newly proposed norm of preventive hegemonic war and forceful democratization sought to alter American national security policy making by replacing the dominant Cold War normative paradigm. This endeavor appears to have failed.

Definition of Strategic Culture

To develop a working definition of strategic culture appropriate to this article, one must begin with defining its parent terms: *culture* and *political culture*. Doing so allows for identifying what strategic culture means to constructivists, a necessary step in understanding their explanations of its role as a cause of the Iraq War. In the broadest sense, one may think of culture as "an interdependent collection of symbols, values, attitudes, beliefs, habits, and customs that a self-identifying group develops over time and shares through a common and evolving interpretation of its own historical experience . . . [which] they use to rank alternative outcomes" and make choices.[1] The subset of political culture notes "the embedding of political systems in sets of meanings and purposes, specifically in symbols, myths, beliefs, and values."[2] Definitions of strategic culture build on preceding definitions but narrow the subject matter to strategic choices.[3] Scholars generally agree that strategic culture is concerned with the role of cultural influences, influences on how political entities judge the proper time to employ force, ways of using force during a conflict, and ways of determining the best time to terminate conflict.[4] Constructivists narrow down to sets of norms the influences that stem from ideational values and habits of practice identified by definitions of culture and political culture. For constructivists, cultural influences that constitute strategic culture are thus a set of norms.

Kerry Longhurst's definition of strategic culture is of great utility to constructivists in particular: "a distinctive body of beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the use of force, held by a collective [usually a nation] and arising gradually over time through a unique protracted historical process."[5] Thus, for Longhurst strategic culture consists of norms that both

influence and guide elites as well as policy makers with a "collective"; it also reflects the actions of norm entrepreneurs who modify, reshape, replace, reject, and create new and existing norms on the basis of past experiences with norms and normative structures.[6] For constructivists, his definition identifies the relationship in strategic culture between the key actor of norm entrepreneurs and the sets of norms that constitute strategic culture. Moreover, Longhurst believes that strategic culture "is not permanent or static," and even though the norms of strategic culture have inertial force and can create continuity in foreign policy behavior through rule making, these norms and the strategic culture that they compose are malleable and quite open to change over time in the face of traumatic catalytic events.[7] He thereby opens the door to the means by which normative strategic cultural ideas ensure both continuity in and define attempts to change national security policies, as with the effort to replace the Cold War paradigm with the messianic Wilsonian option offered by neoconservatives in the run-up to the Iraq War.

Constructivism and Strategic Culture

The Constructivist Approach to Strategic Culture

The first central proposition of the constructivist vision of strategic culture is that, contrary to materialist analyses of international security, ideals in the form of norms like those that constitute strategic culture create and define interests. That is, norm entrepreneurs build a coalition of support that advocates the diffusion of new proposed norms.[8] For constructivists, their study of international relations and foreign policy concentrates on both "international normative structures and their effects" and the "interaction between international structures and local agents of change" in regard to the formulative "origins and dynamics of these norms."[9] For these scholars, "ideational, rather than material factors, explain particular national security policies."[10] Specifically, "security interests are defined by actors who respond to cultural factors."[11] This is because interest formation stems from a "logic of appropriateness" as opposed to "logic of consequences"; before people can maximize benefits and minimize costs, they must first know either what they want or what they believe they should do.[12] Norms and sets of norms

that compose social structures determine the proper means for pursuing interests and defining what should constitute ends.[13] Consequently, independent variables associated with interests, such as the neorealist conception of anarchy, are actually dependent variables that can be created, modified, and replaced by variables representing the rise of new strategic cultural norms.[14] The ideas of strategic culture expressed in norms play a central role in national security outcomes for constructivists, a factor they view as neglected by interest-based analyses like those of the neorealists.

Furthermore, the norms that make up strategic culture are dynamic and malleable, making them responsive to catalytic or traumatic changes in the larger normative social structures that make up international society. Diffusion of fresh normative suggestions is made possible by "ecological processes result[ing] from the patterned interaction of actors and their environment," and "social process arguments [where] norm building take[s] the form of generalizations about the way [actors] interact," like "social diffusion."[15] Diffusion of proposed norms is also possible through catalytic events that discredit old social systems and allow for the rise of new ones sponsored by norm entrepreneurs.[16] Which proposed norms succeed and which fail depend upon "norm prominence" like sponsorship by powerful states, "how well [the prospective norm] interacts with other prevailing norms [in the] 'normative environment' and . . . what external environmental conditions confront [it]."[17] A potential international norm becomes a norm at the state or unit level when the "negotiated reality" among elites and important groups leads to its acceptance via persuasive discourse.[18] International pressure in support of the proposed international norm then builds over time as state and nonstate actors who support the prospective norm try to convince other states to follow the new norm, leading to a "norm cascade" in which "norm internalization occurs" in international society.[19] For constructivists, attempts to change the norms that compose strategic culture are not just an evolutionary process. A rapid normative shift in the strategic cultural paradigm is also possible if international conditions lead to powerful actors becoming receptive to radical paradigm shifts in national security policies, such as may have been the case among senior policy makers in the Bush administration after 9/11.

Constructivism and the Iraq War: A Starting Point for Analysis

Prior constructivist work explains the causes of the Iraq War in terms of the role played by neoconservatives as policy entrepreneurs after 9/11. Andrew Flibbert concentrated on the role played by norm entrepreneurs, specifically neoconservatives, and how they persuaded the administration to accept their normative vision in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.[20] The neoconservatives that populated the lower ranks of the Bush administration offered a plan of action that conservative policy makers accepted, one that overthrew traditional multilateral and geopolitical calculations.[21] In their place, the administration favored the vision of a self-evidently benevolent America defeating the great ideological threat and disease of irrational militant Islamic fundamentalism via the forceful expansion of the antibiotic of democracy to the virus of autocratic regimes.[22]

However, this account is problematic. Since neoconservatives populated the lower ranks of the Bush administration, decisions were ultimately made by higher-level officials such as George Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, and Condoleezza Rice.[23] Flibbert's approach neglects their role as individual actors, appearing to assume the wholesale conversion of senior Bush policy makers to the neoconservative argument for invading Iraq.[24] Despite the sympathy that some senior Bush policy makers may have had with neoconservative ideals, Flibbert does not demonstrate that the former, such as true foreign policy heavyweights like Rumsfeld and Cheney, became devoted converts to the norms proposed by neoconservatives.[25] They may have agreed with or even accepted the neoconservative normative vision, but strong evidence exists that they did so only or at least partially by relying on a calculus based on material geopolitical interests—one that happened to find common cause with, and was thus not subordinate to, ideational aspirations such as a benevolent American hegemon expanding a theoretical zone of democratic peace.[26] Flibbert's work is flawed because it largely assumes that only neoconservatives were intellectually proactive in thinking up a response to 9/11 that included invading Iraq.

