

American Exceptionalism and the Bush Administration

The Case of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Iraq War

(January 2002-June 2004)

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Introduction

As a response to the 9/11 attacks, President Bush declared a war on terror when he expressed his determination to go after terrorists and the states that protected them (Lafeber 547). The foreign policy formulated by the Bush administration, later known as the Bush Doctrine, focused on unilateralism, preventive war, and regime change in so-called rogue states (Jervis 365). The Bush Doctrine was also applied to the policymaking process of the Iraq War, resulting in a military intervention on March 19, 2003 (Daalder and Lindsay 144). It allowed the US to demonstrate its willingness to use force in preventive wars. It could also compensate for its inability to overthrow the Iraqi regime in the 1991 Gulf War (Record 88, 92, 100). The primary justification for the Iraq War used by the administration focused on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which presented a threat to the United States, since they could be handed over to terrorist networks. However, the American troops never found any evidence of WMD in Iraq and the administration acknowledged that the stated justification for war turned out to be false (Daalder and Lindsay 119, 131, 156-63).

These reasons and justifications used by the Bush administration partially explain why the US intervened in Iraq. The concept of American exceptionalism is fundamental in understanding the war. American exceptionalism has evolved over time as American power expanded and the leadership role of the US increased in importance, but its origin can be traced back to the Puritans and John Winthrop's "city upon a hill." It emphasizes moral superiority as well as uniqueness, combining the Puritan ideas of religion and morality with the Enlightenment ideals of individual reason and liberty (McEvoy-Levy 23-25; Rojecki 69). There are two different strands within American exceptionalism. The exemplary strand asserts that the US should set an example for the rest of the world. However, the missionary strand contends that the US should also actively spread American values abroad and has the right and duty to do so (McCrisken 182-83). The US is seen as a force for good in the world that leads to democratic change (Monten 113-14). Although political scientist Restad does not agree with the different strands, she acknowledges the conventional understanding of the exemplary and missionary strands. While exemplary American exceptionalism leads to an isolationist foreign policy, the missionary strand results in an internationalist foreign policy. The former means that the US focuses on its own issues and does not engage in international affairs, while the latter encourages the opposite as it promotes active American involvement in international politics (Restad 56-57). Within the Bush administration, American exceptionalism can be found in the neoconservative vision, which relates to the missionary strand and an internationalist foreign policy that are reflected in the Bush Doctrine. Neoconservatism focuses on

American hegemony, unilateralism, military power, and exporting democracy (McCrisken 185; Dolan and Cohen 37-38). There is no consensus amongst scholars, but President Bush and Vice President Cheney most closely represent the neoconservative thought in the higher ranks of the administration. Secretary of State Powell is not considered a neoconservative since he is often viewed as a realist, concentrating on national interests and other elements of power, such as diplomatic, economic, and political power. Realism considers military power as an option of last resort (McCrisken 186; Record 41; Ritchie and Rogers 152; Dolan and Cohen 37-39).

The academic literature available connects American exceptionalism to the Bush administration and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The concept of American exceptionalism is deeply rooted in American history and plays a key role in foreign policy as it defines how many Americans view the world and its own role in the international political system (McCrisken 182-83; McEvoy-Levy 23; Monten 113-14; Restad 56-57). Neoconservative politicians use American exceptionalist rhetoric, but there is no consensus about its influence on US foreign policy in the Bush administration (Daalder and Lindsay 15; Dolan and Cohen 37-39; McCrisken 185-86; Monten 143; Record 41, 52; Ritchie and Rogers 152, 157; Rojecki 71). There is, however, a general understanding that American exceptionalism is apparent in the Bush Doctrine (Lafeber 549; Record 52; Ritchie and Rogers 156; Wheeler 207). There is also an ongoing debate amongst scholars whether or not the policy pursued in Iraq under the Bush administration can be seen as a continuity or a change in comparison to earlier presidents (Daalder and Lindsay 12-13; McCrisken 185; Leffler 395-96, 406). Although much literature focuses on American exceptionalism within the Bush administration, there is no clarity about how the role of American exceptionalism in the Iraq War changed during the first term of the Bush administration after the non-discovery of WMD. A comparison of public remarks will reveal whether or not there was an increase in the importance of American exceptionalism in the policymaking process of the Bush administration. It will help illustrate why the war continued until 2010, even after the primary justification of war became invalid (Cooper and Stolberg).

In order to assess this change, the research concentrates on public remarks and interviews of the Bush administration. Bush started his campaign for possible military action against Iraq in his State of the Union of 2002, where he first publicly presented Iraq as a threat (Dolan and Cohen 49). At the end of June in 2004, Iraq regained its sovereignty after the US installed the Coalition Provisional Authority in an attempt to support Iraq in establishing a well-functioning democracy after the overthrow of Hussein's regime (Bush, *Decision Points* 359). The time frame analyzed, between January 2002 and June 2004, spanned the period in which the administration

acknowledged that its intelligence on WMD in Iraq was false. It is extremely difficult to indicate a specific moment, but at the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004, *The New York Times* reported that Bush renounced his claims that WMD would be found in Iraq. However, he reiterated that, the American military intervention was justified, even without the possibility of WMD, because the world was significantly better off without Hussein in power (Sanger; Stevenson).

