

The University of Chicago

**The relationship between anxiety and war: Theory and the Iraq War**

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August 2023

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the  
Master of Arts program in the Committee on International Relations

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Abstract: Anxiety is one of the most fascinating aspects of the human mind and should be fully integrated in the realm of IR theory. However, it has only been theorized in the realm of Ontological security is the only subfield that has explored the issue of anxiety yet it is a framework that uses anxiety in relation to the Self. Combining anxiety with status, this paper proposes a theory that anxiety about status can be a crucial factor in the decision for a state to go to war. The theory consists of two steps. A crucial event can trigger state anxiety, defined as a hard unknowability about the future. In response the anxious state will initiate conflict in order to regain that perceived lost status. Four hypotheses are tested anxiety about status, rationalist explanations for war, ideological factors and structural reasons. The theoretical proposition is tested using the Iraq War. A detailed qualitative analysis shows that the impact of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks posed a threat to American status on the Bush administration and in an exaggerated attempt to regain the standing of global hegemony the war in Iraq was launched.

Few notions possess the captivating, cruel and enigmatic qualities that anxiety does. Given the uniqueness of anxiety to the human experience it is only inevitable that it affects the dynamics of international relations. Thus the question arises; Can anxiety lead a state to the decision to go to war? How does anxiety trigger insecurity, and how does it differ from the concepts of fear and uncertainty about intentions, two very popular concepts in the realm of International Relations (IR) theory. The concept of anxiety, which can provide very strong causal explanations, has only been a significantly explored in the Ontological Security (OS) literature. Linking anxiety with the concept of status will allow for more frameworks to be developed and establish a causal inference between anxiety about status and the decision to go to war. Thus the aim of this paper is twofold. (1) To create a theoretical ground for anxiety to be integrated in IR theory by implementing the literature of OS as basis but moving away from it in more mainstream IR work and elevate attention to anxiety but not to the exclusion of traditional causes. (2) Observe instances anxiety about status of through a qualitative analysis of the Iraq War, examining documents and speeches in the lead up to the war to locating how anxiety comes forward. The hypothesis of heightened anxiety leading to war will be tested against rationalist explanations, ideological factors and purely structural explanations. After September 11<sup>th</sup> the phrase “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty” became state policy. The attacks on that fateful day in September did not only leave more than two thousand people dead, but also threatened the U.S status as the preponderant superpower; a status gained after the end of the Cold War. In order to regain that status, the Bush administration in an exaggerated attempt launched two wars. The focus of the qualitative analysis will be on the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime and as I will show explanations focusing on the bargaining model of war, the structure of the system, the influence of neoconservative ideology and the performative war thesis are not adequate to

explain the conflict. Moreover, statistical analysis, such as the theory of status dissatisfaction put forward by Jonathan Renshon is important for theory building but ultimately statistics are unable to capture status and changes in status. As a result, the aim of this study is to elevate anxiety into the mainstream IR literature because as Neta Crawford says “research on emotion may lead to a fundamental reconceptualization of agents and agency in world politics. Neither individuals or groups are rational in the utility-maximizing, unemotional way supposed by most theories of world politics. Nor are decisionmakers necessarily irrational if they are not rational in a classical sense. Rather, humans reason; humans make decisions that are always both classically self-interested and emotional.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Anxiety**

Emotions have been a crucial part of IR theory. Some of the most credible theories employ emotions, such as fear in order as a base to their core assumptions. Yet the concept of anxiety has only been explored in depth in the field of ontological security. Ontological Security (OS) in IR theory refers not to physical security (survival) but of the security of the Self, the need to feel a strong sense of identity and agency in a chaotic world, and is maintained via consistent, familiarized, routines social interactions and narratives.<sup>2</sup> As Mitzen and Larson say “We know that we are mortal. However, if we were constantly aware of and thinking about our fragility and mortality we would be consumed by existential dread or anxiety and it would be impossible to live our lives. The starting point of ontological security is that this awareness must

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<sup>1</sup> Crawford, “The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships,” 156.

<sup>2</sup> Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*, 3; Mitzen and Larson, “Ontological Security and Foreign Policy,” 1–3.

be suppressed.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, states seek ontological security to alleviate insecurity in who they are, their identity.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars of OS have explored this issue in depth. For example Mitzen applies OS to the security dilemma arguing that the discrepancy between self-identity and socially assigned role is solved when states adopt their “socially recognized identities” that being security seeker or rival; which is why some conflicts such as Israel/Palestine persist.<sup>5</sup> Hom and Steele on the other hand extend OS to the third image discussing how narratives and self-identities of states constitute the international system over time and actors such as the Islamic State exacerbate anxiety and cause ontological insecurity as they erase borders, merge territories and challenge existing norms and ordering principles.<sup>6</sup> One of the most important contributions is by Rumelili, theorizing that anxiety in IR theory should be considered a constitutive condition and that ontological security is the most suitable avenue to do so. Implementing an existentialist definition of anxiety based on the writings of Heidegger and Kierkegaard, Rumelili distinguishes anxiety from fear, as “fear has a definite object, unlike anxiety, whose object, if any, is precisely no-thing-ness.”<sup>7</sup> As a result she is able to trace the concept of anxiety as an integral part in one of the most influential texts for IR theory the *Leviathan*, and says that Hobbes not only distinguishes between anxiety and fear but for him anxiety or hard uncertainty or unknowability is the key constitutive condition for the struggle for power in the state of nature that is the basis for a state.<sup>8</sup>

Yet for Rumelili, anxiety can only be integrated in the realm of IR theory through the lens of OS. The literature on ontological security only provides a framework in which to study

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<sup>3</sup> Mitzen and Larson, “Ontological Security and Foreign Policy,” 3.

<sup>4</sup> Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma,” 342.

<sup>5</sup> Mitzen, 359–63.

<sup>6</sup> Hom and Steele, “Anxiety, Time, and Ontological Security’s Third-Image Potential,” 325–27, 332.

<sup>7</sup> Rumelili, “Integrating Anxiety into International Relations Theory: Hobbes, Existentialism, and Ontological Security,” 259.

<sup>8</sup> Rumelili, 259–61.

why a state goes to war, much like the bargaining model. The study of anxiety only comes through the lens of identity and the Self. The purpose of this paper is to establish a logical causal connection between anxiety and war, theoretically and through qualitative analysis. As a result, in order to establish a causal connection between anxiety and war, the issue of status needs to be brought into the picture.

## Status

As Robert Gilpin says status or prestige is the currency of international relations.<sup>9</sup> He defines prestige “as perceptions of other states with respect to a state's capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise its power.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Renshon asserts that status is not a constant but varies over time due to “situational and dispositional factors.”<sup>11</sup> The author puts forward a theory of status dissatisfaction that predicts how increased concerns about status (for example due to a significant event) can increase concern for a states’ prestige which may lead to escalation.<sup>12</sup> Renshon proposes that status concerns increase when a state is going through a status deficit, “those expectations will be viewed through the prism of “local” comparisons to some salient reference group” and that states experiencing status concerns will take actions in order to alter those beliefs and their position.<sup>13</sup> Therefore in order to measure status deficits, Renshon uses the diplomatic exchange data from COW and a series of innovations such as a network centrality measure to “construct hierarchies of influence and prestige”<sup>14</sup> What would cause status dissatisfaction? According to Renshon, the key is expectations about what states believe they ought to have in relation with another with their peers.<sup>15</sup> As a result dissatisfied

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<sup>9</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Gilpin, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Renshon, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Renshon, “Status Deficits and War,” 523.

<sup>14</sup> Renshon, 527.

<sup>15</sup> Renshon, 524.

states may use violence for three reasons according to the author: (1) violence is a public and visible signal to other states; (2) it is a “dramatic event” that will certainly capture the attention of peers; (3) it transmits clear, distinct and explicit information.<sup>16</sup> Although war may reveal private information about capabilities, “the capabilities, along with behavior of the two opponents and the outcomes observed by the international audience, combine to influence the status beliefs of others in the hierarchy. Militarized conflicts—which are public, dramatic, and salient—are thus a chance for the international community to simultaneously calibrate their judgments concerning how much international standing a given state possesses.”<sup>17</sup> Steven Ward disagrees with Renshon’s assessment and methodology as it “incorrectly treats the relationship between material capabilities (a potential confounder) and change in diplomatic rank as linear. Because the positive influence of capabilities on change in diplomatic rank is stronger for relatively weak than for relatively strong states, and because the positive association between conflict and change in diplomatic rank is also stronger among relatively weak states, imposing linearity on the former relationship results in an overestimate of the effect of conflict initiation on change in diplomatic rank”<sup>18</sup> Ward poses a sound criticism on Renshon’s methodology however it exposes the limitations of using a statistical analysis to measure status. While the critique is correct isn’t the change in rank a product of differential rates of growth over time,<sup>19</sup> thus analysis will skew towards weaker powers who gain a considerable amount of status by increasing capabilities over great powers who already possess status. Thus, this limitation of measuring status using statistics implies that in order to measure prestige qualitative analysis is

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<sup>16</sup> Renshon, 526.

<sup>17</sup> Renshon, 526.

<sup>18</sup> Ward, “Status from Fighting? Reassessing the Relationship between Conflict Involvement and Diplomatic Rank,” 275.