One finds an excellent example of Flibbert's problem in Cheney and the defensive and offensive geopolitical logic that appeared to govern his views. These views first included the "one percent doctrine," whereby even a 1 percent chance of Iraq's possessing and using nuclear weapons in light of 9/11, even if only to deter American freedom of action, would make such a

situation unacceptable.[27] Second, according to the compellent logic of the "demonstration effect," the invasion of Iraq would intimidate rogue states and even future peer competitors such as Iran, North Korea, and China into acquiescence and policies of accommodation, as opposed to developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that could counter the influence of the hegemon in strategic areas like the Persian Gulf.[28] This element of Cheney's logic, whereby the motivations for some senior policy makers involve geopolitical interests that may or may not work in conjunction with an acceptance of the normative vision of the neoconservatives, demonstrates that Flibbert presents an incomplete picture. We need a more nuanced and diversified approach to outlining the constructivist explanations of the workings of American strategic culture that led to the invasion of Iraq.

The Ambitious Constructivist Argument: Norms Defining Interests

An ambitious constructivist approach would contend that the Bush administration went to war in Iraq to establish the de facto utility of a proposed norm of preventive war—part of a new vision of a larger social structure of hegemonic global governance—the hegemonic paradigm. This approach represented a reaction to the trauma of 9/11, allowing America to demonstrate that it could successfully function as the world's policeman and stop the spread of WMDs.[29] America would also impose a massive social engineering project in the Middle East by assisting in the overthrow of authoritarian regimes and placing the people directly in charge. Access to oil, insurance of control in a geopolitically vital region, the deterrence factor of WMDs in the hands of rogue states, and Israeli security were all important. But governing adoption of the new paradigm proposed by the Bush administration was an attempt to redefine America's identity and its relationship with the world and, thus, the question of how the United States should seek to attain material goals.

This new strategy of preventive war meant abandoning the search for stability as the ultimate geopolitical goal, one that had included at least leaving the option open for negotiating with adversarial rogue states in the Middle East. The United States would serve its geopolitical, security, and economic interests by imposing its will on the region and reconstructing that area in its own image.[30] This process would begin with regime change in some states that sought WMDs, thus ensuring the intimidation of other

adversarial actors.[31] Because the United States could not afford to wait to be attacked, it would strike first and change the international order, given the potential catastrophic consequences of not doing so. It would also enjoy the benefits and perceived low costs of using its awesome military might to eliminate enemies quickly.[32] By following the normative logic of preventive war as the world's policeman, America would serve its global and regional security interests.

The Cautious Constructivist Argument: Norms as a Supplement to Interests

According to more cautious constructivists, the United States went to war in Iraq to meet the needs of both interests and normative aspirations, specifically by exerting control over a geopolitically vital region and establishing a new vision for America's role in the world—the hegemonic paradigm. This cautious vision appealed to its messianic Wilsonian tendencies by promoting the spread of universal democratic values through the de facto utility of a prospective norm of preventive war.[33] This norm, once the Iraq War had served one of its purposes as a successful test case, would become part of a larger proposed social structure of benevolent hegemonic global governance.[34] As causes of the war, cautious constructivists saw access to oil, the insurance of control in a geopolitically vital region, the check of WMDs on American power and physical security, and Israeli security issues all working with a need to redefine what constituted appropriate behavior for how the United States should seek to attain its goals. In sum, cautious constructivists suggested that interests interacted with how the United States defined who it was, what it should stand for in terms of its strategic culture, and how this definition shaped the outcomes of national security policy. No longer would America seek geopolitical stability in the region through unsatisfying compromises, such as balancing the support of Israel with obtaining access to oil from states antagonistic toward it.[35] For the Bush administration, according to the constructivists, the United States would meet its security and economic interests by imposing its will on the region and reconstructing it, beginning with the elimination of states seeking WMDs, thus demonstrating the futility of challenging America.[36] In brief, a successful war and democratic reconstruction of Iraq would serve as a de facto legitimation of overt American hegemony. For cautious constructivists, the Bush administration's attempt to inaugurate the proposed hegemonic paradigm sought to satisfy both Wilsonian idealism

and pragmatic interests in the outcomes of national security policy. This would be quite a departure from the cold, calculating logic of the previous Cold War normative paradigm in American strategic culture, one often criticized for appearing to sacrifice ideals for material gains.

Constructivism: Explanation for the Iraq War

The Cold War Normative Paradigm before 9/11: The Case of the Gulf War

Before 9/11, as seen in the example of the Gulf War, a dominant Cold War strategic cultural paradigm governed American foreign policy. Such a conservative normative structure valued geopolitical stability and sought acceptance for American interests via multilateralism. This system of strategic cultural norms also included a reliance on deterrence and containment when the employment of force became necessary. The Gulf War represented a response to the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's opportunistic grabbing of Kuwait, leading to America's abandoning its policy of cultivating him as an ally.[37] From the realist perspective of the first Bush administration, allowing a revisionist actor with WMDs like Saddam to get away with invading Kuwait would promote instability and further aggression in the post–Cold War era.[38] That is, Iraq would dominate the supply of Middle Eastern energy resources by force, allowing Saddam to hold hostage the economic security of the West.[39] Such a situation could subject the United States, its allies, and the global economy to blackmail at the hands of an unreliable and ruthless dictator who had demonstrated his capacity for aggression.[40] Consequently, the United States went to war.