As an examination of the whole Bush administration is beyond the scope of this research, the focus of this thesis is on President Bush, Vice President Cheney and Secretary of State Powell. Cheney was the dominant proponent of going to war in Iraq because of WMD (Mann 369). In contrast, Powell proposed a more deliberate course of action, starting with diplomacy at the United Nations (UN). He was not principally opposed to military intervention, but he believed that the US should not act unilaterally and should take its time to properly plan and execute a possible military intervention in Iraq (Mann 340). The opposing views of Cheney and Powell resemble the differences between neoconservatism and realism within the administration. For the purpose of this study, Cheney represents the neoconservatives, such as Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, while Powell represents the realists, such as Richard Armitage, within the Bush administration (Mann 54; McCrisken 186; Ritchie and Rogers 152).

The role of American exceptionalism in US foreign policy towards the Iraq War during the first term of the Bush administration is examined in the next chapters by analyzing scholarly literature alongside public remarks and interviews given by Bush, Cheney, and Powell. The first chapter focuses on the role of American exceptionalism in the policymaking process between January 2002 and November 2003, representing the time frame in which the Bush administration publicly believed in the possibility of WMD in Iraq. The second chapter assesses the importance of American exceptionalism in the period between December 2003 and June 2004, the period after the non-discovery of WMD. There has certainly been a change in the role of American exceptionalism in the public remarks of the Bush administration about US foreign policy towards the Iraq War between January 2002 and June 2004. Bush, Cheney, and Powell increasingly relied on American exceptionalist rhetoric when explaining the Iraq War in their public remarks after the alleged WMD were not found.

Chapter 1: American Exceptionalism and WMD

On March 19, 2003, Bush announced that “[t]he people of the United States ... will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder,” thereby initiating Operation Iraqi Freedom (“Address on Iraq”). This chapter will examine the use of American exceptionalist rhetoric in the period before and after this declaration of war. The policy decisions made in the White House during this timeframe were based on the National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2002. This document presented the US as an exceptional power due to its strength and influence. Therefore, it had “unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunity,” which included preventing rogue states from threatening or using WMD against the United States (*National Security Strategy* 1, 14). According to political scientists Daalder and Lindsay, the significance of the NSS of 2002 was that it encouraged the US to use its “unprecedented power to remake the world in America’s image” (123). The strategy contended that the American values of freedom, democracy, and free enterprise would eventually prevail and defeat the enemy (Daalder and Lindsay 125). This argument illustrates elements of the missionary strand within American exceptionalism. The NSS aimed to actively spread American values in order to eliminate the threats and to improve American security. However, this document formulated a strategy for the general war on terror, not for the Iraq War specifically. The Bush administration mainly focused on WMD when discussing Iraq before the publication of the National Security Strategy in September 2002. At the end of the year and throughout 2003, there was a slight increase in the use of American exceptionalist rhetoric in public remarks, in particular after the US intervened in Iraq and overthrew the regime of Saddam Hussein.

I. President George W. Bush

As the NSS of 2002 already demonstrated, American exceptionalism played a significant role in defining the general war on terror, but there were almost no specific links to Iraq at that time. In the State of the Union of 2002, Bush depicted the US as a force for good and argued that “[h]istory has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom’s fight” (“State of the Union” 2002). This argument portrayed Bush’s belief in American exceptionalism. The American values of liberty and justice needed to be spread to other parts of the globe to create a better and safer world. Bush briefly mentioned the Iraqi regime as one of the “axis of evil” (next to North Korea and Iran), because of the ambition to develop WMD (“State of the Union” 2002). In contrast to the lack of reference to Iraq before the publication of the NSS, Bush

started to discuss the Iraqi threat more frequently after September 2002. He mainly used WMD as a justification for the US to act against Hussein. On October 7, 2002, Bush argued that Iraq “possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons [and it seeks] nuclear weapons” (“Address On Iraq From Cincinnati”). He also linked Hussein to international terrorist groups, thereby raising the concern that Iraq might distribute its WMD to terrorists that want to attack the US. Bush believed that the US had “an urgent duty to prevent the worst from occurring” (“Address On Iraq From Cincinnati”). Therefore, he called for disarmament. However, if Hussein did not disarm, the United States might have to act militarily. Bush explained that they would support the Iraqis in rebuilding their society and government if an intervention was necessary (“Address On Iraq From Cincinnati”). The US would actively spread its values of liberty and freedom to Iraq, which corresponds to the missionary strand within American exceptionalism. Bush also extensively discussed the WMD threat that Iraq posed and the possible American influence on Iraqi society if military action was required in the State of the Union of 2003. He demonstrated how Hussein was not disarming, but rather deceiving the international community. Since Bush was slowly moving towards war with Iraq, he informed the world that the US would lead a coalition to disarm Saddam if necessary. Also, Bush explained that “this call of history has come to the right country” to destroy the evil forces of terrorism (“State of the Union” 2003). The US would provide the citizens of Iraq with freedom (Bush, “State of the Union” 2003). These three addresses demonstrate that after the publication of the NSS of 2002, Bush extensively discussed the Iraqi WMD threat and used American exceptionalist rhetoric when considering military action against Hussein.

