America after Iraq

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Announcing the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom on 31 August 2010, President Barack Obama declared that America had met its responsibility in Iraq after seven long years. Mindful that the Iraq war has been a contentious issue, President Obama paid tribute to his predecessor's 'love of country and commitment to [America's] security'.[1] Acknowledging America's special responsibility for global leadership, the President stated one of the key lessons of this war to be that 'American influence around the world is not a function of military force alone' but also of 'diplomacy, economic strength, and the power of American example'. This is in stark contrast to the previous administration and the so-called 'Bush Doctrine' which will for ever be associated with the Iraq war.

In his 2002 State of the Union Address as president, setting out the central tenets of the doctrine, George W. Bush sought to shift the post-9/11 focus from the battle against Al-Qaeda to a possible confrontation with Iraq. States like North Korea, Iran and Iraq, he said, 'constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world … these regimes pose a grave and growing danger'.[2] The acquisition by failed states of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), or even the intent to develop WMD capability, now constituted a legitimate *casus belli* in the minds of leading neo-conservatives in the Bush administration.

In the opening section of this article, we consider in greater depth how far the US invasion of Iraq signified a strategic re-evaluation of America's role in the world. What made the Iraq war so shocking for large sections of global civil society was the fact that the UN system had been designed to prevent the resort to force by Great Powers simply to further their own national interests. Yet special rights have always been claimed by Great Powers even if they have not been extended to others. In seeking to change the norms of war to permit a right of 'pre-emption', the Bush presidency acted as though the multilateral international order had become an unreasonable constraint on its system-shaping capacity. Did the US, at the height of the neo-conservative revolution in foreign policy, believe that the rules of international society did not apply to it?

[1] Remarks by the President in 'Address to the nation on the end of combat operations in Iraq', The White House, Washington DC, 31 Aug. 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/08/31/remarks-president-address-nation-end-combat-operations-iraq, accessed 18 Sept. 2010.
[2] See President George W. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', 29 Jan. 2002, http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/, accessed 26 July 2010.

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Nearly a decade after regime change in Iraq first appeared on the US foreign policy agenda, the dominant discourse has shifted away from unilateralism, although, as we will argue in the second section of this article, the pendulum has not swung back to the point where the US is once again a power defending the status quo. The tipping point from hegemony to imperialism was reached when the US no longer regarded the sovereignty of others as unconditional but rather deemed it legitimately extinguishable when a state failed to meet certain standards of conduct, whether in relation to WMD capability or in relation to liberal benchmarks of human rights, democratization and good governance.

It is worthy of note that some of those who advocated an American empire in the aftermath of the terror attacks on New York and Washington are now claiming that there is a crisis of authority in international society, prompted by a growing realization of the dubious capacity of global institutions to manage challenges such as climate change, WMD proliferation, and a shift in the balance of power towards South and East Asia. These developments bring into question the basis of the post-1945 order that America had built—the open, institution-based international system in which states cooperate to achieve mutual gains.[3]

The experience of multilateral institutions designed to provide governance over security, trade and finance continues to show that cooperation is harder to achieve and perpetuate than generations of liberal internationalists have anticipated, despite the ascendency of democratic state formation in the system. Recent studies generated by influential think-tanks confirm this trend. The US National Intelligence Council's survey of 'Global Trends 2025' argues that (liberal) international governance arrangements will become unrecognizable in the decades to come, given the challenges associated with economic globalization and with the widely observed shift in power from the 'West' to South and East Asia.[4]

What is striking about these projections about the decline in US relative power is the manner in which they marginalize the dimension of domestic politics: for there is an important link between what Americans want and how their state behaves. In the third section of the article we look more closely at the widespread belief among ordinary Americans in the legitimacy of the Iraq war. While it is easy to point the finger at the 'Vulcans' in the White House,[5] there is empirical evidence to support the view that the American public remain intuitively supportive of an American administration that fights for its values. The vitality of American patriotism after 9/11 sustained overseas interventions in the name of the 'war on terror', posing awkward questions for liberal defenders of the so-called democratic peace.