By the same token, the Cold War paradigm that drove the logic of the first Bush administration during the Gulf War also sharply constrained its actions. The United States committed itself to war only after building a large, multilateral coalition of support, including winning acceptance for its actions from authoritarian Middle Eastern governments like Syria and Egypt.[41] In addition to sharing the costs of intervention with European and Japanese allies, the coalition cast the United States in a favorable light in the Arab world.[42] By respecting the wishes of Arab governments, the United States held off claims of acting as a neocolonial power.[43] Moreover, it sought limited objectives in this war—namely, removing Saddam from

Kuwait and shoring up the strategic position of the oil-rich and vulnerable Gulf states.[44] This course of action reflected how the traditional approach to the Middle East called for maintaining peaceful stability in the region, therefore ensuring the stable flow of oil necessary for fuelling the global economy.[45] After all, when America viewed a strong Iraq under Saddam as a bulwark of stability, Rumsfeld played a central role as the political envoy who opened up relations between Iraq and the United States during the Iran-Iraq War, making possible financial, agricultural, and technological support for countering the influence of Iran and jockeying against the Soviets for favor from Saddam.[46]

The handling of the war-termination phase during the Gulf War also reflected this cautious orientation in strategic culture. Operating within the Cold War paradigm, the realist logic of national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, best friend to the elder Bush and mentor of Condoleezza Rice, led decision makers to see Iraq as a valuable instrument for checking Iranian power.[47] The first Bush administration also feared the potential danger of bloody regional chaos if Iraq collapsed.[48] In "Why We Didn't Go to Baghdad," Bush and Scowcroft explain why they did not aid the postwar revolts: "We were concerned about the long-term balance of power at the head of the Gulf. Breaking up the Iraqi state would pose its own destabilizing problems."[49] Moreover, going to Baghdad would have led to costly "'mission creep,' and would have incurred incalculable human and political costs," especially as "the coalition would have instantly collapsed, the Arabs deserting it in anger and other allies pulling out as well."[50] This desire by the United States to maintain the unity of Iraq and preserve the multilateral coalition meant abandoning the Kurds and Shiites when they revolted after the Gulf War.[51] Furthermore, Bush and Scowcroft stressed that "Turkey—and Iran—objected to the suggestion of an independent Kurdish state," while Secretary of Defense Cheney argued that both Syria and Iran desired Iraqi territory.[52] The administration also wished to reduce casualties and costs, Cheney bluntly arguing, "How many additional dead Americans is Saddam worth? Our judgment was, not very many, and I think we got it right."[53] Even Paul Wolfowitz did not want to overthrow Saddam at this time, primarily concerned that the war had ended prematurely in terms of degrading the latter's military forces.[54] The Cold War paradigm of calculating prudence dominated policy making.The ruthless caution of the Cold

War paradigm produced a situation that the idealistic perspective of neoconservatives considered deeply unsatisfactory. Saddam's surviving the revolts led to a policy of containing his power under the rubric of legitimating international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), no-fly zones, and weapons-inspection regimes backed up by the threat of punitive deterrent force.[55] One can describe such behavior only as the exact type of multilateralism and balancing tactics the neoconservatives railed against—a far cry from the policies followed by the Bush administration after 9/11. For neoconservatives, the Cold War paradigm allowed the bad guy, an enemy of the United States, to walk away and engage in more heinous behavior.

From the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine to the Election of 2000

One finds the de jure expression of the normative logic of American strategic culture, as reflected in the de facto conduct of the United States during the Gulf War, in the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine—the antithesis of the national security strategy of 2002 as a formal guide for American national security policy. This doctrine from the early 1980s—a reaction to both Vietnam and the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut—captures the epitome of what the second Bush administration rebelled against after 9/11.[56] It stipulated that "America should not send its combat forces on overseas missions unless doing so was vital to U.S. interests, . . . [the mission enjoyed] 'clearly defined political and military objectives' for a combat mission, . . . [and it had a] reasonable assurance that the mission would have the support of the American public."[57] Furthermore, "the use of American combat troops should be a last resort," and they should be employed "only in cases in which the United States had the clear intent of winning."[58] Such caution was antithetical to the employment of preventive war. The doctrine's circumspect tone also set it completely at odds with the messianic Wilsonianism and ambitious aims of overt American hegemony found in the proposed hegemonic paradigm during the second Bush administration, when the younger Bush and Rice abandoned the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine after 9/11.

Policy Advocacy: Neoconservative Norm Entrepreneurs

From the end of the Gulf War to 9/11, the dominant Cold War paradigm faced challenges by the hegemonic paradigm, a dissident vision of benevolent hegemony and the right of unilateral American intervention upon confrontation

of rogue states. Long before 9/11, in fact, neoconservative norm entrepreneurs set the stage by pushing for an open assertion of unilateral hegemony over the suffocating facade of multilateralism. They also pushed for relying on preventive war rather than traditional strategies of deterrence and containment as part of this proposed overall normative paradigm. For neoconservatives, "the truth is that the benevolent hegemony exercised by the United States is good for a vast portion of the world's population," "nor can one easily imagine power on an American scale being employed in a more enlightened fashion by China, Germany, Japan, or Russia."[59] In fact, "no nation really wants genuine multipolarity" because none are "willing to make the same kinds of short-term sacrifices that the United States has been willing to make in the long-term interest of preserving the global order."[60] Even if nations do desire true multipolarity, it would only lead to greater strife and conflict, as seen in the regional tensions created by China's attempts to build up its power.[61] According to neoconservatives, multilateralism of this sort, as practiced by China, instead of an open acknowledgement and acceptance of American hegemony, is dangerous because it gives actors without the strength or desire to truly play a role commensurate with their responsibilities in a multipolar world a veto over American policy.[62] Neoconservatives pushed for a new normative proposal, the hegemonic paradigm, to guide American strategic culture and thus national security policy.