In the months leading up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, there was an increase in the prominence of American exceptionalism. In his memoir, Bush explained that if the US was going “to remove Saddam from power, ... I would have an obligation to help the Iraqi people to replace Saddam’s tyranny with a democracy. ... Once liberty took root in one society, it could spread to others” (*Decision Points* 232). This argument is supported by his public remarks. For the first time, Bush publicly defended transformation as a war aim (Record 110). On February 26, 2003, he delivered an address in which American exceptionalism played a more influential role, in comparison to earlier speeches. He believed that Iraq would be “fully capable of moving toward democracy and living in freedom” (Bush, “American Enterprise Institute”). The new government would also be an example to the rest of the Middle East. Bush argued that “America’s cause is right and just: liberty for an oppressed people, and security for American people. ... We have met great tests in other times, and we will meet the tests of our time” (“American Enterprise Institute”). This

claim can be connected to the missionary strand within American exceptionalism. Bush pursued the spread of American values and he believed that the US had the right, the duty, and the capability to do so. On March 17, 2003, Bush reiterated these contentions. He pressured Hussein to leave the country within forty-eight hours in order to avoid military confrontation (Bush, “Address on Iraq”). Bush argued that, “[u]nlike Saddam Hussein, we believe [that] the Iraqi people are deserving and capable of human liberty ... [and] they can set an example to all the Middle East of a vital and peaceful and self-governing nation” (“Address on Iraq” March 17, 2003). Once again, Bush focused on the spread of American values of liberty and democracy to Iraq and the Middle East. However, it is important to remember that the American strategy was based on the imagined threat of WMD in Iraq (Record 60-61; Ritchie and Rogers 83).

Following the military intervention and the overthrow of the Iraqi regime, the significance of American exceptionalism continued to expand. On May 1, 2003, Bush declared the mission to be accomplished. The US was committed to transforming Iraq into a democracy. According to Bush, the way forward for Iraq was to implement American values and institutions (“USS Abraham Lincoln”). This argument was further elaborated on in his address on November 6, 2003. He focused on the issue of democracy promotion in the Middle East and how Iraq was an important factor in achieving a “global democratic revolution.” Bush was absolutely certain that the transformation of Iraq would succeed. He connected it explicitly to American exceptionalism when he said that “[t]he advance of freedom is the calling of our time. It is the calling of our country” (Bush, “National Endowment for Democracy”). The United States was responsible for leading the international community to a better and safer world, signifying that the American values of freedom, liberty, and democracy would be embraced by all.

II. Vice President Dick Cheney

Cheney followed a similar pattern as Bush in describing Operation Iraqi Freedom in his remarks in 2002. Initially, he concentrated on the possible WMD and he hardly mentioned American exceptionalist themes. However, at the end of the year, there is a slight increase in the emphasis on American exceptionalism. Political scientists Daalder and Lindsay explain that Cheney was worried about the possible connection between rogue states, in particular Iraq, and WMD (118-19). This concern became very apparent when Cheney appeared on *Meet the Press* on March 24, 2002. In order to avoid terrorists gaining access to WMD, the US was prepared to do “whatever is necessary to make certain that the United States and our allies are not threatened by a nuclear-armed Saddam Hussein” (Cheney, “Meet the Press”). Cheney was not very interested in changing Iraq into a

democracy. Daalder and Lindsay claim that he was willing to use force to defend American security, but he was hesitant to use American power to remake the world (15). However, political scientist Record argues that Cheney agreed with Bush and promoted a transformation of the Middle East through regime change in Iraq (108). Cheney's support for Bush resulted in his speech on August 26, 2002, at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) 103rd National Convention. Political scientist Ritchie and social scientist Rogers clarify that Cheney declared Iraq's intentions and capabilities regarding WMD as definite facts (95). He believed that the US should act against Iraq to protect American security and freedom, because "[i]nspections ... could too easily be a source of false comfort" (Cheney and Cheney 389). Cheney argued that the Iraqi threat did not only present a danger to the US, but that it also provided them with an opportunity. He used the example of Afghanistan to show how the US would act in Iraq. In Afghanistan, he explained, "the world is seeing that America acts not to conquer but to liberate, and remains ... to help the people build a future of stability, self-determination, and peace" (Cheney, "VFW"). The US is portrayed as a force for good, a central feature of American exceptionalism. Although Cheney mainly employed the argument of WMD in order to justify the military intervention, he also used American exceptionalist rhetoric to explain the Iraq War.

In 2003, Cheney utilized more American exceptionalist notions in his remarks. He relied more often on the depiction of the US as a force for good. On April 9, 2003, Cheney still measured the threat in Iraq by its capability of producing WMD, but he also discussed the spread of democracy to Iraq. Cheney argued that the Iraqis were finding out that the American troops genuinely wanted to help Iraq to eradicate the danger and to secure freedom ("VP Salutes Troops"). In describing the general war on terror, the influence of American exceptionalism is more apparent. Cheney believed that the US had "a moral duty to confront [the] threats And as the leading power, we have a further responsibility to help keep the peace of the world and to prevent terrorists and their sponsors from plunging the world into horrific violence" ("VP Salutes Troops"). Cheney portrayed the US as a nation that destroyed the evil forces due to its moral superiority. This depiction is even more emphasized in Cheney's remarks on July 24, 2003. He argued that Iraq was better off thanks to Bush and his policies. A well-functioning democracy in Iraq would be an example for the rest of the Middle East. This would result in a peaceful and stable (in other words democratic) Middle East, increasing the security of the American citizens and its allies (Cheney, "War on Terror"). In comparison with his earlier remarks, Cheney utilized American exceptionalism more frequently in 2003 to explain Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The discussion about WMD in Iraq started to emerge in the second half of 2003 since the alleged weapons of mass destruction had not been found yet. On October 10, 2003, Cheney argued that the US was justified in overthrowing the regime of Hussein, because he was in material breach of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (“Heritage Foundation”). This resolution required Hussein to adhere to its obligations to the international community regarding WMD. If he failed to comply, serious measures would be taken to disarm him (Ritchie and Rogers 99). Cheney explained that “[t]he United States and our allies rid the Iraqi people of a murderous dictator, and rid the world of a menace to our future peace and security.” The peace and security of the world would have been in worse conditions with Hussein in power (Cheney, “Heritage Foundation”). The US acted as a force for good, liberating the world from a terrible security threat. If the US would not have intervened, Cheney elaborated that Hussein would still be able to inflict violence on his own citizens and threaten the US. He argued that only the United States had the power and the determination to lead the world in this time of crisis (Cheney, “Heritage Foundation”). The response of Cheney to the possibility of the non-discovery of WMD demonstrates how the role of American exceptionalism increased in the formulation of the US foreign policy in the Iraq War. Instead of concentrating on WMD, Cheney emphasized how the United States used its exceptional power, abilities, and determination to change the world for the better.