<sup>19</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

needed. To be clear Renshon, provides a great theoretical framework for status, which will be implemented, yet as it will be shown later in the paper statistical observations to measure status are severely limited. An important reason as to why these measures are limited is that they fail to account for anomalous phenomena, reality altering events that completely change perspective or as Renshon would say, “situational factors”<sup>20</sup> that may alter perceptions of status and increase anxiety. For this paper, status will be defined as an amalgamation of a state’s perception of itself in relation to its peers and material capabilities; and this status can be altered due to situational factors. However, unlike Renshon, status will be examined through a qualitative analysis.

### **Theory**

The concept of anxiety seems to be implied in some of the existing literature. For example, Jervis mentions “the inability to recognize that one’s own actions could be seen as menacing and the concomitant belief that the other’s hostility can only be explained by its aggressiveness help explain how conflicts can easily expand beyond that which an analysis of the objective situation would indicate is necessary”<sup>21</sup>. Thus an issue of existential anxiety resulting in helplessness can result in the inability to escape the security dilemma. Moreover, JFK during the missile crisis broke off a meeting of the ExComm because its rational demeanor would not survive another twenty-four hours”<sup>22</sup> again suggesting a sense of helplessness during the crisis. By examining the concept of anxiety in more depth stronger causal claims can be made about the impact of anxiety on the decision making.

In the context of this paper anxiety about status, triggered by a significant situational event, for example, a terrorist attack on the only superpower in the world that left more than

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<sup>20</sup> Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Jervis, “*Perception and Misperception in International Politics*,” 254.

<sup>22</sup> Keegan, “The Human Face of Deterrence,” 147.



2000 people dead can create an anxious executive, not only concerned about safety but also of the status as a unipole or hegemon and result in actions such as the launch of a war against a state that not only had nothing to do with the attacks but did not harbor any weapons of mass destructions. In order to put forward this theory anxiety must first be defined and differentiated from both fear and uncertainty about intentions.

Anxiety can therefore be defined as a sense of uneasiness, nothingness, helplessness that triggers exaggeration. Existential philosophers have touched on this issue as Rumelili has pointed out in her work discussing that “in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is nowhere.”<sup>23</sup> Heidegger says that “anxiousness is a basic kind of Being-in-the-world’ makes one feel “uncanny” (not at home) and “this uncanniness pursues Dasein (existence, being-there) constantly and is a threat to its everyday lostness in the “they.”<sup>24</sup> As Rumelili correctly points out anxiety is a constitutive condition, ingrained in every person that can be triggered through life altering events. Hence the definition of anxiety used in this paper will be partially adopted by Rumelili.

Continuing anxiety needs to be separated from two already important concepts in IR theory, fear and uncertainty about intentions. As the APA says, the terms anxiety and fear are often considered synonyms yet “Anxiety is considered a future-oriented, long-acting response broadly focused on a diffuse threat, whereas fear is an appropriate, present-oriented, and short-lived response to a clearly identifiable and specific threat.”<sup>25</sup> Rumelili also makes this clarification highlighting how anxiety can materialize into fear.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 231.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, 233–34.

<sup>25</sup> “Anxiety.”

<sup>26</sup> Rumelili, “Integrating Anxiety into International Relations Theory: Hobbes, Existentialism, and Ontological Security,” 259.

Anxiety can be further differentiated from another important assumption in IR theory uncertainty about intentions. Uncertainty about intentions or as Rosato terms it “intentions pessimism” says that great powers can never be certain about adversaries’ intentions because that specific information is simply not accessible; firsthand information is on the minds of leaders and the executive and they are not likely to share it and second-hand information which includes declarations and interests is simply unreliable.<sup>27</sup> Overall uncertainty about intentions is an informational issue about an anarchic world. This definition however does not address the “emotional ramifications of uncertainty.”<sup>28</sup> As a result the definition of anxiety for this paper will consist of a deeper unknowability, a vagueness<sup>29</sup> about the future that does not have a concrete entity to be directed at and that is followed by an exaggeration or actions such as the Iraq War. Anxiety can also result in actions such as the decreasing in information gathering in order to make one feel better.<sup>30</sup>

The main theoretical proposition put forward and tested in this paper is explained in two parts. (1) In the face of unprecedented events for example an attack on the homeland anxiety is triggered. As previously stated anxiety can be defined as a sense of uneasiness and helplessness, a hard uncertainty about the loss of a state’s status. (2) In order to regain its status in global affairs the anxious state will act recklessly and in an exaggerated manner e.g. launch a war or initiate a crisis. It should be noted that structural factors such as material capabilities hold an integral part in this process as they can define whether the ability of a state to launch a conflict is possible or successful (whether it can trigger a counterbalancing coalition). Some examples that

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<sup>27</sup> Rosato, *Intentions in Great Power Politics: Uncertainty and the Roots of Conflict*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Rumelili, “Integrating Anxiety into International Relations Theory: Hobbes, Existentialism, and Ontological Security,” 262.

<sup>29</sup> Runelili uses terms such as hard uncertainty, possibility of possibilities

<sup>30</sup> Crawford, “The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships,” 138.

may apply in this case of anxiety resulting in a loss of status could be Germany after the end of First World War or China after the so called “century of humiliation.” One example that stands out among the rest and that is the reaction of United States in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in September 2001.

The concept of a negativity bias in international relations sheds light on many issues connecting emotional reasons to the outbreak of war. According to the authors, psychological research has shown that a negativity bias, “a fundamental principle of human cognition, in which negative factors have a greater impact than positive factors across a wide range of psychological phenomena, including motivation, emotion, information processing, decision- making, learning, and memory”<sup>31</sup> A very important discovery, negativity implies a constitutive condition that subconsciously affects behavior which goes against the popular argument of utility maximization.<sup>32</sup> Rooted in evolution, the authors expand the on the idea of this bias explaining threat sensitivity, loss aversion and failure salience.<sup>33</sup> With the basic idea being that negative phenomena are significantly more salient than positive, a logical theory could be put forward extending the argument about how a significant event for example an attack on the homeland could trigger very serious anxiety about status, especially in the world’s sole superpower and the executive overestimating the threat, can rush to a war.

Status attainment or dissatisfaction is a major factor regarding the final decision to go to war. States seldom start wars because of a belief in a material advantage, but most often because leaders are assured that war will achieve certain foreign policy goals.<sup>34</sup> As Lebow asserts in his reading of the Melian dialogue, Sparta’s decision to go to war was guided by its self-image-

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<sup>31</sup> Johnson and Tierney, “Bad World: The Negativity Bias In International Politics,” 97.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson and Tierney, 97.

<sup>33</sup> Johnson and Tierney, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Lebow, “Windows of Opportunity: Do States Jump Through Them?,” 149.

status of manliness and indestructible army and saw Athens as a threat to that status and its way of life.<sup>35</sup> To be clear, structural factors such as material capabilities definitely matter in explaining outcomes, yet they produce a blurry picture of reality. By adding the issue of anxiety and social rank into the equation a clearer framework could be implemented in order to understand international affairs. Power usually defined by material factors matters greatly, yet foreign policy decisions could be made in the background of both material factors as well as perceptions of status and social rank.<sup>36</sup> Research from a plethora of disciplines including economics, psychology and neuroscience finds that status attainment is a strong indicating factor of behavior “the search for status will cause people to behave in ways that directly contradict their material interest in security and/or prosperity.”<sup>37</sup> Discussions of social rank being a motivating factor for behavior were echoed in the 1970s as Harsanyi said that with exception of material gains, status attainment drives behavior.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Duque argues that equating status with material capabilities leads to “material reductionism” and proposes a relational approach to status examining recognition dynamics using the embassy networks.<sup>39</sup> While that may be a correct assessment, the use of material capabilities for example a state initiating conflict and ultimately winning a war will result in an increase in its social status in relation to adversaries, that is adversaries will now make assessments taking into consideration said state’s capabilities and interests. Duque brings the example of North Korea acquiring nuclear weapons and instead of receiving great power status, the regime was branded a rogue state.<sup>40</sup> Nuclear weapons may well be the exception to the rule as they are defensive weapons, used for

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<sup>35</sup> Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics Ethics, Interests and Orders*, 99–100.

<sup>36</sup> Herrmann, “Perceptions and Image Theory In International Relations,” 356.

<sup>37</sup> Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War,” 35.

<sup>38</sup> Harsanyi, *Essays On Ethics, Social Behavior, And Scientific Explanation*, 204.

<sup>39</sup> Duque, “Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach,” 579–81.

<sup>40</sup> Duque, 577.

deterrence and the acquisition of said weapons has limited the voices for any direct intervention, so for North Korea's a paradox has emerged of both a rogue state and one where there is limits on intervention.

An issue that needs to be discussed is whether anxiety is endogenous or exogenous to war. The traditional security dilemma literature is a Hobbesian story where a state concerned about an attack will attain power inevitably threatening the security of other states.<sup>41</sup> In that instance an amalgamation of fear, anxiety and uncertainty about intentions can lead to war, thus in that case anxiety is endogenous to war. However, as previously elaborated there is a big distinction between fear and anxiety; one being against a specific observable threat while the other is an excessive worry that may not have a particular focus. Furthermore, anxiety as defined in this paper concerns the status, the standing of a state in relation to other states. Status concerns affect, are at the very least are taken into consideration especially regarding the decision to go to war; e.g. How will x state's prestige be affected if it wins/loses the war. Coupled with the negativity bias anxiety is exogenous to war.

Four hypotheses will be tested in this paper:

H1: Anxiety about status results in an initiation of conflict in order to regain that lost status.

H2: Uncertainty about intentions which leads to an incentive to misrepresent, commitment problems, and issue indivisibilities (rationalist explanations) result in war.