Accordingly the neoconservatives saw preventive war as an essential component of a new prospective hegemonic paradigm, one that would avoid the dangers of multilateralism. For the United States, given its global interests and commitments, multilateral activity offers little and in fact may cost a great deal since indulging European sensibilities may delay a timely, effective, and therefore responsible first strike to threats that America's military prowess, unlike that of its European allies, can actually do something about.[63] Such multilateralism, according to Lewis "Scooter" Libby, hindered American policy by fostering cooperative support with lukewarm or even antagonistic authoritarian regimes in the Middle East prior to 9/11.[64] This cooperation also spawned terrorism against the United States during the Clinton administration, acts that were then encouraged through American responses which involved weak or empty diplomatic gestures.[65] Libby concludes that multilateralism, as opposed to assertive hegemony, has made Americans appear as if they "don't have the stomach to defend

themselves" and are "morally weak" since deterrence and containment do not "help to shape the environment in a way which discourage[s] further aggressions against U.S. interests."[66] This thinking demonstrates the larger logic behind support for a revisionist hegemonic strategic cultural paradigm that would replace the logic of the Cold War status quo.

Neoconservatives believed that the case of Iraq in particular demonstrated both the failure of multilateral deterrence and containment as well as the need for hegemonic policing. Dissatisfaction with the morally ambiguous political end state of the Gulf War, coupled with the stunning success and low cost of American military might, led neoconservatives and sympathetic traditional conservatives, such as Rumsfeld, to feel that conflict had been a lost opportunity.[67] For neoconservatives, the United States could have used the war as a springboard for global governance based on benevolent American hegemony.[68] Through the virtue of overwhelming military power, the United States could preclude the rise of any hostile peer competitor.[69] Neoconservatives argued that America could not have deterred Saddam because he was "a pathological risk-taker. Theories of deterrence notwithstanding, he attacked Iran under the misguided belief that its regime would quickly collapse . . . and attacked Kuwait because he calculated that the United States would not respond."[70]

According to the neoconservatives, a hegemonic American sheriff can keep the peace through preventive action—but only by eschewing the constraint of glacial multilateral diplomacy. As evidence that "one of the virtues of preemptive action . . . is that it is often less costly than the alternative," they turned to the Israeli attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor, which prevented Saddam from having nuclear weapons by the time of the Gulf War.[71] The almost universal condemnation of Israel's attack in multilateral institutions such as the UN represents evidence in general of the futility of subjecting decisions on the use of American power to such a weak reed.[72] In fact, neoconservatives contend that multilateral accommodation of Saddam during the Reagan and Bush years, based on the logic of realpolitik, blew up in America's face after the invasion of Kuwait.[73] Thus, in a world where American hegemony and military might are indispensible and accepted by the international community on this basis in de facto terms, neoconservatives argue that American supremacy should be considered desirable—not burdened under cumbersome multilateral constraints and hand-wringing.[74]

With the example of Iraq in mind, as Zalmay Khalilzad has argued, the United States should also "preclude the rise of another global rival for the indefinite future" and "be willing to use force if necessary for the purpose."[75] The proposed hegemonic paradigm, with the big stick of preventive war to keep rogue states and potential peer competitors in line, could attract more than just neoconservatives.

Attractions and Limits of the Neoconservative Proposal Prior to 9/11

The sympathy of senior Bush policy makers to neoconservative policies was evident even before 9/11. For example, distrust of multilateral institutions revealed itself when the Bush administration "rejected the Kyoto Protocol, . . . withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, [and] scuttled the Land Mine Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty."[76] Further, it refused to allow American servicemen and citizens to be subject to the International Criminal Court.[77] Thus, "within [its first] six months [in office], the administration announced its intention to reject six international agreements."[78] These attacks on multilateralism were fully consonant with the defense policy guidance of 1992, made by such neoconservatives as Wolfowitz and Libby and sympathetic conservatives like former secretary of defense Cheney, who argued for preventing the "reemergence of a new rival," even if this meant preventive military action.[79] At the time, lacking a transformative event like 9/11, the leaking of the defense policy guidance of 1992 to the *New York Times* led to a massive, negative domestic and international reaction, forcing the retraction of the original work and its eventual resubmission in a more moderate form that stressed traditional multilateralism, deterrence, and containment strategies.[80] Despite some confluence of sympathy between senior Bush policy makers and neoconservatives, the actual ability of either group to reach its shared goals was sharply circumscribed prior to 9/11.

One also saw the openness of Bush policy makers to the neoconservative plan for remaking America's strategic culture, and thus its national security policy, in their dissatisfaction with the Clinton administration, especially regarding rogue states. Under Rumsfeld the 1998 Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States argued that "the threat to the U.S. posed by these emerging capabilities is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than has been reported in estimates and reports by the Intelligence Community."[81] The commission further cautioned that

through new means of delivery, rogue states could strike the United States "within about five years of a decision to acquire such a capability (10 years in the case of Iraq) . . . [and with] alternative means of delivery [that] can shorten the warning time of deployment nearly to zero."[82] Rumsfeld in particular reflected the philosophy of many conservatives, neoconservatives, and the military when he initially met the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) offers to help in Afghanistan with an cool response.[83] He considered the political benefits of such aid of secondary value compared to the tactical and operational constraints on the hegemon's ability to flex muscle and control overall strategy with NATO involvement.[84] This dismissal of multilateral military aid resulted from the unsatisfying experience of Kosovo, where "U.S. aircraft flew two-thirds of the strike missions," yet America found itself constrained by squeamish Europeans who interfered with targeting policies and missions.[85] Both neoconservatives and senior Bush policy makers felt that since the United States did the fighting, it should have the lion's share of decision making.[86] The role of the Europeans in NATO and the UN involved "cleaning up the mess" of reconstruction afterwards via peacekeeping and nation-building activities as befit satisfied client states and satellites.[87] The Clinton administration's behavior in the face of recalcitrant rogue states led to dissatisfaction among Bush policy makers and neoconservatives.