III. Secretary of State Colin Powell

Before his famous UN presentation on February 5, 2003, Powell mainly focused on the Iraqi threat in terms of WMD and the necessity to disarm. This coincides with Bush’s claims in his remarks. Political scientist Ritchie and social scientist Rogers explain that, unlike others in the administration, Powell did not aim attention at the connection of Iraq, WMD, and terrorism. Instead, he focused on disarmament (Ritchie and Rogers 97). In multiple interviews given in 2002, Powell concentrated on WMD, but he also emphasized the American right to intervene in order to achieve regime change if the UN was unable to act accordingly. He utilized American exceptionalism to show that the US should and could act if that was the case (“CNN’s Late Edition”; “ABC’s This Week”). In his address to the UN Security Council on February 5, 2003, Powell presented a detailed account of the WMD in Iraq in order to describe the threat that Iraq posed and the need of the international community to intervene. He substantiated his arguments with evidence from the intelligence community (Powell, “UN Security Council”). In his memoir, Powell reflected on his famous speech and said that “there was no disagreement [within the intelligence community] over the fact that the Iraqis had [a WMD program]” (Powell and Koltz

218). On January 26, 2003, Powell also extensively described the Iraqi WMD threat, and explained how the US was slowly moving towards war. Hussein had to disarm or the United States would ensure that he would be disarmed, since the US “continue[d] to reserve our sovereign right to take military action against Iraq alone or in a coalition of the willing” (Powell, “World Economic Forum” 2003). The decision to intervene militarily was completely based on the WMD threat that Iraq posed, but missionary American exceptionalism substantiated Powell’s claim. He believed that the US was completely justified in intervening in another sovereign country, because they reserved the right to act accordingly. However, any other country did not have this right. Legal scholar Koh argues that these double standards are part of American exceptionalism (1500). The US uses different rules for itself than for others nations, which is demonstrated by the interviews and public remarks of Powell in 2002 and 2003 before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Throughout 2003, there was an increase in the use of American exceptionalist rhetoric and a shift away from the focus on WMD. This development coincided with the gradual revelation of the non-existence of WMD by the end of 2003. On March 5, Powell delivered a powerful address on Iraq and its failure to disarm. Since Hussein was not complying with Resolution 1441, war was the only option left. When it came to military intervention by the US, Powell extensively relied on elements of American exceptionalism to support his claims. He presented the US as a force for good in the world. They would take into account the Iraqi civilians and would avoid to impose losses of innocent lives. The US would also accept its responsibility to ensure stability after Hussein was removed from power. The US, Powell argued, “has a superb record over the past 50 or 60 years in helping countries ... put themselves on a better footing for a brighter future” (“Iraq: Still Failing to Disarm”). In other words, Powell portrayed the US as an exceptional power that was not there to do harm, but to do good. This assertion was reinforced by an interview given on Al-Jazeera Television on June 23, 2003. Powell showed how the US was helping others and changing the world. They did not want to impose themselves on others, because they “do not do colonies; we are not colonizers. ... The United States comes, it helps, it puts in place a better form of government and then we leave” (Powell, “Al-Jazeera Television”). Powell described the Bush administration as a government that wanted peace, stability, and improvement of the lives of Iraqis, which meant that the US would actively spread its values to lead Iraq to democratic change. Powell’s remarks on November 10, 2003, support this argument. He completely focused on democracy promotion in Iraq. The Bush administration was certain that what they were doing was right and just, because “[d]emocracy works. Freedom works. Liberty works” (Powell, “City College”). Powell described the United States as an exceptional nation that helped other countries transform into democracies.

The Bush administration had the right and duty to do so, according to the principles of American exceptionalism that Powell followed closely.

There was a strong emphasis on WMD before Operation Iraqi Freedom when the Bush administration described the threat that Iraq posed in their public remarks and interviews. The decision to go war was based on the potential WMD in Iraq as specified in Powell's address to the UN on February 5, 2003, and Bush's war message to Hussein on March 17, 2003. American exceptionalism was mostly related to the general war on terror in the beginning of 2002. However, there was an expansion in the use of American exceptionalist rhetoric during 2003. Bush and Cheney relied on American exceptionalism to justify the Iraq War after the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, while Powell already used American exceptionalist rhetoric before the military intervention when discussing a possible confrontation in Iraq. After the American invasion and the overthrow of the Hussein regime, American exceptionalism became even more apparent in Powell's public remarks. The Bush administration was fairly united in utilizing American exceptionalist rhetoric at the end of 2003. Bush, Powell, and Cheney concentrated on the promotion of democracy in Iraq and portrayed the United States as a force for good that sought to destroy evil forces in the world. However, while Bush and Powell increasingly ignored the alleged WMD, Cheney continued to publicly address the issue in the second half of 2003. The Bush administration mainly focused on the WMD that Hussein allegedly possessed in public remarks and interviews given in 2002, while in 2003, a change towards greater importance of American exceptionalism was already noticeable in the rhetoric regarding the war justification before the non-discovery of WMD.