H3: Ideological factors and world views lead to war.

H4: Structural reasons determine whether a state will go to war.

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<sup>41</sup> Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," 157.

## The Iraq War

Before delving into the Iraq War a few words should be said about the case selection and the type of case study this paper follows. The Iraq War is chosen as it is one of the most intriguing cases for scholars and the reason as to why the United States chose to invade will continue to baffle researchers. As expressed in the introduction the main aim of the paper is to elevate the issue of anxiety as a cause of war in relation to other established variables. The research design fits into the category of what Levy terms as a plausibility probe and an illustrative case study which falls under that term, which “allows the researcher to sharpen a hypothesis or theory, to refine the operationalization or measurement of key variables, or to explore the suitability of a particular case as a vehicle for testing a theory before engaging in a costly and time-consuming research effort, whether that effort involves a major quantitative data collection project, extensive fieldwork, a large survey, or detailed archival.”<sup>42</sup> In sum, the aim of this paper is to show the theory that anxiety about status can lead to initiation of conflict, supported by a qualitative analysis about the Iraq war, is worth examining more.<sup>43</sup> The issue of using one case study will be discussed in the conclusion.

The 9/11 attacks triggered an intense anxiety, a sense of helplessness and uncertainty, in the Bush administration about the status of the United States. The anxiety manifesting itself in the form of exaggeration and a belief that the United States is the primal superpower in global affairs led to the policy of preventive war and the toppling of the Saddam Hussein government in 2003.

What would the Bush administration be anxious about? A straightforward answer would be the devastating attacks on September 11 that left more than 2000 dead and a possible attack in

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<sup>42</sup> Levy, “Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference,” 6–7.

<sup>43</sup> Eckstein, *Regarding Politics: Essays on Political Theory, Stability, and Change*, 148.

the future. While that is a valid answer, until September 10 the United States “enjoyed global prestige and status commensurate with its material capabilities and social rank—America knew it was universally acknowledged as a hegemonic power.”<sup>44</sup> The 9/11 attacks significantly altered America’s status -its perception in regard to other states. Whether unipole or hegemon, the only state to amass as much power as the Roman Empire<sup>45</sup> was wounded resulting in extreme anxiety in the administration about its status in the world. The result was a war to alleviate anxiety and regain its status as the global hegemon.

Butt puts forward the idea that the Iraq war was a performative war, as the toppling of the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2001 was not sufficient enough for the United States to regain its status as the sole superpower.<sup>46</sup> While the idea of a performative war is compelling it is not appropriate to describe US foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11. Anxiety about status resulting in an exaggerated act, and allowed by the structure of the international system in 2003, caused the United States to invade Iraq not a mere performance. However, the key term added is exaggeration. Anxiety resulting in exaggeration about the status position of a state that can lead to war is the theoretical framework that this paper will try to establish. Exaggerated concerns about malign intentions from an adversary is a compelling explanation in IR literature about how the security dilemma leads to conflict.<sup>47</sup> However, anxiety resulting in exaggerated concerns about a state’s status in the international arena which results in war is an area not explored. This is why adding status into the equation is extremely important as it is the currency of international relations. Thus, the theory of anxiety about status differs from the performative war thesis.

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<sup>44</sup> Butt, “Why Did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?,” 251.

<sup>45</sup> Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” 17.

<sup>46</sup> Butt, “Why Did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?,” 251.

<sup>47</sup> Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War*, 136.

The ease and ability of the United States to manifest that anxiety about its status into a preventive war depended on the fact that the U.S had a preponderance of military power. The end of the Cold War eliminated the Soviet Union from the realm of great powers and the structure of the system did not constrain the United States from following a more prudent policy. Despite any opposition from allies and the international community the United States could not be deterred from launching a war and it is safe to say that if none of its allies had decided to commit troops in Iraq, the United States would have acted unilaterally. So structure plays two roles in this story; On the one hand it produced anxiety about the status of the U.S as the unipolar, primal power and on the other had it allowed the Bush administration to launch a preventive war. Status can only be measured qualitatively for one very important reason. For an event such as the September 11 attacks, where massive damage was inflicted by a non-state actor there can simply be no variation in the data. As the 9/11 report said, the attacks were the result of a failure of “imagination.”<sup>48</sup> The attacks were unimaginable, an extraordinary event that shocked the United States to its core and subsequently led the executive to be anxious and question its status in the world. Hence, why a qualitative analysis will offer a more in-depth look at how the status is altered, as this concerns subjective opinions and feelings rather than objective data. Furthermore, regarding anxiety as disorder mental health professionals after conducting physical examinations use questionnaires and ask questions about a patient ‘s history, and mental state at the moment to assess the level of anxiety and existence of a disorder. Both facts coupled with Ward’s criticism of the fact change in status is skewed against great powers in a statistical study, this makes qualitative analysis the appropriate method to measure status anxiety.

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<sup>48</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, “Executive Summary,” 9.



The paper will proceed as follows. Qualitative data including documents, speeches and memoirs will be presented, analyzed and the hypotheses presented above will be tested. For H1, anxiety about status leading to war the theory has been elaborated in detail in the theory section. For the following hypotheses concerning the bargaining model, ideology, and structural factors the theory will be elaborated.

Joseph Stieb divides the scholarship on explanations of the Iraq War between the security school and the hegemony school. The security school consisting of scholars like Robert Jervis emphasize the fact that the United States had the capabilities to launch a preventive war and that the attacks “was the decisive new variable that prompted a reevaluation of national security, which ultimately led to the invasion.”<sup>49</sup> The hegemony schools consisting of scholars such as John Ikenberry, Stephen Walt, Ahsan Butt and John Mearsheimer look at security explanations as limited and view the Iraq War as an escalation of liberal hegemony, primacy and unilateral US action around the world.<sup>50</sup> Hence, the explanation put forward in this paper should fall within the hegemony school although the impact of 9/11 is center stage on the theory of status anxiety. It should be noted however, that scholars within both schools disagree on key issues such as the role of neoconservatism.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

### **Hegemonic Status**

In order to understand the perception of hegemonic status the story begins after the end of history, the fall of the Soviet Union where the United States remained the sole superpower in global affairs. Despite the fact that the George H.W Bush administration was publicly calling for restraint and prudence, the now infamous “Defense Planning Guidance” that was leaked to the

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<sup>49</sup> Stieb, “Why Did the United States Invade Iraq? The Debate at 20 Years.”

<sup>50</sup> Stieb.

press, told the story of a superpower aiming to maintain its status as a world hegemon. The document explicitly calls a foreign policy aiming to thwart any power from gaining the resources to challenge US preponderance of power. Interestingly, this new deterrence was not aimed solely on peer competitors, such as Russia but also allies such as European states and Japan. US leadership or the Liberal International Order was to be maintained and American capabilities were meant to inhibit any ambitions of another state rising to great power status.<sup>51</sup> Cofounder of the Project for the New American Century, Robert Kagan reiterated the same rhetoric linking American hegemony to the national interest calling for an interventionist foreign policy to support and maintain “American hegemony.”<sup>52</sup> Founded in 1997, the think tank Project for the New American Century is mostly associated with neoconservatism, yet as previously mentioned, support for authoritarian allies makes the theory that ideological factors led to the war, stand on shaky grounds. What is obstinate however is the perception of many of the members of the think tank such as Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, all members of the George W. Bush administration of the preponderance and status of the United States as the main and sole superpower. The statement of principles for the Project for American Century, sets off the alarm for the dangers of America not taking advantage of its preeminent position in the world, calling for US foreign policy to play an active role in every region (Europe, Asia and Middle East) and more importantly for the US to accept its status and extend the liberal international order.<sup>53</sup> Continuing the theme of recognizing the special status of America, George W. Bush’s Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice outlined her vision of the national interest in a *Foreign Affairs* essay

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<sup>51</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis Libby, and Zalmay Khalizad, ‘Defense Planning Guidance,’ February 18, 1992 (Excerpt),” 10.

<sup>52</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Robert Kagan, ‘American Power-A Guide For the Perplexed,’ Commentary, April 1996 (Excerpt),” 15.

<sup>53</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Project for the New American Century, ‘Statement of Principles,’ June 3 1997,” 20.

published in 2000. Rice calls for a foreign policy rooted in the acceptance of the US' sole power status and argues in favor engaging in power politics and increasing military spending to deter any potential rival emerging in key areas.<sup>54</sup> Unsurprisingly, key areas all the world regions Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Persian Gulf, Middle East.<sup>55</sup> William Kristol and Robert Kagan in 2000 echoed the same sentiments warning that the greatest threat the U.S faced was the diminishing of responsibilities which would put the status of America and the order it created during and after the Cold War in jeopardy<sup>56</sup>. These statements are related to the grand strategic vision of primacy. Supporters of primacy assert that the United States must maintain the preponderance of power gained after the end of the Cold War in order to ensure stability and peace and view any rise of another great power as the main threat to national and international peace.<sup>57</sup> According to Posen and Ross the main objective of primacy is to “ preserve U.S. supremacy by politically, economically, and militarily outdistancing any global challenger.”<sup>58</sup>

Hence supporters of primacy view the preservation of hegemonic status as the key for US foreign policy. While the debate was happening in the 1990s the focus was on issues relating to NATO expansion, dealing with Russia, the rise of China as well as proliferation of WMDs. Some advocated of primacy where pushing for regime change in Iraq in the late 1990s (citation), yet that view did not gain considerable support until after the attacks. A key question, is what would a primacist response be in the event of an attack on the homeland. Every grand strategy has as its core objective the ability to defend the homeland from an attack. But for supporters of hegemonic stability a terrorist attack on the homeland that led to more than two thousand deaths,

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<sup>54</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Condoleezza Rice, ‘Promoting the National Interest,’ Foreign Affairs, January-February 2000 (Excerpt),” 40–45.