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[3] G. John Ikenberry, 'Liberal internationalism 3.0: America and the dilemmas of liberal world order', *Perspectives on Politics* 7: 1, 2009, pp. 71–87.
[4] United States National Security Council, 'Global Trends 2025: a transformed world' (2008), www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2025_project.html, accessed 26 July 2010.
[5] James Mann's phrase: see his *Rise of the Vulcans: the history of Bush's war cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004).

American power and purpose

The Iraq war and the unfolding efforts to build and secure peace in Iraq are symptoms of deeply embedded power relations reflected in a specific understanding of American power and its *unique* role in world politics. US pre-eminence in the current international system is an undisputable fact. America's GDP roughly equals that of China, Japan, Germany, Russia, France and Britain combined, or alternatively, one-quarter of global GDP.[6] Moreover, the US spends more on defence than any other country in the world by a very long way—its defence expenditure in 2008 amounted to nearly half the global total.[7] Thanks to this material preponderance, the United States commands 'unassailable military dominance over sea, air, and space',[8] and possesses the capability of projecting massive military power virtually anywhere in the world. This distribution of material resources enables the US to be a system shaper.

While realists, liberals and neo-conservatives disagree about what America should do with its unrivalled power,[9] they share the belief that America's dominance of the post-Cold War system puts it in a category of its own. Unipolarity captures the character of the international order that has been sustained by the economic and military power of the United States and shaped by its liberal mission to extend the reach of capitalism and democracy. The unipolar configuration of power provides a crucial context within which US foreign policy behaviour must be understood.

If the primacy of American power and the hierarchical nature of the current international order are undisputed, the characterization of such an order has been the subject of intense debate. The main difference between conceptions of, respectively, hegemony and empire lies in the nature of domination and whether dominance is enjoyed by a particular state that has primacy *within* international society or an empire that transforms the character of the units in that society such that their right to sovereignty can be compromised or denied.[10] In an empire the lead state operates outside the order, while in a hegemonic system the leader establishes the rules and is bound by them unless it can persuade others that exceptional conduct is required (and that particular rules can be suspended until normal politics resumes).[11]

Mechanisms of maintaining hegemonic order vary. As Gramscians and other structural theorists argue, the political process is affected by a hegemon such

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[6] International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook* database, April 2007, http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2007/01/data/index.aspx, accessed 11 March 2010.

[7] *SIPRI Yearbook 2009*, http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2009/files/SIPRIYB0905.pdf, accessed 26 July 2010.

[8] Barry Posen, 'Command of the commons: the military foundations of US hegemony', *International Security* 28: 1, 2003, pp.5–46.

[9] G. John Ikenberry, one of the foremost thinkers on unipolarity, defines a unipolar system thus: 'An international system can be said to be unipolar if it contains one state whose overall capabilities place it unambiguously in a class by itself compared to all other states'. See G. John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno and William C. Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity, state behavior, and systemic consequences', *World Politics* 61: 1, 2009, pp. 1–27 at p. 5. See also G. John Ikenberry, 'Liberalism and empire: logics of order in the American unipolar age', *Review of International Studies* 30: 4, 2004, pp. 609–30; Charles Krauthammer, 'The unipolar moment', *Foreign Affairs* 70: 1, 1990–91, pp. 23–33.

[10] Tim Dunne, 'Society and hierarchy in international relations', *International Relations* 23: 1, 2009, pp. 107–14.

[11] Ikenberry, 'Liberalism and empire', p. 615.

that political rivals end up adopting the preferences of the leading power in the system.[12] Hegemons are also able to induce compliance by bargaining and, where necessary, making side-payments to maintain order. A more durable and less costly approach is to ensure that the particular pattern of ordering is acceptable to others. Such a view is neatly captured by Ned Lebow in his articulation of the Greek conception of *hegemonia*: a successful period of hegemonic rule 'requires acquiescence by allies or subject states, and this in turn rests on some combination of legitimacy and self-interest'.[13]

Being both a 'system maker' and a 'privilege taker',[14] the hegemon is often regarded as a satisfied power which is likely to maintain the status quo.[15] This position is contentious on rational choice grounds as well as in relation to the historical practice of the exercise of hegemonic power. In relation to the former, Robert Jervis contends that unipolarity might well provide structural incentives for the unipole to be dissatisfied and thus offers opportunities for revisionist behaviour. For instance, concern over the durability of its pre-eminence might lead it to become dissatisfied and take risks that could undermine international order. Coupled with the absence of countervailing power and the presence of multiple and diffused threats, this could induce the unipole to take military action.[16]