Chapter 2: American Exceptionalism and the Non-Discovery of WMD

In December 2003 and January 2004, the Bush administration acknowledged that the Iraqi regime did not possess WMD, because the American troops had not found any by then (Sanger; Stevenson). Therefore, the stated justification for the war in Iraq became invalid. The US needed a different reason to defend why they intervened and planned on governing Iraq until June 30, 2004, when they turned over sovereignty to the Iraqis after dissolving the Coalition Provisional Authority (Bush, *Decision Points* 359). As political scientist McCrisken argues, the belief in American exceptionalism by the Bush administration can clarify why the US wanted to continue to promote democracy in Iraq, even when WMD were not found (189). This argument is supported by political scientist Record, because he claims that the non-discovery of WMD shifted the focus of the administration to democracy and freedom in Iraq, thereby becoming the main justification for war (58). He also contends that the war in Iraq was about “the arrogance of power” of the US, since it wanted to preserve American military and political supremacy (Record 147). This chapter will explain these claims by demonstrating that the Bush administration extensively emphasized American exceptionalist rhetoric in explaining the Iraq War to the American public after December 2003. Responding to questions about the stated justification to go to war, Bush, Cheney, and Powell utilized American exceptionalism to legitimize their answers and the military operation. In other words, while the influence of American exceptionalism already started to increase before December 2003, this process continued exponentially and American exceptionalism played an even more significant role in the justification for the Iraq War used in the public remarks and interviews of the Bush administration between December 2003 and June 2004.

I. President George W. Bush

In 2004, Bush illustrated the US as a force for good in the world, thereby emphasizing American exceptionalism. He often referred to America’s duties and responsibilities due to its remarkable power and capabilities. As political scientist McCrisken contends, the message of Bush was: “We are Americans, therefore we are right, and therefore we will win” (194). This argument is reinforced by the State of the Union of 2004. Bush concentrated on the fact that the US was able to act accordingly in Iraq. He argued that “[t]he work of building a new Iraq is hard, and it is right. ... Because of American leadership and resolve, the world is changing for the better” (Bush, “State of the Union” 2004). He announced that the US had a mission that was based on their fundamental beliefs. They did not have the characteristics of an empire or the desire to be one. The goal was

democratic peace, which is “a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman” (Bush, “State of the Union” 2004). Adhering to the principles of American exceptionalism, Bush depicted the US as a force for good that led to democratic change (Monten 113-14). Bush reinforced this portrayal of the US on February 23, 2004. He explained that due to American intervention, “Saddam’s torture chambers are closed ... , the Middle East is more peaceful ... , Iraq’s weapons programs are ended forever ... , nations like Libya have gotten the message and renounced their weapons programs ... , an example of democracy is rising at the heart of the Middle East ... , the world is more free, and America is more secure” (“Republican Governors Association”). He clarified that this greatness came from their “love [for] freedom,” “the values we try to live by,” and “the institutions that help to give us direction and purpose” (Bush, “Republican Governors Association”). In these public remarks, Bush demonstrated that the US was an exceptional power in 2004 by suggesting that the nation was a force for good and an example to other countries.

Even though WMD were not found in Iraq, Bush continued to depict Iraq as a threat, utilizing American exceptionalist notions. Although the justification turned out to be false, he argued that the military intervention was still the right thing to do since it caused positive changes in the world (Bush, *Decision Points* 267-70). On February 8, 2004, Bush gave an interview on NBC where he admitted the evidence discovered so far only showed the capacity to produce. However, he immediately added that “the world is a safer and better place as a result of Saddam Hussein not being in power,” thereby trying to justify the military intervention (Bush, *Meet the Press*). In comparison with earlier remarks, there was an interesting change in rhetoric when discussing WMD. Instead of presenting the Iraqi threat as a current issue, the threat is based on past actions since Hussein “had used weapons, ... had manufactured weapons, ... had financed suicide bombers into Israel, ... had terrorist connections” (Bush, *Meet the Press*). This contention shows that Bush altered his claims in order to justify the American intervention in Iraq. He used similar argumentation on April 13, 2004. The overthrow of the Iraqi regime was still justified, even without the WMD, because “the world is better off without Saddam Hussein” (Bush, “News Conference”). Bush did not regret his decision as he argued that, “[e]ven knowing what I know today about the stockpiles of weapons, I still would’ve called upon the world to deal with Saddam Hussein. ... And as the greatest power on the face of the earth, we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom” (“News Conference”). Although the main justification became invalid, the US still had the right, the duty, and the responsibility to intervene in Iraq, because Bush believed in the American ability to positively change the world.