Despite these irritations, prior to 9/11, the prospective hegemonic paradigm advocated by the neoconservatives had little traction in terms of gaining the acceptance among senior policy makers necessary to overthrow established Cold War norms in American national security policy. These attempts to redefine American foreign policy in a more aggressive and explicitly dominant manner, especially through using regime change in Iraq as a test case, proved largely unsuccessful.[88] Due to domestic and international opposition, the leaked version of Wolfowitz and Cheney's defense planning guidance of 1992 had to be toned down in its call for the United States to resist the rise of any peer competitor and extend the unipolar moment.[89] The document especially needed this change because it singled out allies in Europe, not just traditional enemies or adversaries such as Russia and, increasingly, China.[90] The open letter from the Project for the New American Century calling for the United States to commit itself to overthrowing Saddam's regime may have led to the Iraq Liberation Act, but actual attempts

to overthrow the government were limited to abortive and cautious covert operations by a Clinton administration and US Central Command much more enamored of the Cold War normative paradigm's mentality of containing Saddam.[91]

In terms of the Cold War paradigm in American strategic culture, the beginning of the Bush administration appeared to offer more of the same. By its first term before 9/11, elite policy makers' orientation toward Iraq was often cautiously realist, with Rice calling for "a clear and classical statement of deterrence."[92] Similarly, "Cheney appeared to endorse the Clinton administration's containment policy, saying that 'we want to maintain our current posture vis-a-vis Iraq.' "[93] His position included moving toward smarter sanctions to placate increasingly queasy multilateral support.[94] It also meant a reduction in American overseas humanitarian interventions like Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, and Kosovo.[95] Or, as Bush argued, "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 gotta be.'"[96] As a result, other than a handful of deputy neoconservative officials like Wolfowitz and Libby, no one wanted war with Iraq.[97]

September 11 and the Neoconservative Normative Paradigm

For constructivists, 9/11 called into question the entire Cold War normative edifice that governed American foreign policy, not only with regard to the Middle East and Iraq but also with what was identified as the proper role of the United States in the world. Before 9/11, few people in the Bush administration (which had mainly concerned itself with the rising power of China and ballistic missile defense as an alternative to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty) regarded terrorism as a serious threat.[98] The American attempt to preserve stability through multilateralism led to al-Qaeda's perceiving the United States as the "far enemy" that supported the "near enemy" of oppressive authoritarian governments.[99] In sum, the attacks of 9/11 called into question the traditional approach to Iraq and the Middle East, opening the path to the shift in national security policy offered by the proposed hegemonic paradigm put forth by neoconservatives.

First, the neoconservatives critiqued the Cold War paradigm via a threat analysis which emphasized that rogue states, in addition to the terrorist organizations with whom they often allied themselves, could not be deterred—a situation demanding preventive war. Such interventions using

superior military technology would inhibit rogue states from doing the same thing that al-Qaeda had done.[100] By contrast, preventive war offered the option of rapidly eliminating antagonistic regimes and getting other states to fall in line out of fear of being next.[101] Second, according to the Bush administration, goading cumbersome multilateral alliances into taking action in a world where the diffusion of technology and radical Islamic fundamentalism required rapid responses could lead to catastrophe.[102] Colin Powell argued in favor of this new neoconservative doctrine: "The potential connection between terrorists and weapons of mass destruction had moved terrorism to a new level of threat, a threat that could not be deterred because of this connection between States developing weapons of mass destruction and terrorist organizations willing to use them without any compunction and in an undeterrable fashion."[103] Under the logic of the proposed hegemonic paradigm, a strategic cultural norm espousing preventive war would ensure no repeat of the disastrous terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The attacks on 9/11 also gave credence to the neoconservative argument that regime change could shore up American hegemony by forcibly exporting democracy. Neoconservatives argued that the old policy of supporting friendly authoritarian governments had led to supporting dictators like Saddam and rejecting democracy, which led to the political repression that motivated groups like al-Qaeda.[104] In neoconservative eyes, the Cold War emphasis on respecting sovereignty to support stability resulted in the United States' ignoring the political needs of the Arab people, thus allowing Islamic jihadism to blossom.[105] Working with authoritarian governments to deter and contain common threats, such as Iran in the past and now Iraq, gave rise to supporting governments disliked by their people, who then disliked the United States.[106] By contrast, relying on preventive war via unilateral hegemony would mean that the United States could uphold its values and build support among the people of despotic states, "as the realist obsession with 'vital' interests never fully jibed with America's definition of its national interest" anyway.[107] Neoconservatives believed that overthrowing these regimes would provide the option of a more attractive government to the people of the Middle East via the introduction of liberal democracy and free markets as a viable alternative to Islamic jihadism, feudal autocracies, and corrupt Ba'athists.[108]

After 9/11, neoconservative norm entrepreneurs went on the verbal offensive, arguing against the validity of Cold War norms governing American strategy and pushing for preventive war. Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz were in the neoconservative vanguard, arguing against a "myopic and false realism that wrongly had sought accommodation with evil."[109] According to Wolfowitz, "the idea that we could live with another 20 years of stagnation in the Middle East that breeds this radicalism and breeds this terrorism is, I think, just unacceptable—especially after September 11th."[110] Such beliefs had arisen from his personal witness of the democratization of close allies like the Philippines and South Korea, leading him to declare that "democracy is a universal idea" and that "letting people rule themselves happens to be something that serves Americans and American interests."[111] David Frum and Perle made the case for invasion explicitly, contending that "Saddam Hussein's ambitions were dangerous enough before 9/11; afterward, they had to be regarded as a clear and present danger to the United States."[112] The Project for the New American Century's open letter of 20 September 2001, nine days after 9/11, summed up this perception of the need to eliminate Iraq: "Even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aimed at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq."[113] Underlining the neoconservative case for invasion is Douglas Feith's contention that "terrorist organizations cannot be effective in sustaining themselves over long periods of time to do large-scale operations if they don't have support from states."[114] These revolutionary statements illustrate the intensity of the neoconservatives' desire to overthrow the existing Cold War paradigm that constituted American strategic culture.