<sup>55</sup> The Western hemisphere is not included although that is a given considering the Monroe Doctrine.

<sup>56</sup> Kagan and Kristol, *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Posen and Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” 32.

<sup>58</sup> Posen and Ross, 32.

would send shivers down their spine. The sole and leading nation had just been shown to be vulnerable both economically and militarily to a non-state actor that aimed to wreaked havoc. Hence anxiety, a hard uncertainty about future status, must have been high and a response was necessary by the executive in order to reclaim that status and show competitors, allies, citizens, terrorists as well as to themselves that they are the preponderant power in world politics.

This is where H3, that worldviews and ideas lead to war, needs to be brought up and analyzed. Members of the Bush administration, like Paul Wolfowitz, and organizations mentioned above are associated with neoconservatism. In fact, neoconservatism became the label for individuals who wanted an assertive foreign policy whose most important goal was to overthrow the Iraq regime. Authors who focus on ideological reasons, stress the influence of neoconservatives and Straussians who viewed the world in “ terms of continual, potentially existential threats”<sup>59</sup> According to Andrew Flibbert it was four key ideas that shaped the decision to invade; “a belief in the necessity and benevolence of American hegemony, a Manichaeian conception of politics, a conviction that regime type is the principal determinant of foreign policy, and great confidence in the efficacy of military force.”<sup>60</sup> While neoconservatism shaped the Bush Doctrine it did not provide the justification to invade Iraq. Neoconservatism may rest on American hegemony, the belief that other states will bandwagon rather than balance American power and its commitment to the use of force it was status anxiety after 9/11 attacks that was the key causal factor.<sup>61</sup> As Butt says, support for authoritarian regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia made neoconservative beliefs in democratic peace and the spread of liberal

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<sup>59</sup> Lieberfeld, “Theories of Conflict and the Iraq War,” 14.

<sup>60</sup> Flibbert, “The Road to Baghdad: Ideas and Intellectuals in Explanations of the Iraq War,” 312.

<sup>61</sup> Schmidt and Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists, Security Studies,” 194–96.

ideas dubious<sup>62</sup>. Neoconservative ideology may have been the tipping factor but it was the anxiety after 9/11 that gave justification to the administration to launch a preventive war.

### **The Day that Changed Everything**

Matthew Morgan aptly named a six-volume series of books on the impact of 9/11, *The Day that Changed Everything?* The question mark is not needed as the attacks were such a profound, extraordinary event, that altered world history. What is more the period after the attacks is popularly referred to as the post-9/11 period.

The picture of the President's Chief of Staff Andy Card giving him the news that the country was under attack has been ingrained in history. Bush said "My first reaction was outrage. Someone had dared to attack America. They were going to pay."<sup>63</sup> Bush was angry and anxious. He recalls tearing apart his Chief of Staff about what was happening and his "blood was boiling. We were going to find out who did this, and kick their ass."<sup>64</sup> At the same time, a sense of unknowability, anxiety took over as to what the appropriate policy would be from a state attacked by a "faceless enemy."<sup>65</sup> Later that day he gave a powerful speech addressing the nation saying that the U.S was targeted because it was "the brightest beacon of opportunity and freedom in the world,"<sup>66</sup> emphasizing U.S status as a special state. Dick Cheney thought of how Washington had only been attacked once before, by the British in 1814 and the sight of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, symbols of military and economic power, status, in flames, altered his assumptions about security.<sup>67</sup> According to Woodward, Cheney was the epitome of the

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<sup>62</sup> Butt, "Why Did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?," 253.

<sup>63</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 243.

<sup>64</sup> Bush, 246–52.

<sup>65</sup> Bush, 265.

<sup>66</sup> Ehrenberg et al., "George W. Bush, Address to the Nation, September 11, 2001 (Excerpt)," 58.

<sup>67</sup> Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir*, 31–32.

negativity bias mentioned before, as he would always think of the worst case scenarios but even he could not comprehend the level of the attack that day<sup>68</sup>. Even Donald Rumsfeld who wrote “that the only thing surprising is that we continue to be surprised when a surprise occurs” was overwhelmed by the status of America’s economic power in flames.<sup>69</sup> As the third plane hit the Pentagon where Rumsfeld’s office was located he says:

“As people arrived on-site to assist, I turned back toward my office to gather what additional information I could. On my way I picked up a small, twisted piece of metal from whatever had hit the Pentagon. Minutes later I would learn from an Army officer that he had seen the unmistakable body of a silver American Airlines plane crash into the Pentagon. That piece of the aircraft has served me as a reminder of the day our building became a battleground—of the loss of life, of our country’s vulnerability to terrorists, and of our duty to try to prevent more attacks of that kind.”<sup>70</sup>

For Condoleezza Rice the phrase “Every day since has been September 12” has been ingrained in her mind. She could not fathom how the world’s predominant superpower could not stop an attack by “a stateless network of extremists, operating from the territory of one of the world’s poorest countries.”<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, status mattered even at the time of the attacks, as one of her priorities was to ensure the rest of the world that the U.S government was still operating, as the media coverage of the attacks shown around the world would increase uncertainty.<sup>72</sup> Dick Cheney dismissed to make a formal statement as that action would weaken Bush’s status, the “commander in chief needed to be seen as in charge, strong, and resolute.”<sup>73</sup> Secretary of State Colin Powell was in Lima, Peru for a General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) and in his statement he emphasized what America symbolizes:

“A terrible, terrible tragedy has befallen my nation, but it has befallen all of the nations of this region, all the nations of the world, and befallen all those who believe in democracy. Once again

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<sup>68</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*, 661–63.

<sup>70</sup> Rumsfeld, 665.

<sup>71</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir Of My Years in Washington*.

<sup>72</sup> Rice.

<sup>73</sup> Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir*, 29.

we see terrorism, we see terrorists, people who don't believe in democracy, people who believe that with the destruction of buildings, with the murder of people, they can somehow achieve a political purpose. They can destroy buildings, they can kill people, and we will be saddened by this tragedy; but they will never be allowed to kill the spirit of democracy. They cannot destroy our society. They cannot destroy our belief in the democratic way. You can be sure that America will deal with this tragedy in a way that brings those responsible to justice. You can be sure that as terrible a day as this is for us, we will get through it because we are a strong nation, a nation that believes in itself. You can be sure that the American spirit will prevail over this tragedy. It is important that I remain here for a bit longer in order to be part of the consensus of this new charter on democracy.”<sup>74</sup>

After the addressing the nation George Bush held a meeting with members of the National Security Council (NSC) where he said, “We have to make it clear to Pakistan and Afghanistan, this is showtime.”<sup>75</sup> In addition Woodward writes that during the same meeting Bush emphasized twice that the attacks were “a great opportunity” in order to ameliorate relationships with peer competitors like Russia and China.<sup>76</sup> On September 12<sup>th</sup> Bush advised his counsellor Karen Hughes on how to educate the American citizens focusing on “a faceless enemy.”<sup>77</sup> The same day Bush told reporters in the Cabinet room that the US would implement all of its power to locate the terrorists describing the hunt as Manichean struggle.<sup>78</sup> He instructed the Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to reach out to General Mahmoud Ahmad head of Pakistan’s intelligence service (ISI) to send a simple message to Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharraf; “with us or against us.”<sup>79</sup>

Later that day the issue of Iraq and Saddam Hussein was brought up. The President asked his special advisor Richard Clarke to inquire whether Saddam Hussein and Iraq were related to the attacks despite Clarke’s objection that it was Al-Qaeda.<sup>80</sup> In a National Security meeting that

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<sup>74</sup> “Statement at the Special General Assembly of the Organization of American States.”

<sup>75</sup> Woodward, *Bush At War*, 27.

<sup>76</sup> Woodward, 28.

<sup>77</sup> Woodward, 36.

<sup>78</sup> Woodward, 39.

<sup>79</sup> Woodward, 41.

<sup>80</sup> Glain, *State vs Defense: The Battle to Define America’s Empire*, 597.

night, Clarke recalls how “Rumsfeld came over and the others, and the president finally got back, and we had a meeting. And Rumsfeld said, “You know, we’ve got to do Iraq... There just aren’t enough targets in Afghanistan. We need to bomb something else to prove that we’re, you know, big and strong and not going to be pushed around by these kinds of attacks.”<sup>81</sup> Rumsfeld had the support of his deputy Paul Wolfowitz.<sup>82</sup> Bush made it clear that the response would not be a mere performance; “The American people want a big bang,”... “I have to convince them that this is a war that will be fought with many steps.”<sup>83</sup> On September 13<sup>th</sup> during the Pentagon briefing, Wolfowitz, speaking on behalf of himself and Rumsfeld hinted towards regime change and more specifically Iraq, as a state who offers a haven for terrorists, which saw the disagreement of Colin Powell who wanted to focus on Afghanistan.<sup>84</sup>

On a September 15<sup>th</sup> meeting at Camp David, Bush made it clear that in the formation of an international coalition against terrorism, he wanted America to be the commanding force and if it was forced, it would act unilaterally.<sup>85</sup> In the same meeting Bush allowed a debate about Iraq to play out, where Wolfowitz made it clear that for the international community to take the war against terrorism into serious consideration, the United States would have to strike Iraq.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, from a communications perspective as Woodward elaborates, Bush had realized that the footage from the attacks, the airplanes crashing, the smoke, collapse, debris, people jumping from towers would be replayed all over the world would have severe impact and anticipated that he may not be able to respond in the same theatrical manner yet he had to show boldness and courage both for domestic and international audiences.<sup>87</sup> On September 17<sup>th</sup> at an

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<sup>81</sup> Glain, 598.