Besides the influence of American exceptionalism in the discussion of the WMD in Iraq, Bush also described the US as an exceptional power in reference to the future. He focused on American benevolence: its ability to do good without establishing an empire. According to political scientist McCrisken, US foreign policy often includes a benign meta-narrative that dictates that the US goes to war to promote American values and spread the principles of freedom, democracy, and modernity (181). Bush utilized this meta-narrative in his public remarks. He argued that the US was “not an imperial power ... [but a] liberating power” and that they sought “an independent, free and secure Iraq” (Bush, “News Conference”). This benevolence is part of American exceptionalism, because it relates to their ability to do good in the world. It culminated into a five-step plan for Iraq: “We will hand over authority to a sovereign Iraqi government, help establish security, continue rebuilding Iraq’s infrastructure, encourage more international support, and move toward a national election that will bring forward new leaders empowered by the Iraqi people” (Bush, “Army War College”). The American troops would not “stay as an occupying power ... [and] make [the Iraqis] American” (Bush, “Army War College”). Instead, the US would support the Iraqi citizens to establish their own democracy, which meant that they used American values and institutions as an example. Bush believed that “freedom can advance and change lives” (Bush, “Army War College”). It would not have been acceptable if Iraq did not become a well-functioning democracy in the eyes of the American government. Bush illustrated the US as an exceptional power with benevolent interests in his public remarks. The American troops were not there to dominate Iraq, but to support the Iraqis in creating a democracy based on American values.

II. Vice President Dick Cheney

Similar to Bush, Cheney justified the military intervention in Iraq by arguing that the US made the world safer and better. In his memoir, Cheney explained that David Kay, the leader of the Iraq Survey Group that was responsible for finding WMD, “did not dismiss the threat Iraq had represented. ... But there were no stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction” (Cheney and Cheney 411-12). Since Hussein was a threat to the international community and the United States with or without WMD, the Bush administration had every reason to intervene militarily. This outsized importance of national security is central to US foreign policy and highly related to American exceptionalism. Historian Preston claims that throughout history, American national security depended on an international community that was sympathetic to the interests of the US. The simplest manner to secure this unthreatening world order was to promote and protect American values abroad (Preston 480). Cheney supported this claim on January 14, 2004. The Bush

administration made the world safer by removing the regime of Hussein, and also sent a message to other nations: “The pursuit of weapons of mass destruction only invites isolation and carries other costs” (Cheney, “LA World Affairs Council”). A regime that had WMD would never be a friend of the US. However, discontinuing the production of WMD, and thereby abandoning the instability, hatred and terror related to it, would clear the way for “better relations with the United States of America and other free nations” (Cheney, “LA World Affairs Council”). This connection would provide the space needed to promote freedom and democracy in the Middle East. Cheney acknowledged that there were many uncertainties in this process. However, due to American exceptionalism, “we can be certain that by the strength and character of this country, and by the rightness of our case, we will prevail” (Cheney, “LA World Affairs Council”). Cheney made a similar claim on May 17, 2004, as he argued that the US improved the security of the international community by intervening in Iraq. In his description of the Iraqi WMD threat, he focused on the past actions of the Hussein regime and used words that demonstrate a possibility of WMD production, instead of depicting their existence as factual (Cheney, “Coast Guard Academy”). This assertion closely followed Bush’s argument on February 8, 2004. Both Bush and Cheney argued that the American intervention was justified, with or without WMD in Iraq.

Cheney increasingly described the US as the catalyst for positive developments in the world that was justified in intervening in other countries in order to accomplish these changes. On March 17, 2004, Cheney argued that the US never needed “a permission slip to defend the security of our country” (“Ronald Reagan Presidential Library”). Therefore, the military intervention in Iraq in 2003 was completely justified. Cheney’s assertion suggested that certain standards only applied to the US, which can be related to the double standards that are apparent in the Bush Doctrine (Koh 1500). Cheney also claimed that the problems in Iraq in 2004 were not caused by the US, but by “the thugs and assassins [that] are desperately trying ... to prevent the rise of a democracy — but they will fail” (“Ronald Reagan Presidential Library”). Cheney’s comments portrayed the Bush administration as a government that was very confident, but lacked the ability to reflect on its own role in Iraq, which can also be connected to American exceptionalism. Cheney seemed to truly believe in the unique character of the US and its ability to make the world a better and safer place to live in by promoting democracy and freedom in 2004. Cheney’s address on May 14, 2004 reinforced this claim. He presented the terrorists as evil, thereby implying that the US was a force for good. The example of Iraq only reiterated this depiction. Thanks to the strength and determination of the Bush administration, “Iraq will never go back to the camp of tyranny and terror” (Cheney, “Jewish Federation”). In order to achieve this goal, as many democracies as

possible were needed, because “[d]emocracies do not breed the anger and radicalism that drag down whole societies or export violence” (Cheney, “Jewish Federation”). The US would lead this process, Cheney concluded: “Abroad, we will use America’s great power to serve great purposes — to turn back the forces of terror, and to spread hope and freedom throughout the world” (“Jewish Federation”). This assertion is a clear representation of Cheney’s belief in American exceptionalism. The unique power of the United States would be used to change the world for the better, thereby promoting and spreading American values such as democracy and freedom.