There are deeper reasons to be suspicious of the view that a unipolar power is likely to define its role as a provider of order. A feature of the modern state system has been the practice of lawless behaviour by Great Powers, punctuated by moments when they have sought to legalize their exceptional conduct.[17] The military action against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 illustrates one such moment: in defence of military action, the French President was moved to argue that 'the humanitarian situation constituted a ground that can justify an exception to a rule [i.e. the general prohibition on the use of force], however firm and strong it is'.[18]

Despite the frequent breaches of international rules and conventions, and the practice of denying the same rights and prerogatives to states believed to be uncivilized, it remains the case that hegemonic powers desire that the rest of international society confer legitimacy on their actions. As we argue below, the 2003

[12] This equates to the 'third level of power' according to Stephen Lukes. See his *Power: a radical view*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[13] Richard Ned Lebow, quoted in Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in international society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 474.

[14] Michael Mastanduno, 'System maker and privilege taker: US power and the international political economy', *World Politics* 61: 1, 2009, pp. 121–54.

[15] The classic argument for a hegemon providing order develops out of Mancur Olsen's classic work *The logic of collective action: public goods and the theory of groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). Uniquely powerful actors, in any social context, will be inclined to provide for public goods, and even tolerate free-riders, because they know that their interests are safeguarded by these goods as well.

[16] Robert Jervis, 'Unipolarity: a structural perspective', *World Politics* 61: 1, 2009, pp. 188–213. See also Jonathan Monten, 'The roots of the Bush Doctrine: power, nationalism, and democracy promotion in US strategy', *International Security* 29: 4, 2005, pp. 116, 141.

[17] For a powerful historical account, see Gerry Simpson, *Great powers and outlaw states* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[18] Quoted in Clark, *Legitimacy in international society*, p. 213. The two main grounds for supporting the Kosovo war were the claim that the violence against the Kosovo Albanians constituted a threat to international peace and security and, significantly, the need to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.

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Iraq war is an interesting case in point: while appearing to be indifferent to the rules of the game, the Bush administration made a number of arguments about why the war was justified, but these were not acceptable to other sovereign states or to the main international institutions.

A dissatisfied unipolar power that is prepared to ignore the will of the UN and the majority of its member states is acting less as a hegemon than as an imperial power which is uninhibited by the absence of legitimacy. Even ardent proponents of American hegemony accept that 'unipolarity does generate imperial temptations' and that imperial logics are currently at play, as manifested in American foreign policy in the Middle East and Latin America.[19] 'Being number one', observes Michael Cox, 'generates its own kind of imperial outlook.' Most members of the Washington foreign policy establishment, he goes on, 'tend to see themselves as masters of a universe in which the United States has a very special part to play by virtue of its unique history, its huge capabilities and its accumulated experience of running the world for the last 50 years'.[20]

Echoing old debates which go to the heart of American identity, advocates of unilateralism in the early years of the twenty-first century believed that Washington needed to act decisively and purposively to renegotiate America's role in the world and secure its long-run dominance.[21] For neo-conservatives, 9/11 was 'a most opportune wake-up call' in that it showed in dramatic fashion that the world was a very dangerous place and that it could get more dangerous if no firm action was taken promptly.[22] Sympathy with American suffering ensured minimal 'noise' at home and abroad. With criticism of its policies at a record low following the 9/11 atrocities, Washington's 'war on terror' evolved into a wider mission including regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq to replace the incumbents with reliable allies, in turn producing less terrorism and more stability. As President Bush put it: 'We understand history has called us into action and we are not going to miss that opportunity to make the world more peaceful and more free.'[23]