<sup>82</sup> Woodward, *Bush At War*, 42.

<sup>83</sup> Woodward, 43.

<sup>84</sup> Woodward, 51–52.

<sup>85</sup> Woodward, 70.

<sup>86</sup> Woodward, 73.

<sup>87</sup> Woodward, 83–83.



NSC meeting about military action in Afghanistan, Bush surprisingly said that the aim was not to overthrow the Taliban but to signal a change in America's behavior aimed towards Iran and Syria.<sup>88</sup> In the next weeks, plans for the operation in Afghanistan were drawn up with the Bush reaching out to Putin to ensure him that the U.S would not establish a permanent military base in what was considered the Russian sphere of influence.<sup>89</sup>

In a subsequent meeting, Rumsfeld again hinted the issue of Iraq in order so that the success of war on terror is not just dependent on Afghanistan.<sup>90</sup> What eventually turned out to be America's longest war, Afghanistan, was launched on October 7, 2001. By November, 2001, the Taliban government capitulated to the might of U.S air strikes, the Northern alliance and Pashtun anti-Taliban forces, however Osama bin Laden had escaped to Pakistan.<sup>91</sup> But even this mighty victory was insufficient to alleviate the anxiety that took over the executive on the day of the attacks. By December 2001 Bush publicly explained why America's status as the sole superpower had to be reclaimed by criticizing the Clinton's administration efforts to neutralize Al-Qaeda and its leader Osama bin Laden:

“I mean, people viewed that as the impotent America... a flaccid, you know, kind of technologically competent but not very tough country that was willing to launch a cruise missile out of a submarine and that'd be it. I do believe there is the image of America out there that we are so materialistic, that we're almost hedonistic, that we don't have values, and that when struck, we wouldn't fight back. It was clear that bin Laden felt emboldened and didn't feel threatened by the United States.”<sup>92</sup>

Anxiety, guilt and responsibility took over the administration post September 11. They felt they let their country and its citizens down and were equally aware of the political consequences of such failures. Homeland security was a key issue the Bush administration ran

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<sup>88</sup> Woodward, 85.

<sup>89</sup> Woodward, 102.

<sup>90</sup> Woodward, 118–19.

<sup>91</sup> “1999-2021: The U.S War in Afghanistan.”

<sup>92</sup> Woodward and Balz, ““We Will Rally the World.””

on and got elected they ultimately failed. That anxiety, guilt and thirst for vengeance led the administration to enter Afghanistan.<sup>93</sup> But as hindsight showed, the relatively easy way the Taliban regime collapsed showed that Operation Enduring Freedom simply was not enough to alleviate any anxiety or regain any of that lost perceived status the United States lost that day in September.

As a result, H1 the proposition that the anxiety about status resulted into war again provides an adequate explanation, while H4, structural factors misses the point about the significance of events that may alter perceptions about status. Authors that focus on structural factors such as Robert Jervis say that “even without terrorism, both internal and structural factors predisposed the United States to assert its dominance.”<sup>94</sup> This view points towards structural determinism and it is very hard to imagine a preventive war and an American presence in the Middle East of that size without the impact of September 11. Jervis says that ease in which the US toppled the Taliban in Afghanistan was factor in the expansion of goals.<sup>95</sup> Although that may be correct the goals were expanded to alleviate that anxiety produced in the aftermath of the attacks. Even Jervis said that “Bush frequently acknowledges, indeed stresses, that he was shocked by the assault, which greatly increased his feelings of danger and led him to feel that drastically different policies were necessary.”<sup>96</sup> It was the shock of the attack and the anxiety it produced about the U.S standing in the world that led to the policy of preventive war. Material capabilities did play a part especially when the question is asked on why the U.S did not invade Iran but downplaying or disregarding the impact of 9/11 does not capture the complete picture as to why the decision to war was reached.

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<sup>93</sup> Leffler, *Confronting Saddam Hussein: George W. Bush and the Invasion of Iraq*, 140–42.

<sup>94</sup> Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” 380.

<sup>95</sup> Jervis, 381.

<sup>96</sup> Jervis, 372.

## Preventive War

Some members of the administration were still not happy with only the Afghanistan war. A senior intelligence official told Ahsan Butt regarding the Iraq War that “every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business.”<sup>97</sup> By November 2001, Bush decided that the United States had to turn its attention to Iraq and asked Donald Rumsfeld to start drawing up plans for what would eventually become Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).<sup>98</sup> The CIA informed the administration that only a large scale U.S invasion would be credible enough to Iraqi opposition groups like the Kurds and the Shiites.<sup>99</sup> Mearsheimer and Rosato describe Bush’s cabinet as divided between the supporters of the war in Iraq and that included Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and the doubters led by Colin Powell and army Generals who questioned the viability of the mission.<sup>100</sup> The 2002 State of the Union address signaled that Bush had taken the side of the proponents of war, as Paul Wolfowitz realized that himself and Rumsfeld had a significant impact on the President’s thinking.<sup>101</sup> The axis of evil speech really was the foundation for the reorientation of American foreign policy; what became known as the Bush Doctrine. Bush sent a clear message to allies, competitors and to the American public that the United States would reestablish itself as the undisputed power. “..Some government will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: If they do not act, America will.”<sup>102</sup> He made it clear, that the United States will take the initiative; “ I will not wait on events as dangers gather. I will not stand by, as perils draw closer and closer.”<sup>103</sup> Bush was proud of that speech, it was his Ronald Reagan

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<sup>97</sup> Butt, “Why Did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?”

<sup>98</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 58.

<sup>99</sup> Woodward, 121.

<sup>100</sup> Mearsheimer and Rosato, *How States Think: The Rationality of Foreign Policy*, 205.

<sup>101</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 152.

<sup>102</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “George W. Bush, State of the Union Address January 29, 2002 (Excerpt),” 60.

<sup>103</sup> Ehrenberg et al., 60.

“Evil Empire” moment that made him sound resolute; “It just kind of resonates” he later recalled.<sup>104</sup> According to Woodward, including Iran and North Korea provided additional covert for the secret plans for OIF.<sup>105</sup> European allies did not react well to this speech. Neoconservative Charles Krauthammer responded to these complaints in a *Washington Post* op-ed. Despite the neoconservative leanings, the piece was more about flexing American power and reasserting status rather than promoting democracy. Krauthammer, ushered in the Bush administration’s trend of using and defending the policy of preemption, rather than prevention, to target European criticism of the axis of evil speech.<sup>106</sup> It should be noted that preemption did not apply to that scenario or in any of the future scenarios that will be presented later, as a preemptive war consists of the other side mobilizing for war or actually possessing weapons of mass destruction. Krauthammer then, in a polemic way reasserted the U.S great power status calling European states subjugates and leeches that depended on the American security umbrella; “The Europeans are sick and pout. What else can they do? The ostensible complaint is American primitivism. The real problem is their irrelevance.”<sup>107</sup>

Even though Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Adviser was sidelined from the discussions on Iraq, she did her best to push this new foreign policy agenda.<sup>108</sup> In a speech at Johns Hopkins in March 2002 she elaborated on how the international system was unstable and that 9/11 ushered in a period of great anxiety but also of great opportunity to reassert American dominance. She likened it to 1945 to 1947 where “American leadership expanded the number of free and democratic states-Japan and Germany among the great powers-to create a new balance

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<sup>104</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 155.

<sup>105</sup> Woodward, 155.

<sup>106</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Charles Krauthammer, ‘The Axis of Petulance,’ *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2002 (Excerpt),” 61.

<sup>107</sup> Ehrenberg et al., 62.

<sup>108</sup> Mearsheimer and Rosato, *How States Think: The Rationality of Foreign Policy*, 205.

of power that favored freedom.” Rice, emphasized how crucial power is and named the new grand strategy as “a balance of power that favors freedom.” She acknowledged American preponderance and distinguished it from previous great powers saying that the mission was not territory or even war on terror but to create a world of more freedom. Finally she reminded the audience of irreformable regimes, without naming Iraq, and the impact of 9/11 “as part of itself (America) that some had forgotten, or that some thought we no longer had.”<sup>109</sup> The rhetoric on human rights, democracy and equal justice, free speech may have been what Hobbes called words, “ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so.”<sup>110</sup> The U.S especially during that period had backed regimes that represented the opposite of those values and passed legislation that would even undermine those values. Behind the rhetoric the word power looms large and in that speech as well in the subsequent ones by George Bush, freedom equals American hegemony, values and power. Rice reminded the students that the attacks triggered that anxiety yet, freedom, American power and hegemony would strike back and the post-9/11 period was one of the United States seeking to reassert its status, as the hegemon that represented freedom.

Vice President Cheney planned a trip to the Middle East in March 2002 to meet with leaders, of Egypt, Oman, U.A.E, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, Israel and Turkey to strengthen a coalition against Saddam but more importantly to let them know that “if the United States were to use force, they would be serious about it.” To Cheney’s surprise, most of the leaders were not concerned with Saddam Hussein or terrorism but pressured Cheney to call on the President to step up, increase involvement and push for a solution in the Israel-

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<sup>109</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Condoleezza Rice, Remarks on Terrorism and Foreign Policy, Johns Hopkins University, April 29, 2002 (Excerpt),” 63–65.