In addition to the costs of inaction in the face of aggressive rogue states and the potential benefits of democratization, advocates postulated preventive war as a low-risk strategy for the sole remaining superpower. Ken Adelman assisted in laying the groundwork for such a neoconservative attacking of Iraq by arguing in a *Washington Post* editorial that he believed "demolishing Hussein's military power and liberating Iraq would be a cakewalk"; prior American military performance against Iraq coupled with both exponential advances in American military capabilities such as precision-guided munitions and the corresponding degradation of Iraqi conventional military power under sanctions formed the basis for this optimism.[115]

Ultimately, Adelman's statements capture three components of the neoconservative case for unilateral, hegemonic preventive war. First, enemies—especially states with their superior resources and desire to obtain WMDs—could inflict catastrophic damage. Second, the attraction of democracy and American military technical proficiency would lower the cost of war and reconstruction. Third, the elimination of a threat and its replacement with an ideologically satisfied state could help transform a geopolitically vital yet problematic region. After 9/11 the traditional Cold War approach offered none of the lure of this silver bullet.

Successful Persuasion: The National Security Strategy of 2002

These views found formal expression in the national security strategy of 2002, written by the National Security Council under Rice. In 2002, no longer faced with a Cold War threat that it could deter via multilateral containment, America needed a new normative structure to meet the threat of "radicalism and technology" and of enemies that were pursuing WMDs—a structure that could act "against such emerging threats before they are fully formed."[116] The strategy began by defining what America was—the victor in "a great struggle over ideas: destructive totalitarian visions versus freedom and equality."[117] Such victories demonstrated that the liberal democratic and free-market model of the United States was universally applicable and responsible for its status as the dominant global power, thus requiring that it "defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere."[118] Deterrence may have worked against the "status quo, risk-averse adversary" of the Soviet Union, but it was "less likely to work against leaders of rogue states more willing to take risks, gambling with the lives of their people, and the wealth of their nations."[119] Furthermore, the statement that "the overlap between states that sponsor terror and those that pursue WMD compels us to action" implicitly ties state sponsors of terrorism directly to terrorists as possible recipients of WMDs, which could lead to further catastrophic attacks.[120] Given this picture painted by the strategy, preventive war became all the more necessary because "the greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack."[121] The national security strategy of 2002 offers an excellent starting point for

understanding the Bush administration's acceptance of the prospective hegemonic paradigm, justifying the invasion of Iraq.

Evidence of Persuasion: The Views of Senior Policy Makers

Statements by some traditional conservative elites in the Bush administration, such as President Bush and Rice, reveal how neoconservative norm entrepreneurs were able to convince senior policy makers to accept the prospective hegemonic paradigm's vision of America's global role. The danger of Iraq's possessing WMDs resided in the fact that Saddam "could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred."[122] Consequently, in remarks at West Point on 1 June 2002 (barely nine months after 9/11), Bush warned that "if we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. . . . We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge."[123] Moreover, the United States was justified in enjoying this hegemonic exemption to international law both by virtue of its power as well as by moral legitimacy in its status as the "single surviving model of human progress."[124] In asking for UN support for enforcing its resolutions on Iraq, Bush made the choice clear: "Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding, or will it be irrelevant?"[125] Furthermore, echoing the neoconservative Robert Kagan and the national security strategy of 2002, Rice stated that "the United States is a very special country in that when we maintain this position of military strength that we have now, we do so in support of a balance of power that favors freedom."[126] This also legitimated prevention of the rise of other powers and the use of preventive war, according to Rice, because the leader of the free world had always reserved the right to strike first if necessary to secure its physical security.[127]

Bush's passion was matched by the cooler, but no less ideological, calculations of Cheney on the need for the sole superpower, America, to lead with unilateral preventive war as a way of remaking the world for the better. The neoconservatives' normative vision of the hegemonic paradigm met the vice president's calculations concerning the security interests of the United States. On the 8 September 2002 segment of *Meet the Press*, Cheney argued that containment and deterrence, for all their utility during the Cold War, were of little use against Saddam.[128] He cited not only the breakdown of sanctions but also 9/11, contending that just as America could not deter or

contain terrorists, neither could it do so with a leader obsessed with obtaining WMDs.[129] As evidence of the need to take preventive action to initiate regime change, he referred to his experience with Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) briefings during the Gulf War which had informed him that Iraq was several years away from obtaining nuclear weapons.[130] New intelligence, however, indicated that Iraq had been only six months away from developing a nuclear device at the start of the war.[131] Therefore, Cheney used neoconservative rhetoric to contend that "if we fail to respond today, Saddam and all those who would follow in his footsteps will be emboldened tomorrow. . . . Some way, some way, I guarantee you he'll use the arsenal."[132] This statement justified preventive action at the present time, both for Iraq in particular and for rogue states in general.[133] The neoconservatives' proposal for a new set of norms in American strategic culture, and thus for guiding national security policy, was consistent with Cheney's calculations of American security interests.

Cheney's personal beliefs and emphasis on the utility of hegemonic force as a way of intimidating adversaries were consonant with both neoconservative principles and the proposed normative paradigm. In a speech before the Veterans of Foreign Wars on 26 August 2002, he declared that "we will, no question" employ preventive war to preclude the occurrence of an "even more devastating attack [than September 11th]" at the hands of terrorists or rogue regimes.[134] He then mentioned the pacifying benefits of regime change in Iraq, where "the freedom-loving peoples of the region will have a chance to promote the values that can bring lasting peace."[135] The Bush doctrine of unilateral action by a benevolent hegemon was thus buttressed by the "one percent logic" of Cheney, which held that even if only a 1 percent chance exists of a WMD attack in the future, the United States must respond to eliminate this threat.[136] According to former adviser Aaron Friedberg, Cheney was looking for a "demonstration effect" by "taking him [Saddam] down because [we] could" and thereby "encouraging the others" to behave.[137] The idea behind attacking Iraq was that since the United States had suffered a devastating strike, America had to make it clear to those who supported such acts that they would pay a horrible price for doing so.[138] The United States needed to "encourage the others" not to mess with America by demonstrating its strength and power.[139] The agreement between Cheney's ruthless, interest-based calculations and the normative ideals of

the neoconservatives reveals that support for the hegemonic paradigm could also be synergistic—not just a case of senior Bush policy makers accepting the guidance of subordinate neoconservative norm entrepreneurs, as Flibbert suggested. This sharing of goals between senior policy makers such as Cheney at the Office of the Vice President (OVP) and neoconservatives within the Department of Defense made for a powerful one-two punch in their construction of a flawed and often false case for war.