The ideology of neo-conservatism relies heavily on an imperial logic. Rooted in liberal exceptionalism—the belief that America is qualitatively different from other developed nations as a result of its unique origins and historical evolution—and a vision of America as a redeeming force in international politics, this doctrine endorses the projection of US power as the primary instrument of change.[24] The power of example and moral suasion were not deemed, by the neo-cons, to be sufficient to advance US interests. According to President Bush in 2002, 'The only path to safety is the path of action.' America must move beyond example and actively use its power to spread its universal values. Below we consider specifically

[19] Ikenberry, 'Liberalism and empire', p. 611.
[20] Michael Cox, 'Empire by denial: the strange case of the United States', *International Affairs* 81: 1, 2005, pp. 15–30 at p. 26.
[21] See e.g. Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*.
[22] Michael Cox, 'Empire, imperialism and the Bush doctrine', *Review of International Studies* 30: 4, 2004, pp. 585–608 at p. 597.
[23] Cited in Robert Jervis, 'Understanding the Bush Doctrine', *Political Science Quarterly* 18: 3, 2003, p. 368.
[24] Monten, 'The roots of the Bush Doctrine', pp. 119, 141. On the idea of American exceptionalism, see e.g. H. W. Brands, *What America owes the world: the struggle for the soul of foreign policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Seymour Martin Lipset, *American exceptionalism: a double-edged sword* (New York: Norton, 1996).

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the challenge posed by the Bush Doctrine to what were previously thought to be settled norms in the system in relation to sovereign equality and the restraints on the use of force associated with the rules of the UN order.

The Iraq war: breaches of principle and failures of policy

One of the central tenets of the Bush Doctrine is the notion of preventive war.[25] Based, ultimately, on the desire to ensure American dominance, the preventive war doctrine is premised on the belief that America cannot rely on deterrence to defend itself from threats from international terrorism and failing states. The costs of inaction, argue its proponents, are far higher than those of preventive action.[26] When Vice-President Dick Cheney said that Iraq ought to be struck before it acquired nuclear weapons,[27] he was clearly evoking the doctrine of preventive war.

Unlike pre-emptive war, which is initiated when an attack is imminent (as for example in Israel's war against its Arab neighbours in June 1967), a preventive war is the use of force against a target state before it poses an imminent threat.[28] This implies that the evidence supporting preventive action is often ambiguous at best, and subject to rebuttal at worst. Moreover, while pre-emptive war is considered by international law to be a legitimate act of lawful self-defence, the same cannot be said for preventive war. As discussed further below, the preventive war rationale is what marks out the invasion of Iraq as the symbolic moment when America lapsed from being a hegemon with a responsibility for maintaining order into a revisionist imperial power bent on changing the rules of the game.

There was an important difference between the cases for war set out by President George W. Bush and by Prime Minister Tony Blair. For the British Prime Minister, the Iraq war was not about self-defence (despite the intelligence dossier's infamous '45-minute' claim), and for this reason the UK did not accept the premise of the Bush Doctrine that there was a right in international law to act pre-emptively.[29] The UK case rested on Iraq's breach of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 on disarmament, the authority to use force being vested in a revival of prior Security Council resolutions going back to the 1990–91 Gulf War.[30]

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[25] The three others are: the belief that it has fallen to America to transform international politics by the extension of democracy and capitalism; the belief that unilateral US action is justified when necessary; and the belief that peace and stability demand that the US assert its primacy in world politics. For similar analyses of the Bush Doctrine, see Jervis, 'Understanding the Bush Doctrine', pp. 365–88; Monten, 'The roots of the Bush Doctrine', pp. 140–53; Yuen Foong Khong, 'Neo-conservatism and the domestic sources of American foreign policy: the role of ideas in Operation Iraqi Freedom', in Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne, eds, *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[26] Jervis, 'Understanding the Bush Doctrine', pp. 369–73.

[27] See e.g. his speech at the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention, Nashville, 26 Aug. 2002, http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/cheneyvfw.htm, accessed 26 July 2010.

[28] Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America unbound: the Bush revolution in foreign policy* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2003), p. 147.

[29] Philippe Sands, *Lawless world: America and the making and breaking of global rules* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 186.

[30] The case made by the UK Attorney-General was that Resolutions 678 (restore regional peace and security), 687 (ceasefire and not develop WMD) and 1441 (disarmament) constituted 'combined effects' enabling the authority of the Security Council to be invoked. Earlier, the Attorney-General had written in the *Sunday Telegraph* that the question of the war's legality was 'a gigantic irrelevance'. See Sands, *Lawless world*, ch. 8.