<sup>110</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 35.

Palestine conflict. Bush was happy with the message Cheney sent to Middle-Eastern leaders elaborating, “I think one other point that the vice president made, which is a good point, is that this is an administration that when we say we’re going to do something we mean it;... It is very important for these leaders to understand the nature of this administration so there’s no doubt in their mind that when we speak, we mean what we say, that we’re not posturing. We don’t take a bunch of polls and focus groups to tell us what—how to—to what we ought to do in the world”

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By June George Bush was scheduled to give a speech at West Point. His speechwriter Michael Gerson had travelled with him to craft what would be the sequel to the State of the Union “Axis of Evil” speech. The speech would put into words the new foreign policy vision of reasserting American dominance that the President wanted to implement following the attacks. Woodward says that “Gerson recognized the bedrock of American hesitancy, even extreme reluctance, to be involved in the world. To change that, the country had to be convinced that both its security interests and its ideals were in jeopardy. In order to convey the message clearly Gerson realized the need to blend realism with Wilsonian idealism, taking inspiration from the Truman Doctrine and the defense of free people against totalitarian regimes.<sup>112</sup> In the speech George Bush talked about the need to modernize the security apparatus, preemptive strikes, and the need for America to be force for peace for the entire world. Speaking in Manichean terms of good and evil he dismissed the theory of the clash of civilizations and spoke about the principles of freedom such as limited government, private property, free speech and freedom of religion applying everywhere from Latin America to the Islamic world. “America cannot impose this vision -yet we can support and reward governments that make the right choices for their own

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<sup>111</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 178–81.

<sup>112</sup> Woodward, 207–9.

people.<sup>113</sup> Bush was echoing Dick Cheney's rhetoric of preemptive strikes, a departure from the Cold War policy of containment, against states that possess capabilities to hurt the U.S amplified by the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.<sup>114</sup> "But new threats also require new thinking," Bush told the graduating cadets.<sup>115</sup> As previously mentioned the executive may have been trying sell the idea of preemptive strikes against rogue states, in this instance Iraq, yet again the term preemption does not apply against a state with no such capabilities. During the same time, June 2002, Donald Rumsfeld and General Franks were drawing up plans for the war, and there exists no mention of where facilities of nuclear weapons would be located in order to launch a preemptive strike against, or even WMDs in general as a hindrance to the plan.<sup>116</sup> The logical conclusion from this evidence is that what the Pentagon was planning was a preventive war, a war against a state though to be a potential enemy, to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The reason for that war explicitly had to be the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the impact and anxiety it created about American status. The rhetoric used may have been masked behind a blend of realpolitik and idealism, yet the spread of American values meant a reassertion of a perceived American status lost during the attacks in September. Afghanistan was where the perpetrators of attacks were located not Iraq, yet that simply did not matter for executive.

A July 23, 2003 a Downing Street Memo, that became public three years later revealed the full determination of the Bush administration to invade Iraq and link it to weapons of mass destruction. In the memo "C," later revealed to be Sir Richard Dearlove, head of the MI6 reported from Washington that George Bush was adamant about invading and deposing Saddam by linking terrorism with weapons of mass destruction. "But the intelligence and the facts were

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<sup>113</sup> Ehrenberg et al., "George W. Bush, Graduation Speech at West Point, June 1, 2002 (Excerpt)," 65–67.

<sup>114</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 209–10.

<sup>115</sup> Ehrenberg et al., "George W. Bush, Graduation Speech at West Point, June 1, 2002 (Excerpt)," 65.

<sup>116</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 211–16.

being fixed around the policy.” The author of the memo Matthew Rycroft admitted that the case of Saddam possessing such weapons was weak arguing that Iraq’s capabilities were less than Iran, North Korea and Libya. Rycroft also assessed that the regime was not posing a regional threat. More revealing is the statement that “There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action...”<sup>117</sup> The administration’s focus was solely on military action and deposing a dictator without deliberation as to what a democratic Iraq would look like. In an August 5<sup>th</sup> meeting where General Franks was to brief Bush and NSC the discussion entailed military operations and the new Hybrid Concept of war as well as the role of regional powers in assisting the United States military for transit. What seemed to be missing was discussion as to what the occupation and a post-Baathist Iraq would look like. The focus was clearly in pursuing a campaign that would topple a dictator.<sup>118</sup>

Colin Powell became disillusioned with the continuous plans of war. On the evening of the same day he had a meeting with George Bush to present his case. Powell first started by analyzing the potential negative consequences of an invasion of Iraq. The list was long, deterioration of relations with key allies in the region like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, negative effect on the war on terror and the supply of oil, the optics of the American military occupying an Arab country, the fact that Iraq was never a democracy, timeline, what success meant, as well as the responsibility that would bear with the President who would be ruling over twenty-five million people. More importantly, Powell asked Bush if he wanted his tenure to be defined by the Iraq war. “What should I do? What else can I do?” asked Bush. Powell made the case for an international coalition or a U.N resolution as he was not a believer in unilateralism. In reality Powell was making an anti-invasion argument yet “It was paramount to talk only within

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<sup>117</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “The Downing Street Memo, July 23, 2002 (Excerpt),” 67–69.

<sup>118</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 228–33.



the confines of the preliminary goals set by the boss.” In an interview with Bob Woodward sixteen months later Bush said on the points his Secretary of State made “And my reaction to that is, is that my job is to secure America...“And that I also believe that freedom is something people long for. And that if given a chance, the Iraqis over time would seize the moment. My frame of mind is focused on what I told you—the solemn duty to protect America.” The response left Woodward perplexed as this had nothing to do with Powell’s points. Bush said that the Secretary’s job tactical whereas his was strategic.<sup>119</sup>

In a speech later that month Dick Cheney laid out the Bush Doctrine in full force for the world to see. First reiterating the changing international environment that had forced the United States to abandon Cold War era strategies, he talked about the impact of 9/11 on the nation and the fact that Al-Qaeda was pursuing weapons of mass destruction before switching solely on the Iraq threat. The first time the issue of WMD’s was being discussed in public by the administration, Cheney emphasized that Saddam was breaking UN resolutions and deceiving inspectors, explicitly making the point that inspections were useless and that unilateral action was a one-way street ahead. After addressing the critics of the Bush doctrine he quoted a Middle-East expert saying that “the streets in Basra and Baghdad are sure to erupt in joy, in the same way the throngs in Kabul greeted the Americans. Extremists in the region would have to rethink their strategy of Jihad.” Despite all the freedom talk Cheney would hint some light at anxiety and opportunity to regain status bringing up how “these times bring not only great dangers but great opportunities.” Very glaringly he asserted that “In other times the world saw how the United States defeated fierce enemies, then helped them rebuild their countries, forming strong bonds between our peoples and our governments. Today in Afghanistan, the world is seeing, that

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<sup>119</sup> Woodward, 235–39.

America acts not to conquer but to liberate, and remains in friendship to help the people build a future of stability, self-determination, and peace.” He continued by expressing the desire that this had to be the case in Iraq too.<sup>120</sup> The Vice President shed a certain amount of truth in that statement. When one looks beyond arguments stemming from the administrations Wilsonian idealism, realities of asserting power and hegemony after a devastating attack come into play. First, by dismissing any notion of multilateralism, Cheney made it clear that not only the administration did not have any faith in allies therefore it had to act unilaterally, but without evidence called the inspection regime inadequate at doing their jobs, thus paving the way for military action. All the talk about violation of resolutions and secret facilities turned out to be false but what remained true was the statement and the perception of the United States as the world’s superpower policeman. The statement on how the world had previously seen America coming in and rebuilding a state that would be pro-American, a reference to the post WWII foreign policy, as well as the “success” of overthrowing the Taliban aimed to show that the United States was about to reclaim that status; lost after September 11<sup>th</sup>, but with its capabilities the administration was about to launch a campaign to regain that lost prestige. Afghanistan was the first step yet the vulnerability of the attacks were so much in the eyes of the leaders that Iraq had to be next.

The Bush Doctrine was laid out in detail in the 2002 National Security Strategy. The document opens with the recognition that America is the predominant power in global affairs but it then introduces a paradox. The White House stresses that the United States will not act unilaterally but “We seek instead to create a balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and

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<sup>120</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Dick Cheney, Speech at Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention, Nashville, Tennessee, August 26, 2002,” 75–80.

challenges of political and economic liberty.”<sup>121</sup> It should be logical that the U.S as a great power would seek to push for its interests around the world, yet again the word freedom that the document, and the administration, used actually meant American influence. Thus the word freedom for the Bush doctrine really meant the spread of American influence through any means necessary whether, political, economic or in the case of Iraq military. The effect would be an increase in American status. Continuing on the theme of “the balance of power that favors freedom” the document again asserts unmatched capabilities that bear the burden of “unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunity,” thus why the turn in foreign policy had to be based on “a distinctly American internationalism.” The word distinctly is in the document for a purpose to emphasize the exceptional value of American stature. After bringing up the issue of proliferation from rogue states the document again summarizes the main points that the Bush administration had been pushing since beginning of the year; impact of September 11<sup>th</sup>, reorientation of foreign policy from old doctrines of deterrence and containment to preemption<sup>122</sup> and no hesitancy to act unilaterally, which contradicts the opening statement. The role of the military was front and center in this new policy as it had to “reassure our allies and friends, dissuade future military competition, deter threats against the U.S interests, allies and friends, decisively defeat any adversary if deterrence fails.” More importantly for the Bush Doctrine to be implemented the United States would have to expand its reach beyond (need bases) Europe and Asia.<sup>123</sup> The symbol of U.S stature, its military, would have to implemented to its full extent in order to regain the unquestionable distinction of American status.