III. Secretary of State Colin Powell

In comparison to Bush and Cheney, Powell mentioned WMD more frequently in his public remarks and interviews. His UN presentation on February 5, 2003, addressed the intelligence available on WMD in Iraq, which turned out to be false. In his memoir, Powell acknowledged that after the fall of Baghdad on April 9, 2003, inspectors searched for WMD in Iraq, but they never found any (Powell and Koltz 220-21). This contention partially explains why there was a change in Powell’s rhetoric when discussing WMD in Iraq. Instead of presenting facts, Powell focused on the past actions, intent, and capability of Hussein. On February 3, 2004, he argued in an interview that the military invasion “was the right thing to do” as Iraq still posed a threat (Powell, “Washington Editorial Board”). He based this threat on Hussein’s intent and capability, because “the two of them together equal a threat” (Powell, “Washington Editorial Board”). On April 1, 2004, Powell contended that Hussein “never lost the intent and desire to have [WMD].” He claimed that the military intervention was justified, even without the existence of WMD, in order to prevent the threat from expanding. This assertion followed the arguments made by Bush and Cheney. Powell maintained that, “if [Hussein] had not been dealt with, ... he would have tried to rebuild whatever capability he had ... and continue to be a threat” (Powell, “Max Planck School”). Due to military intervention of the US, this threat was no longer a concern in 2004. In his memoir, Powell also expressed that he had no regrets about the removal of Hussein from power, because it eliminated a possible WMD threat (Powell and Koltz 224). Therefore, the Bush administration served the right cause, increasing the security of the world. Powell continued to portray the Hussein regime as a threat due to WMD. He thereby utilized American exceptionalist themes to justify the US ensuring the security of the international community.

Besides the WMD threat, Powell also relied on the American exceptionalist notions when discussing the problematic situation of Iraq in 2004. Similar to Bush and Cheney, Powell demonstrated how the US was a force for good in the world. On January 14, 2004, he argued that

they “did the right thing to get rid of [Hussein] who filled mass graves and was prepared to use and did use weapons of mass destruction” (Powell, “New Year Message”). He was convinced that Iraq would become a democracy. The Iraqis would have the full support of the US in creating a democratic system. However, he explained that they were not in Iraq “to impose our system on anyone. ... We are [in Iraq] to show you by example what you can achieve when you believe in peace, ... freedom, ... individual rights of men and women to seek their own destiny as God shows them the way to achieve that destiny” (Powell, “New Year Message”). The American model is “a value system that works for us and with adaptation can work for others” (Powell, “New Year Message”). There are clear elements of American exceptionalism in his argument. The US was presented as an example to Iraq and as a benevolent power. It only wanted to do good in the world. Similarly, on May 15, 2004, he argued that “[w]e’ve made mistakes, but we always succeeded. ... America has an enormous capacity to do good” (Powell, “World Economic Forum” 2004). Powell highlighted the benevolent interests of the US, since it “always comes to help, to lend a hand,” as in the Iraq case (Powell, “World Economic Forum” 2004). They “never seek dominion; we never seek sovereignty over any other land. We do not seek anyone else’s resources. We come, sometimes as soldiers, but always in the cause of peace, not in the cause of conquest” (Powell, “World Economic Forum” 2004). Like Bush, Powell suggested that the United States was a unique power with benevolent intentions in his public remarks in 2004. American exceptionalism, Powell reasoned, resulted in the Bush administration’s actions that would transform Iraq into a democratic nation.

Bush, Cheney, and Powell referred extensively to American exceptionalism when discussing Iraq in 2004 in their public remarks and interviews. They focused on the need for the United States to be an example to Iraq in order to spread democracy and to promote American values of freedom and peace. The claims made by Bush, Cheney, and Powell were fairly similar. They all depicted the US as a nation that made the world better and safer. It was a force for good that destroyed evil. They believed that the military intervention was justified, even without WMD, because they claimed that the removal of Hussein from power caused positive changes. They overthrew a dictator that did not treat his own citizens well. Therefore, the Iraqis, the Americans, and the international community were better off without Hussein in power. Bush and Powell also argued that the American intentions for the future of Iraq were benevolent. The US wanted to do good in the world without creating an empire. The American troops were only in Iraq to support the establishment of a democracy that recognized the freedom and rights of Iraqi citizens. The fact that the justification of WMD was not valid did not seem important to the Bush administration in 2004. They claimed that the Iraqi regime

posed a threat due to its past actions, intent and capability to produce WMD. The decision to go to war was based on this threat to American security. There seems to be significant emphasis on the national security justification, even though the Iraqi threat was imagined since there were no WMD. American exceptionalist rhetoric, as expressed by Bush, Cheney, and Powell in their public remarks, was an important tool for the Bush administration to explain and justify the foreign policy actions of the United States to the American public. After the non-discovery of WMD, the demonstration of America's military power and political supremacy due to American values and institutions played a central role in the Iraq War. In other words, the Bush administration seemed to act in accordance with their belief in American exceptionalism.

Conclusion

Bush argued in the State of the Union of 2002 that “[his] hope is that all nations will heed our call and eliminate the terrorist parasites who threaten their countries and our own. ... And make no mistake about it: If they do not act, America will. Our ... goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction.” This doctrine of unilateralism, preventive war, and regime change in rogue states formed the premise for American involvement in Iraq. The justification provided was Hussein’s possible possession of WMD that could be handed over to terrorist networks, thereby endangering American citizens and the international community. However, American exceptionalism is a fundamental concept in order to properly understand the decision-making process of the Bush administration regarding Iraq. It refers to the belief in American moral superiority, uniqueness, and the idea that the United States should be considered as an example to the rest of the world. The missionary strand within American exceptionalism adds an extra dimension to this exemplary strand, since it contends that American values should also be actively spread to other nations and that the United States has the right and duty to do so. The public remarks and interviews given by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and Secretary of State Powell between January 2002 and June 2004 have demonstrated that American exceptionalism is vital in understanding the administration’s actions in the Iraq War.