Strategic Norm Construction as Policy Behavior

Neoconservative norm entrepreneurs manipulated intelligence, as seen in their slipshod vetting of sources. They selected sources on the basis of ideological utility in an attempt to strategically construct support for using Iraq as a test case for establishing their vision of American hegemony. According to such critics as Greg Thielmann of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the neoconservative approach to intelligence gathering "became a failure of process as nobody goes to the primary sources."[140] This sloppy treatment of sources, from the perspective of critics in the intelligence community, came about because the Department of Defense and OVP behaved in a "dogmatic manner, as if they were on a mission from God," so "if it doesn't fit their theory, they don't want to accept it."[141] To implement their beliefs, the neoconservatives in the Office of Special Plans (OSP), backed by a Rumsfeld suspicious of the CIA after his unsatisfactory experience with its assessments during the Rumsfeld Commission, set themselves up as an alternative intelligence-gathering and information-distribution system unconnected to the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency.[142] Shortly after the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, Rumsfeld's and Wolfowitz's close associates, Douglas Feith, Abram Shulsky, and William Luti, led the OSP's initiative to garner intelligence for creating the case for going to war.[143] They also handled planning for the postwar reconstruction of Iraq.[144] The OSP garnered raw intelligence data from other agencies and relied heavily on intelligence from the self-serving Iraqi exiles of the Iraqi National Congress under Ahmed Chalabi.[145] In John Bolton's work as undersecretary for arms control and international security, moreover, a similar process occurred as they examined unvetted human intelligence and electronic intelligence data with "hand-picked loyalists while Bolton ran his own ad hoc intelligence agency."[146] The neoconservatives and allies like

Cheney manipulated intelligence in their efforts to strategically construct the case for war.

Moreover, the OVP and the White House duplicated the behavior of the OSP and Bolton as part of this larger strategy of strategic norm construction. Cheney's office also eschewed properly vetting raw data on Iraqi WMDs at the level of primary sources, especially when it came to the dubious claims of self-serving Iraqi exiles.[147] The OVP then manipulated the mass media by leaking this questionable information to the press and by putting it out in public statements at the same time.[148] This deception created the illusion of two sources, thus enhancing the credibility of the case for war to journalists.[149] Finally, because no one leaked skeptical expert assessments, nothing countered the false information disseminated in the public realm.[150] The behavior of Cheney's office demonstrated how senior policy makers built a case for war that involved the dissemination of distorted data.

This process of information manipulation in the interests of strategic norm construction did not confine itself to the public. Advocates also inflicted it on other policy makers to influence them. For example, according to Dick Armey, to gain Armey's support for the October resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq, Cheney told him that "Iraq's 'ability to miniaturize weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear,' had been 'substantially refined since the first Gulf War,' " and that "al Qaeda was 'working with Saddam Hussein and members of his family.'"[151] However, the Bush administration knew over three months prior to this meeting the falsity of evidence supporting allegations of Iraqi progress toward gaining a nuclear weapon.[152]

For constructivists, the behavior of the Bush administration leading up to the invasion of Iraq also demonstrates how it sought to use the war as a test case for reshaping the strategic cultural norms governing America's national security policies. Within hours of the attack on the Twin Towers, "Rumsfeld raised with his staff the possibility of going after Iraq . . . 'hit S.H. [Saddam Hussein] @ same time—not only UBL [Usama bin Laden].'"[153] Moreover, "the next day in the inner circle of Bush's war cabinet, Rumsfeld asked if the terrorist attacks did not present an 'opportunity' to launch against Iraq."[154] During another meeting on 15 September, Wolfowitz contended that they should attack Iraq at the same time as Afghanistan since "he estimated there was between a 10 to 50 percent chance Saddam was involved in the 9/11 attacks."[155] Cheney was supportive but not in favor of

immediate action, saying that "he would not rule out going after him at some point."[156] By late July of 2002, Sir Richard Dearlove, head of British intelligence, noted in the Downing Street Memo that "Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD."[157] In short, within eight months of the end of fighting in Afghanistan, and often much earlier, senior national security policy makers were in agreement with the neoconservative script and pushing for war with Iraq.

Based on the behavioral groundwork of the OSP, the OVP, and the White House, the Bush administration sold the case for war to the American public and elites outside the executive branch. As Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke pointed out, the neoconservatives so successfully created a political discourse linking 9/11 to Iraq "that seven in ten Americans thought Saddam Hussein had played a direct part in the terrorist attacks" by September 2003.[158] The neoconservatives had presented nightmare scenarios that played on the immediacy of the threat, "such as when President Bush argued that 'according to the British government, the Iraqi regime could launch a biological or chemical attack in as little as 45 minutes after the order is given.'"[159] Another example includes the case for Iraq's potentially providing nuclear weapons to terrorists, based on the unverified report of "[Abu Musab Al-]Zarqawi's two-month stay for medical treatment in Baghdad and his links to Ansar-al-Islam, a localized terrorist organization."[160] This report was fully consistent with the claims made by Secretary Rice and President Bush's State of the Union address which indicated that Iraq had sought to purchase yellow-cake uranium from Niger for over six months after the story was called into question.[161] This statement, in particular, had proven central in persuading fearful congressmen to agree to the October 2002 passage of the resolution authorizing force against Iraq.[162] In fact, "when Iraq released the 12,200-page weapons declaration to the U.N. on December 7th, the administration included in its eight essential omissions and deceptions the assertion: 'The declaration ignores efforts to procure uranium from Niger.'"[163] As a result, the Bush administration successfully (at least before the insurgency blossomed) obtained most Americans' support for invading Iraq as part of a larger strategy of strategic norm construction.