The case for war presented by the US administration was different. On 5 February 2003 Secretary of State Colin Powell presented 'evidence' to the Security Council that Iraq was weaponizing and that it constituted a direct threat to American security. Ambassador John Negroponte drew the conclusion that America had a right to act if the Security Council failed to comprehend the severity of the threat. In his words, 'if the Security Council fails to act decisively in the event of further Iraqi violations, this resolution does not constrain any member state from acting to defend itself against the threat posed by Iraq'.[31]

Negroponte's claim that conventional understandings of *jus ad bellum* are not constraining—that no command has authority beyond that exercised by the political institutions of the United States—is a striking example of an imperialist understanding of the global order. Such a view provoked criticism from realists, who traditionally advocate restraint unless the vital interests of the state are in jeopardy, which they were not in the case of Iraq. Henry Kissinger neatly sums up the realist concern about the implications of pre-emption for international order: 'It cannot be either in American national interests or the world's interest to develop principles that grant every nation an unfettered pre-emption against its own definition of threats to its security.'[32]

The neo-conservative view that the prerogatives of sovereignty should be denied—by force if necessary—to rogue states that are ideological enemies of the US set in train a lawless intervention by the coalition of the willing. The 2003 war did not meet either of the conditions that justify a breach of the general legal ban on force: it was neither an act of self-defence nor authorized by the Security Council.

While it is our contention that rule-following is critical to a stable international order, it is also important to accept that an illegal war could have brought about good ends. Yet, as is detailed elsewhere in this special issue of *International Affairs*,[33] the outcome of the war—so far—reminds us how difficult it is to translate America's material resources into desired political outcomes. The existence of a superpower with extraordinary material preponderance, yet frustrated political influence, raises profound questions about the nature of American power in world politics, and the tension between material endowments, on the one hand, and ability to control political outcomes, on the other.[34] As one high-profile former neo-con put it, the US government 'demonstrated great incompetence in its day-to-day management of policy'.[35]

G. John Ikenberry, the leading institutionalist of American hegemony, argues that Iraq is one reason among many why liberal internationalism is in crisis today. For Ikenberry, the crisis in contemporary liberalism is a crisis of authority. The erosion of the norm of sovereignty by humanitarians wanting protection against

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[31] Alex J. Bellamy, *Fighting terror: ethical dilemmas* (London: Zed, 2008), p. 92.
[32] Quoted in Bellamy, *Fighting terror*, p. 85.
[33] Toby Dodge, 'The ideological roots of failure: the application of kinetic neo-liberalism to Iraq', pp. 1269–1286 in this issue.
[34] Christian Reus-Smit, *American power and world order* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), pp. 2–5.
[35] Francis Fukuyama, *After the neo-cons: America at the crossroads* (London: Profile, 2006), p. viii.

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atrocities and by US leaders targeting rogue states 'has ushered in a new global struggle over the sources of authority in the international community'. A key lesson from the last decade is that a crisis of authority has developed out of the failure to legitimate new understandings about sovereignty in the evolving world order.[36]

In a system of states, legitimacy cannot be appropriated by a single polity. As we discuss in the third section of this article, the Iraq war brought into question the extent to which the rules prohibiting the use of force retain their legitimacy. In the wake of 9/11 and the Bush Doctrine, international lawyers argued that 'an imperial system of international law' has been summoned into existence. The emergence of new rules could be regarded as legitimate only if the US and its allies had persuaded other members of international society to *consent* to new rules or *exempt* the US from breaches of existing ones. Neither permissive condition applied. This leads us to probe how far the US has paid a price for breaking the rules—as sociological understandings of world order would lead us to expect.

'Bring it on':[37] public opinion, Iraq and the war on terror

The impact of the Iraq war on America is frequently viewed in the light of the international dimension, specifically the policy failure and the damage to critically important rules in relation to sovereignty and the non-use of force. It is also important, however, to examine issues pertaining to domestic politics in order to evaluate America after Iraq.