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<sup>121</sup> “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” iv.

<sup>122</sup> As previously stated the administration used the word “preemption” meaning a strike against an imminent threat where in reality “prevention” is the correct terminology. Attack against an enemy that may in the future pose a threat.

<sup>123</sup> “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” 1–30.

What followed was a speech in Cincinnati where Bush made the public case as to why the United States was obligated to overthrow Hussein. He started by bringing up the impact of the attacks, “We also must never forget the most vivid events of recent history. On September the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 America felt its vulnerability.” After revisiting Iraq’s recent history, he equated Al-Qaeda to Hussein’s regime. Discussing how Iraq was planning to purchase centrifuges, aluminum tubes in order to enrich uranium he switched back to 9/11, “We’ve experienced the horror of September the 11<sup>th</sup>” he said. He continued making the case for preemptive action as the continuous cheating rendered the inspections regime vulnerable to cheating. In a very revealing manner he urged America to take action to regain its former glory; “This is not the America I know. This is not the America that I serve. We refuse to live in fear. This nation, in world war and in Cold War, has never permitted the brutal and lawless to set history’s course.” This is a truly revealing statement as America, as the preeminent hegemonic power in the world needed to be able to shape global affairs. This is one the main sources of its hegemonic status. He finished the speech bringing up the attacks for a third time again showing how 9/11 triggered an anxiety about the untouchable status of the U.S; “The attacks of September the 11<sup>th</sup> showed our country that vast oceans no longer protect us from danger.” Bringing up the past again he promised to “meet the responsibility.”<sup>124</sup> By that point in time George Bush was publicly declaring that Saddam Hussein posed the same danger as Osama bin Laden. Jefferey Record correctly points out that with this logic Roosevelt should have declared war on both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>125</sup>

The logic of equating Iraq with Al-Qaeda was false and a lie (as it was proven in retrospect) yet it proved to be adequate enough to rally the public in support the policy. The

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<sup>124</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “George W. Bush, Speech Outlining Iraqi Threat, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 7, 2001,” 84–91.

<sup>125</sup> Record, “Why the Bush Administration Invaded Iraq: Making Strategy after 9/11,” 65.

statements may be filled with these false accusations and some blend of realism with morality but the true intentions usually lie within the statements of the belief in the military power of the United States. What is also not false is the impact of the attacks on the U.S it was truly an extraordinary event that changed the mindset of the whole nation and more importantly the executive. The fact that the U.S was located between two oceans was no longer a source of deterrence for enemies and that triggered an anxiety in the executive branch. Equating Iraq with Al-Qaeda was convincing enough to garner bipartisan support, evident in the Joint Resolution that gave Bush the ability to launch an invasion. “Whereas members of al-Qaida, an organization bearing responsibility for attacks on the United States, its citizens, and interests, including the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, are known to be in Iraq.” 296 Democrats and Republicans provided the legislative justification for the United States to regain its status after that fateful day; “Whereas it is in the national security of the United States to restore international peace and security to the Persian Gulf region.”<sup>126</sup>

The issue of weapons of mass destruction needs to be brought up and H2 which are the rationalist explanations of war needs to be examined. The dominant framework in IR for explaining the breakout of conflict is the bargaining model for war. Also named the rationalist explanation for war, it assumes that war is a failure of two actors to come to a bargain.

According to James Fearon, the bargain breaks down and war resumes due to incentives to misrepresent information about capabilities, inability to commit and issue indivisibilities.<sup>127</sup>

David Lake argues that the model is limited in its explanation for the Iraq War for four reasons:

(1) assumption of states as unitary actors, (2) the fact that it is a two-player game disregarding

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<sup>126</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Joint Congressional Resolution to Authorize the Use of the United States Armed Forces Against Iraq, October 16, 2002 (Excerpt),” 93–95.

<sup>127</sup> Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 381–82.

other actors, (3) the assumption that war is over once victory is declared and, (4) the assumption of rationality.<sup>128</sup> On the last point, Lake says that the US and Iraq were “engaged in self-delusions, biased decision-making, and failures to update prior beliefs that are inconsistent with the assumption that actors will seek out and use all available information.”<sup>129</sup> According to bargaining theory Saddam’s failure to commit to not developing nuclear weapons was the *casus belli*.<sup>130</sup> But as Lake correctly points out the U.S was concerned about future capabilities and intentions which are impossible or extremely difficult to assess.<sup>131</sup> In a letter to the editors of *International Security* Michael McKoy criticizes Lake’s assessment by arguing that he did not take into consideration the “strategic environment faced by Saddam Hussein and the George W. Bush administration” thus undermining both incentives to misrepresent and commitment problems.<sup>132</sup> McKoy emphasizes the dual dilemma of threats from domestic opposition and Iran and needing to reassure the United States which made Saddam not being able to credibly commit to not developing WMDs.<sup>133</sup> In addition McKoy critiques Lake for undermining the impact of September 11, revealing how during the Clinton administration the U.S could not credibly to commit to regime change which altered the administrations perceptions of the threat environment and resulted in an incentive to misrepresent its war strategy .<sup>134</sup> For McKoy, bargaining theory can explain much more about the Iraq War. Lake responds, that the U.S made it clear that it intended to remove Saddam from power and that 9/11 would have sent shockwaves to any administration “but that it occurred on Bush’s watch interacted with preexisting dispositions

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<sup>128</sup> Lake, “Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War,” 9.

<sup>129</sup> Lake, 9.

<sup>130</sup> Lake, 23.

<sup>131</sup> Lake, 23; Rosato, *Intentions in Great Power Politics: Uncertainty and the Roots of Conflict*.

<sup>132</sup> McKoy and Lake, “Correspondence: Bargaining Theory and Rationalist Explanations for the Iraq War.”

<sup>133</sup> McKoy and Lake, 174.

<sup>134</sup> McKoy and Lake, 175-176.

toward Saddam” who by refusing to send a costly signal about dismantling the WMD program resulted in the war, reiterating his main point.<sup>135</sup>

Both authors provide a greater understanding of the usefulness of bargaining theory in explaining the war. For example, McKoy makes a correct point of highlighting the impact of 9/11 while Lake rightly says that for the Iraqi regime, US threat was significantly higher than that of Iran and domestic opposition.<sup>136</sup> However, they both miss a crucial point, ignoring the fact that the Iraqi regime gave unprecedented access to UN and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials in the prelude to the war. In February 2003 the IAEA conducted 177 inspections in 125 locations, including sampling of water, sediment, vegetation and air as well as 300 hundred interviews with high level scientists.<sup>137</sup> By March of the same year the inspections increased to 218 at 141 sites, as well as continuing interviews which were unescorted and untapped and examining probability of uranium enrichment through aluminum tubes and magnets as well as whether Iraq had acquired uranium from Niger.<sup>138</sup> The report states explicitly “After three months of intrusive inspections, we have to date found no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq.”<sup>139</sup> What is more a United Nations Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) report to the Security Council found no evidence of a resumption of Iraq’s nuclear program.<sup>140</sup> The amount of access and openness granted by Iraq which the IAEA described as “forthcoming”<sup>141</sup> shows that the regime was signaling its intentions, not proliferating WMD’s and committing to it. Regarding

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<sup>135</sup> McKoy and Lake, 178.

<sup>136</sup> McKoy and Lake, 178.

<sup>137</sup> ElBaradei, “The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: 14 February 2003 Update.”

<sup>138</sup> ElBaradei, “The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: An Update.”

<sup>139</sup> ElBaradei.

<sup>140</sup> “UN INSPECTORS FOUND NO EVIDENCE OF PROHIBITED WEAPONS PROGRAMMES AS OF 18 MARCH WITHDRAWAL, HANS BLIX TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL.”

<sup>141</sup> ElBaradei, “The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: An Update.”

intentions about the future, it takes 2-3 years for fuel rods to produce yellow cake and with these close inspections and the benefit of hindsight as well, the argument about uncertainty about future intentions does not stand. At the same time foreign policy makers in the United States were openly discussing and preparing the public for war, as Lake points out. Thus, with both sides openly declaring their intentions Lake is right that the rationalist model is inadequate to explain the Iraq War and it is time for a “behavioral theory of war.”<sup>142</sup>

Security Council resolution 1441 drafted by the United States and Britain claimed that Iraq was in violation of a 1991 resolution in relation to such weapons. As such, the 1441 gave the UNMOVIC and the IAEA access to conduct inspections as the “final opportunity” for Iraq. The supposed “ultimatum” called on Unrestricted access, movement, interviews, names and relevant information.<sup>143</sup> As previously mentioned, reports by both agencies showed that Iraq allowed unrestricted access and interviews and no such weapons were found. In his own words, Hans Blix, director of UNMOVIC at the time wrote: “Although the inspection was now operating at full strength, and Iraq seemed determined to give it prompt access everywhere, the United States appeared as determined to replace our inspection force with an invasion army”<sup>144</sup> The reality was that the decision had been made months before that the invasion would be launched. Paul Wolfowitz later said that for bureaucratic reasons “we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on, which was weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>145</sup> The overwhelming evidence rejects any theory that calls on the inability of Iraq to commit to not develop weapons of mass destruction. Despite the overwhelming evidence and his opposition to the war Colin Powell delivered the famous speech at the United Nations Security Council attempting to persuade the

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<sup>142</sup> Lake, “Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War,” 45.