As the first chapter has explained, the Bush administration mainly concentrated on Iraq’s WMD in the beginning of 2002. After the publication of the NSS of 2002 and especially after the military intervention and the overthrow of Hussein in 2003, Bush, Cheney, and Powell placed greater emphasis on American exceptionalism in their public remarks. The US was increasingly portrayed as a force for good in the world and as a nation that has the capability, determination, and responsibility to lead the world in destroying evil. In Iraq, this leadership included overthrowing the Hussein regime and supporting the Iraqis in transforming the nation into a democracy. The importance of American exceptionalism in the public remarks of the Bush administration continued to expand after the non-discovery of WMD at the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004. American exceptionalist rhetoric started to play an even more significant role, because the stated justification for war became invalid as the second chapter has demonstrated. The Bush administration became more united in their arguments in favor of the military presence in Iraq. Bush, Cheney, and Powell depicted the US as an exceptional nation that caused positive changes to happen in the international political world. In other words, the US was considered to be responsible for the process of transforming Iraq into a democracy. The fact that the United States was engaged in a war of which

the stated justification was demonstrably invalid, as WMD were never found in Iraq, did not seem important to the Bush administration. They strongly believed that they were doing the right thing, even without the presence of WMD. They eliminated a threat in Iraq and made the world better and safer by promoting American values such as democracy and freedom abroad. The gradual increase in the importance of American exceptionalist rhetoric in the public remarks of the Bush administration that emerged at the end of 2003 accelerated in 2004.

This thesis has demonstrated that the Bush Doctrine utilized many elements of American exceptionalism, as described by the scholarly literature available on American exceptionalism, the Bush administration and Operation Iraqi Freedom. There is also a general consensus amongst scholars that the influence of the belief in America's moral superiority and uniqueness in the world is mostly apparent in the neoconservative vision, most closely represented by Bush and Cheney. Bush and Cheney utilized American exceptionalism in their public remarks and interviews between January 2002 and June 2004. However, even though Powell is often considered a realist and not included in most discussions about neoconservatism and American exceptionalism, he used American exceptionalist rhetoric to a great extent in his public remarks and interviews between 2002 and 2004. This assertion demonstrates that the use of American exceptionalist rhetoric was not restricted to the neoconservative members, such as Bush and Cheney, but also found support amongst others within the administration, for example Powell.

The role of American exceptionalism in the public remarks regarding US foreign policy in the Iraq War changed between January 2002 and June 2004, because the administration increasingly emphasized the right and the duty of the US to set an example to others nations, as well as to spread American values abroad in order to make the world better and safer. Bush, Cheney, and Powell started to articulate their belief in the US as a force for good that led to democratic change at the end of 2002. Throughout 2003 and in the first half of 2004, the Bush administration continued to express this belief in American exceptionalism. After the non-discovery of WMD, Bush, Cheney, and Powell aimed even more attention at American exceptionalist themes in their public remarks and interviews. This increase can be explained as a consequence of the revelation that the stated justification for war in 2003 by the American government was invalid. The Bush administration needed a different explanation in order to legitimize the American presence in Iraq and to convince the American public that the Iraq War was a cause worth fighting for and continued to be so. Since missionary American exceptionalism leads to an internationalist foreign policy, this increased emphasis on the US as an exceptional nation can explain why the American government remained involved in military actions in Iraq until 2010.

However, others factors may have influenced this change as well. The heightened focus on American exceptionalism in the public remarks and interviews of the Bush administration started slowly to emerge after the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein and the beginning of the transformation of Iraq. A new phase of war started since the Iraqi society and government needed to be restructured. A new plan and a new justification were necessary in order to successfully change the Iraqi regime into a democratic government that recognized American values such as freedom and liberty for all citizens. The emphasis on American exceptionalism in the explanations given to the American public and the international community by Bush, Cheney, and Powell could also have been a result of the emergence of this new phase in the Iraq War. Further research will show whether or not this factor influenced the change in the role of American exceptionalist rhetoric. Also, this thesis has concentrated on the analysis of the public remarks and interviews of Bush, Cheney, and Powell. Within the public sphere, the role of American exceptionalism in the formulation of US foreign policy changed. However, the private sphere might reveal another side of the story that provides a better understanding of what happened behind closed doors regarding the policymaking process of the Iraq War. This new perspective can shed light on whether or not Bush, Cheney, and Powell truly believed in the unique character of the US during the war. It can also show if domestic considerations, for example the presidential election of 2004, were involved in the increased focus on American exceptionalism. Lastly, further research can demonstrate how the role of American exceptionalism in US foreign policy changed within the private sphere of the Bush administration in the years 2002 to 2004. This analysis might also reveal who was the most prominent advocate of this change in emphasis on American exceptionalism within the administration.

The role of American exceptionalism in the public remarks and interviews of Bush, Cheney, and Powell about the involvement of the US in Iraq expanded between January 2002 and June 2004. This increase coincided with the non-discovery of WMD in Iraq, which caused the original justification for war to become invalid. As a result, the Bush administration increasingly utilized American exceptionalism as a tool to justify and defend the American presence in Iraq to the American public and the international community. The United States, the administration maintained, was a force for good that would make the world a better and a safer place by transforming Iraq into a democracy, thereby setting an example to the rest of the Middle East and providing an opportunity to spread American values across the globe.

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