Limits of Diffusion: Fall of the Proposed Paradigm

The de facto hegemonic position of the United States was the greatest asset to attempts to gain global acceptance for the prospective hegemonic paradigm. At the domestic level, the congressional resolution of October 2002 authorized the use of force, and the national security strategy of 2002, the executive legal document used to formalize and justify the new grand strategy, authorized both hegemonic governance and preventive warfare.[164] The global applicability of such arguments, made at the municipal level of the state, rested on the prominence given the proposed norm by the United States as the hegemon that enforces international order.[165] As Kagan contends, for Americans, "such law as there may be to regulate international behavior . . . exists because a power like the United States defends it by force of arms."[166] His view reflects the Bush administration's belief that "the other great powers actually *prefer* management of the international system by a single hegemon as long as it's a relatively benign one" (emphasis in original). This eliminates both the danger of systemic war and advances "certain values that all states and cultures—if not all terrorists and tyrants—share," such as condemning the "targeting of innocent civilians for murder."[167]

Despite support by the American superpower, this was almost certainly not enough to ensure acceptance of the prospective hegemonic paradigm. John Lewis Gaddis argues that the limits of trying to sell the paradigm solely on the material hegemonic power of the United States lie in the relationship of "hegemony, prevention, and consent."[168] The problem is that the American people and America's allies, who are supposed to grant consent based on the benefits offered by the leadership of the United States, find themselves frightened by the military adventurism of hegemony, leading them to question whether "there could be *nothing worse* than American hegemony" (emphasis in original).[169] In addition, the feasibility of a dominant American sheriff imposing a new order of freedom in the Middle East is called into question because of problems with the occupation in the Iraqi test case and concerns over whether liberal democracy is even a practical route for the Middle East.[170] Or, as Madeleine Albright noted regarding the problems of preventive war, the act of "transforming anticipatory self-defense—a tool every president has quietly held in reserve—into the centerpiece of its national security policy" sets up the danger of creating "a world in which every country feels entitled to attack any other

that may someday threaten it."[171] One also sees such concern over preventive war in the preponderance of international jurisprudential criticism, much of which accepts the traditional concept of preemption but rejects the legitimacy of preventive war as enunciated by the Bush administration.[172] Joseph Nye wrote that the Bush administration failed miserably in terms of "contextual intelligence, the ability to understand an evolving environment and to match resources with objectives by moving with rather than against the flow of events."[173] Central to this failure was the discovery that no WMDs existed, a fact that blotted the credibility of preventive war by undermining the basic legitimating factor for its employment.[174]

The proposed hegemonic paradigm supported by the Bush administration never achieved, or even came close to achieving, a norm cascade. Instead, the neoconservatives' proposed normative paradigm managed to earn the opposition of virtually all of America's allied governments in Europe and Japan, including great powers such as Russia and China, and of almost all of the Middle East except Israel.[175] Even in those states in which the *government* provided support for the proposed normative paradigm and for invading Iraq, such as Great Britain, the *population* overwhelmingly opposed the war.[176] For example, "those opposed to U.S. and allied military action rose from 65 percent in September 2002 to 77 percent by February 2003," while "in Russia, opposition to military action in Iraq rose from 79 percent to 87 percent in March 2003," and "in Britain, the percentage of those who approved of the way Bush was handling Iraq fell from 30 percent in September 2002 to 19 percent in January 2003."[177] When the United States went to war, its "coalition of the willing" did technically include 50 states, but only Britain and Australia were considered significant contributors; the other actors were a mixture of microstates and minor African, Latin American, and Caribbean nations.[178] Moreover, the attempt to gain UN support for using force against Iraq in a second Security Council resolution failed disastrously as Russia, China, Germany, France, Canada, and the rotating members of the council ultimately came to oppose Britain and the United States.[179]

In the wake of a costly and increasingly disastrous insurgency and civil war, the Iraq War as a test case for preventive war blew up in the face of the Bush administration and the neoconservative norm entrepreneurs. The *Iraq Study Group Report* of 2006, led by realist James Baker, observed that the

"situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating."[180] This policy outcome discredited the entire normative project both in a practical and moral sense. In fact the outcome was so bad that many of the original neoconservative norm entrepreneurs lost faith in the chance for success.[181] For example, Richard Perle blamed the "devastating dysfunction within the administration of President George W. Bush"; it was so bad, according to Perle, that "if he had his time over, he would not have advocated an invasion of Iraq."[182] Kenneth Adelman glumly added that he "believe[d] that neoconservativism . . . [was] dead, at least for a generation."[183]

The proposed hegemonic paradigm that was to transform American strategic culture and thus its national security policy has collapsed. Some individuals argue that it did so because factors that allowed for the new normative structure to be diffused—"the sudden sense of vulnerability Americans felt following 9/11" and "a feeling of tremendous power"—have passed, forcing a retreat to the old Cold War strategic-cultural normative paradigm.[184] Consequently, Robert Gates replaced Donald Rumsfeld, and "pragmatists such as Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, and North Korea negotiator Christopher Hill" replaced "neoconservatives Wolfowitz, Feith, and Bolton."[185] Ultimately, with the election of President Obama and the retreat of American troops in Iraq to bases and pledges of further withdrawals, one can claim that the test case has produced a suboptimal outcome—one that has led to discrediting of the norm that sought success as its validation.

Conclusion

For constructivists, strategic culture is the product of norms and culture-bearing units such as norm entrepreneurs. From the constructivist perspective, the United States invaded Iraq to replace the strategic cultural norms found under Cold War logic with a new proposal advocating democratic regime change via preventive war. However, during the Iraq War, a proposed paradigm of preventive war, supported by neoconservative norm entrepreneurs and traditional conservative converts and sympathizers in the Bush administration, ultimately failed to replace the Cold War–era strategies of multilateral containment and maintenance of the geopolitical status quo. This proposed norm was part of a larger revolutionary strategy that backed a policy of preventive war, the hegemonic paradigm, whereby

the American hegemon promoted democracy through the use of force. To diffuse this new vision, the United States used the Iraq War as a test case that would prove the validity and effectiveness of the concept of preventive war. New international groupings like "coalitions of the willing" and the national security strategy of 2002 would provide the documents legitimating these new policies. Yet diffusion encountered heavy opposition at both the domestic and international levels as well as the costly nature of the war. Thus American strategic culture and national security policy briefly flirted with the proposed dissident neoconservative paradigm, but presently they appear to be returning to some variant of the Cold War normative paradigm. From a constructivist perspective, the Iraq War not only failed to demonstrate the validity of a new vision of American strategic culture but also undermined the very paradigm it was supposed to inaugurate.

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