<sup>143</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441, November 8, 2002 (Excerpt),” 95–99.

<sup>144</sup> Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 3.

<sup>145</sup> Packer, *The Assassins’ Gate: America in Iraq*, 104.



international community of a link between terrorism and Iraq and that Saddam really had possession of WMDs.<sup>146</sup>

Bush issued an ultimatum to Iraq on two days before Operation Iraqi Freedom started. The same public rhetoric was followed in order to sell the war to the public. He did issue a warning though in case of another terrorist attack similar to 2001; “No act of theirs can alter the course or shake the resolve of this country.”<sup>147</sup> The leader had to make sure that the status would be regained. March 19, 2003 became ingrained history as one of the first preventive wars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The United States would in an exaggerated manner fully alleviate the anxiety caused by 9/11. The unknowability about the future of its hegemonic status was not put to rest with the Afghanistan invasion. Even though the perpetrators of 9/11 had nothing to with the Iraqi regime the United States had to invade to prove to itself that it was still the preeminent power. Melvyn Leffler says that fear, power and hubris led Bush to the decision to invade Iraq. He still maintains though that “Bush’s sense of American power—its capacity to achieve what it needed to do—was equally important.”<sup>148</sup> In the same token Record, reaches a similar conclusion to Butt’s performative war thesis, that the invasion showed the power of the US military to friends and foes, and that the United States would act unilaterally defying any norms.<sup>149</sup> Both of these explanations are compelling yet they do not reach the full point. September 11<sup>th</sup> did create a sense of fear of another attack but the powerful national security apparatus of the United States, equipped with expanded powers, was emboldened never to allow such a tragedy to happen again. It was the anxiety, a sinking unknowability about global status that led to the exaggerated policy to invade Iraq. Any evidence of links to Al-Qaida and WMD’s were used to make policy and

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<sup>146</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “Colin Powell, Address to the United Nations Security Council, February 6, 2003,” 99–102.

<sup>147</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “George W. Bush, Ultimatum to Iraq, March 17, 2003,” 113.

<sup>148</sup> Leffler, *Confronting Saddam Hussein: George W. Bush and the Invasion of Iraq*, 460–61.

<sup>149</sup> Record, “Why the Bush Administration Invaded Iraq: Making Strategy after 9/11,” 77.

there was a lack of plan as to how to deal with the post-Saddam regime. Maybe Bush was right when he said, “We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people.”<sup>150</sup> The plan was to simply oust Saddam with the might of the U.S military. Words such as freedom echoed by the administration were not influences of neoconservatism but perception of American status. The results are twenty years later Iraq is still in chaos.

Daniel Lieberfeld traces what different theories about the conflict argue about the Iraq War and the subsequent implications of such theories. He classifies these different theories as realism, liberalism, elite interests, ideological influences, personality and social psychology.<sup>151</sup> Some of the psychology and personality explanations include Bush’s personality and a personal vendetta with Saddam going back to his father tenure.<sup>152</sup> If the aim of this paper is to examine anxiety in the lead up to the war then it can be correctly assumed that this explanation falls under the personality and social psychology framework. On theories stressing psychological factors Lieberfeld says this “Theories address causality on a fundamental level only if the invasion policy was under consideration in the first place. While President Bush had personal motives for overthrowing Saddam Hussein, personality traits should not be necessarily be considered causal. For example, although lack of cognitive complexity may be relevant factor the connection with Iraq is imprecise. Such traits may have facilitated approval of the invasion policy but were not responsible for its emergence and its prominence. One may with more

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<sup>150</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “George W. Bush, Announcement of the Start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, March 19, 2003,” 114.

<sup>151</sup> Lieberfeld, “Theories of Conflict and the Iraq War,” 2.

<sup>152</sup> Lieberfeld, 14.

confidence view Bush's personal animosity toward Iraq's ruler as another tipping factor that made the invasion policy more attractive.”<sup>153</sup>

Experiencing some form of existential anxiety (helplessness, unknowability and eventual exaggeration) is not a personality trait as anxiety is a constitutive condition in every human and that anxiety can vary depending on the circumstances. Thus, a hypothesis whether a heightened sense of anxiety after the September 11 attacks either led or facilitated the administration to invade Iraq is a plausible causal claim. Second, as Lieberfeld says in the last sentence a heightened sense of anxiety may be viewed as a tipping factor to explain why the invasion was an attractive option. For example Bush may have dismissed information about the lack of WMDs because a sense of helplessness took over and the only way to escape that was by toppling Saddam Hussein. Yet that does not mean that anxiety is a tipping factor but rather the cause as to why he would dismiss that information.

### **Why not Iran?**

Plenty of authors have asked the question whether US foreign policy would be different if Al-Gore was president during the attacks. However, a key question and a good counterfactual exercise is why did the United States choose to invade Iraq and not Iran. Since the revolution of 1979 relations between Washington and Teheran had been strained and Iran had been designated as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1984.<sup>154</sup> Being an adversary of both Israel and Saudi Arabia, two key allies in the region, as well as having an actual nuclear program in place made Iran a better target for the post 9/11 world order that the Bush administration was pushing forward to create. Iran was also part of the famous “axis of evil” along with North Korea and Iraq as George

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<sup>153</sup> Lieberfeld, 16.

<sup>154</sup> “State Sponsors of Terrorism.”

Bush referred to it during the 2002 State of the Union address by saying that the regime “aggressively pursues these weapons {WMDs} and exports terror while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom”<sup>155</sup> What is more, what better way to relieve the anxiety and assert status as the unipolar power than invading a regime with a nuclear program in place stopping that program.

The reality was that the United States lacked the capabilities to implement regime change in Iran. Former CIA and NSA director General Michael Hayden said in 2012 that the idea of an Iranian occupation was something “which nobody wants to contemplate.”<sup>156</sup> The main point of out of the interview is that the United States lacked the capabilities or did not want to bear the costs of an invasion of Iran. In his memoir George Bush discusses how despite the fact that Iran was a theocratic regime it “was a relatively modern society with a budding freedom movement.”<sup>157</sup> This goes back to the point that in the pursuit of status, even the sole superpower considers military capabilities which is why the administration chose Iraq. Bush says that Colin Powell even referred to the strike against Iraq as “easy.”<sup>158</sup> The Afghanistan campaign was over quickly yet that did not satisfy the executive, thus choosing to topple another adversary, in this case Saddam Hussein. It could also be argued that the Iraq war was intended to be a message, a costly signal to Iran to halt its nuclear program and by extension, the war and the fact that United States pursued the impossible task of regime change knowing the consequences was an important factor in Iran signing the JCPOA. Another counterfactual could be made that if the occupation ended up being successful meaning there was no insurgency and the United States

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<sup>155</sup> Ehrenberg et al., “George W. Bush, State of the Union Address January 29, 2002 (Excerpt),” 60.

<sup>156</sup> Rogin, “Bush’s CIA Director: We Determined Attacking Iran Was a Bad Idea.”

<sup>157</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 764.

<sup>158</sup> Bush, 441.

would be able to withdraw in a short amount of time after the operation then Iran or North Korea would be next.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of anxiety is an under examined issue in the field of international relations. Despite being implied in some of the seminal texts in IR theory it has only been examined and theorized through the lens of ontological security. Ontological security however is still only a framework that only sees anxiety through the lens of the Self and the aim of this paper is to integrate the concept of anxiety with status and propose a causal inference as to why a state goes to war. The main theoretical proposition put forward in this paper is that anxiety about status can lead a state to engage in militarized conflict. Four hypotheses are tested, the first being the main theoretical proposition, rationalist explanations for war, ideology and structure. These four hypotheses are tested in case study, the Iraq War. One of the biggest questions that will continue to perplex international relations scholars and historians is why the United States chose to invade Iraq in 2003. A plethora of explanations have put forward from the bargaining model, to the influence of neoconservatism and the unipolar structure of the international system. Through qualitative analysis, I show that the 9/11 resulted in anxiety about the hegemonic status of the United States inside the Bush administration and in an exaggerated attempt to regain that perceived lost status, Saddam Hussein was overthrown. The analysis shows that other explanations fall short, the bargaining model does not account the openness of the Iraqi regime regarding WMD inspection, neoconservative ideologues supported authoritarian regimes and structural explanations point towards determinism. As stated in the introduction the aim of this paper is to elevate anxiety along with other important variables in the world of IR theory.

Emotions, used here as a general term or constitutive states as a better term, can provide explanations that allow for causal inference and can lead scholars towards a behavioral theory of war.

One issue that might arise might concerns the use of only one case study in order to examine the hypotheses. There are both advantages and limitations in using one case study. Using one case study allows for a detailed analysis of the events along with the testing of the other hypotheses. As stated previously the main aim of this paper is to elevate and strengthen the concept of anxiety resulting in a state initiating war. Thus, an aim of this paper is to contribute to the literature and allow for further studies regarding anxiety and war and eventually contribute towards what might be termed as a “behavioral theory of war.” The limitations might be a lack of generalizability, but the plausibility probe aims to show that the theoretical framework is worth examining more using different methods and a number of case studies in order to show that anxiety is worth considering when discussing war. Anxiety, fear and uncertainty about intentions all work together when a conflict arises and the aim of IR should be to locate where those three important mental processes are located and how they trigger conflict.

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