With bombs still falling on Baghdad, in September 2003 President Bush made an emergency war-spending request for $87 billion—the largest such request in American history since the opening months of the Second World War.[38] By 2005 the US Treasury had allocated $212 billion to the Iraq war effort. A joint study by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution calculated that as of August 2005 the direct economic costs to the US were about $255 billion, and the projection of that figure for 2015 is $604 billion.[39] Unplanned expenditure is not the only cost of war. The Iraq strategy, so far, has taken the lives of 4,287 American forces and injured a further 30,182 personnel.[40]

The dire consequences of the Iraq war for America's economy and its citizens are among the most tangible outcomes of the invasion. The impact of the war on the American political system is less perceptible and direct, yet crucial in so far as it has revealed some structural deficiencies which, if uncorrected, may make the American political system prone to other preventive wars. Foreign policy-making

[36] Ikenberry, 'Liberal internationalism 3.0', pp. 71–87.
[37] George W. Bush, speaking at a press conference, 3 July 2003; his actual words were 'bring 'em on', when faced with the story that Iraqi insurgents had been attacking US forces, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-07-02-bush-iraq-troops_x.htm, accessed 7 Oct. 2010.
[38] Peter G. Peterson, 'Riding for a fall', *Foreign Affairs* 83: 5, 2004, p. 112.
[39] See Scott Wallsten and Katrina Kosec, 'The economic costs of the war in Iraq', AEI–Brookings Joint Center for Regulatory Studies, working paper 05–19, Sept. 2005.
[40] These figures are cited from GlobalSecurity.org, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm, accessed 11 Aug. 2010.

in consolidated democracies—such as the United States—is widely considered to be superior to that of alternative regimes because strong institutions of the state and civil society exist to scrutinize and challenge political decision-makers. How, then, did the marketplace of ideas fail to perform its function in relation to the Iraq war?

As Chaim Kaufmann has argued, democratic systems may be inherently vulnerable to issue manipulation, which is what happened in the shift from a strategy of containment to one of prevention from 2003 onwards. Moreover, in relation to international affairs the presidency has an advantage in terms of the control of information, particularly in relation to selective release—or suppression—of intelligence. Countervailing institutions were largely unable, or unwilling, to keep threat inflation in check.[41]

Few can argue with confidence that US public opinion on foreign affairs is particularly well informed and capable of decisive impact on foreign policy. And while Congress has various powers of oversight, when the president invokes a discourse of danger Congress is reluctant to oppose the Executive.[42] Most politicians, mainstream media and public intellectuals do not want to appear soft on national security issues or look weak in the face of external threats. More prominent opposition politicians preferred to criticize President Bush's Iraq policy from the right than from the left. And to the extent that the news media voiced criticism, they did so in narrow ways, focusing on issues of policy implementation and outcomes. As Jane Kellett Cramer has suggested, the need to support strong national security policies and defer to the Executive branch on war powers combined to preclude genuine democratic deliberation on foreign policy alternatives (such as giving the inspectors more time to establish the extent of Iraqi capabilities[43]). In the contest between militarized patriotism and anti-war restraint, patriotism won out with ease.[44] To understand why, the clock must be turned back to the days immediately after 9/11, when President Bush and his advisers represented the terror attacks as part of a war on the United States and its values, and contrasted the virtue and freedom of America with the evil and despotism of its enemies.[45]

The legitimation of the 2003 Iraq war, from the vantage point of domestic politics, was premised on framing the conflict as an extension of the war on terror. Indeed, the terrorism frame was readily available, believable and understandable

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[41] Chaim Kaufmann, 'Threat inflation and the failure of the marketplace of ideas', *International Security* 29: 1, 2004, pp. 5–48. See also Jon Western, 'The war over Iraq: selling war to the American public', *Security Studies* 14: 1, 2005, pp. 106–39.

[42] This point is nicely made by John Dumbrell: 'The greater (and more presidentially defined) the crisis, the more discretion is pushed towards the executive branch.' See his 'Foreign policy', in Robert Singh, ed., *Governing America: the politics of a divided democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 267–85 at p. 279.

[43] This was the position advocated by Hans Blix, head of the UN weapons inspectorate, and supported by a number of Security Council states, especially France.

[44] Jane Kellett Cramer, 'Militarised patriotism: why the US marketplace of ideas failed before the Iraq war', *Security Studies* 16: 3, 2007, pp. 489–524.

[45] Ronald R. Krebs and Jennifer K. Lobasz, 'Fixing the meaning of 9/11: hegemony, coercion, and the road to war in Iraq', *Security Studies* 16: 3, 2007, pp. 409–51. Other relevant works include Stuart Croft, *Culture, crisis and America's war on terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Richard Jackson, *Writing the war on terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

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to a country scarred by 9/11.[46] While President Bush did not blame Saddam Hussein—publicly—for the terrorist attacks on America's soil, his speeches consistently insinuated that a link existed between Saddam Hussein and terrorism in general and Al-Qaeda in particular. For instance, of 13 speeches President Bush gave between 12 September 2001 and May 2003, '12 referenced terror and Iraq in the same paragraph, and 10 placed them within the same sentence. In several keynote speeches, a discussion of terrorism preceded the first mention of Iraq, giving the impression that Iraq was a logical extension of the terrorism discourse'.[47]

Casting the Iraq war in terms of fighting terrorism is part of the reason why masses and elites alike endorsed the White House's Iraq policy. Challenging the war in Iraq would have been all too easily dismissed as un-American and unpatriotic. Thus the context of terrorism narrowed the space for sustainable debate over US policy in Iraq and constrained many leading Democrats who would have otherwise opposed the war. This has led analysts to argue that rhetorical coercion is an essential part of the explanation for why the war was fought. Democrats acquiesced neither because they were persuaded by the logic of the Bush administration nor because of the merits of the case, but rather because the framing of the Iraq war in terms of the fight against terrorism 'had deprived them of winning arguments, of socially sustainable avenues of reply'.[48] The relative ease with which domestic support for the Iraq war was garnered raises serious questions about the war-prone character of powerful liberal states when they encounter what Kant called an 'unjust enemy'.

Conclusion: on the costs of war

Theorists of world order argue that international rules cannot be broken without negative consequences, even by the most powerful state in the world. We conclude this article by reviewing the apparent—and hidden—ways in which America has been weakened by its involvement in Iraq.

The charge of double standards is one that is aimed at many decision-makers. Those taking aim, would do well to remember that acting consistently might not always be a virtue, if the consequence of rule-consistent behaviour is potentially damaging (the diplomacy of human rights in relation to powerful and weak actors being a case in point). Nevertheless, the heightened sense of exceptionalism that has informed US foreign policy since 9/11 risks emptying that policy of all sincerity. Such an impression is neatly set out by Judith Butler:

Nationalism in the US has, of course, been heightened since the attacks of 9/11, but let us remember that this is a country that extends its jurisdiction beyond its own borders, that suspends its constitutional obligations within those borders, and that understands itself

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[46] Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, 'Shaping public opinion: the 9/11–Iraq connection in the Bush administration's rhetoric', *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 2, 2005, pp. 525–37. It bears remembering that, conceptually, frames are important because they help define an issue, how to think about it, and how to deal with it.
[47] Gershkoff and Kushner, 'Shaping public opinion', p. 527.
[48] Krebs and Lobasz, 'Fixing the meaning of 9/11', pp. 440, 447, 448.

as exempt from any number of international agreements. It jealously guards its right to sovereign self-protection while making righteous incursions into other sovereignties.[49]

Iraq has been the site of the most significant of 'those righteous incursions'. It was enabled by a discursive formation that portrayed Islam and the Arab world as a threat to the American way of life, an imaginary so powerful that reasonable people were unable to probe and scrutinize invocations of it.

America's grand strategy in the aftermath of 9/11 shifted from that of a hegemonic hyperpower minded to manipulate the rules to that of an imperial power that regarded the rules and institutions of the UN order as outdated and irrelevant. As we have discussed above, the Iraq war brought into question the extent to which the rules prohibiting the use of force retain legitimacy. Washington's 'assault on the international social structure built up mainly by the US over the previous half century' exposes a central paradox of hegemony.[50] While hegemons possess material capabilities to act unilaterally, they 'cannot maintain this role if they do so at the expense of the system they are trying to lead'.[51] As Christian Reus-Smit notes, unilateral acts of imperial power are 'socially corrosive, with implications both for the hegemon and the world'.[52]

The failure of unilateralism and the limits of US power projection became apparent as the policy failures became starker. Within a year, the WMD claims were revealed as bogus, and within two years the invasion had made the problem of jihadist terrorism worse than it was in 2003, provoking widespread derision about the rationale for war.[53]

Other casualties of the war include the lack of progress made with state-building in Afghanistan, given the US focus on Iraq and the disproportionate allocation of resources there.[54] Closer to home, America's alliance partners, such as the British government, are recalibrating their foreign policy priorities: it is now almost unthinkable that the UK would engage in a new military mission with the United States without the overwhelming support of both domestic public opinion and international opinion.[55] Perhaps the most significant cost of war is the 'known unknown' possibility that the West will not now be able to respond effectively to a future hostile power with WMD capability, as the rationale for preventive war now lacks credibility.

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[49] Judith Butler, *Frames of war: when is life grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 47.
[50] Barry Buzan, *The United States and the great powers: world politics in the twenty-first century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), p. 184.
[51] Bruce Cronin, 'The paradox of hegemony: America's ambiguous relationship with the United Nations', *European Journal of International Relations* 7: 1, 2001, pp. 103–30 at p. 103.
[52] Reus-Smit, *American power and world order*, esp. p. 68.
[53] Fukuyama, *After the neo-cons*, pp. viii–ix.
[54] This view has been aired recently by Lakhdar Brahimi—the former UN special representative for Afghanistan and Iraq. See Barbara Crossette, 'Lakhdar Brahimi: Afghanistan's future', *The Nation*, 9 March 2009, http://www.thenation.com/article/lakhdar-brahimi-afghanistans-future, accessed 26 July 2010. See also Amin Saikal, 'The role of sub-national actors in Afghanistan', in Klejda Mulaj, ed., *Violent non-state actors in world politics* (London and New York: Hurst and Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 239–56; Katia Papagioni, 'Transitional politics in Afghanistan and Iraq: inclusion, consultation, and public participation', *Development in Practice* 15: 6, 2005, pp. 747–59.
[55] John W. Dumbrell, in John E. Owens and John W. Dumbrell, eds, *America's 'war on terrorism': new dimensions in US government and national security* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008), p. 295.

It is not surprising, therefore, that critics of the war have been united in advocating a re-examination of America's role in the world as well as a re-evaluation of the formulation and application of US foreign policy. Winning power under the banner of change, the Obama administration has been expected to adopt a more chastened US foreign policy. The language of President Obama's new National Security Strategy, released in May 2010, suggests that a recalibration of US foreign policy may be under way.

Emphasizing the incumbent administration's commitment to renew America's global leadership in the twenty-first century, the new National Security Strategy is emphatically multilateral, stressing that 'the United States of America will continue to underwrite global security through our commitments to allies, partners, and institutions'.[56] The document reaffirms America's commitment to pursue its interests in an international system in which all members have certain rights and responsibilities.[57] Departing from policies of the Bush administration, the vision of the Obama administration is that America's global engagement must pursue a rules-based international system, underpinning 'a just and sustainable international order'.[58]

For reasons set out above, the swing of the pendulum back in the direction of multilateralism is unlikely to move very far. The events of 9/11 shifted the barometer of US public opinion in an interventionist direction, and future competition with rising or resurgent powers for energy and security is going to mean the gradual erosion of the norms that underpinned the post-1945 order. America will continue to claim exceptional rights to breach others' sovereignty, as befits the role of a hegemon, while other members of international society will become increasingly intolerant of unreasonable exceptionalism in the name of national security, while responses to humanitarian atrocities and the challenge of climate change are marked by exceptional inaction. Iraq accelerated this dynamic and epitomized the problematic legitimacy of the US-led international order.

[56] The White House, *National Security Strategy*, Washington DC, May 2010, p. 1.
[57] The White House, *National Security Strategy*, p. 1.
[58] The White House, *National Security Strategy*, p. 12.

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