IRAQ 2003 (PART 1)[1]: THE ROAD TO WAR

Dr Leopold Scholtz
Extraordinary Professor, Department of History,
Stellenbosch University[2]

Introduction

Most wars in the post-Second World War era, Vietnam included, have been pretty controversial. This has especially been regarding the motivation for the wars. But also the conduct of the conflicts – the strategy, operations and tactics – have been thoroughly debated and second-guessed.

Although it was fought only recently, the Iraq War has been no exception. The war produced a deep transatlantic split between erstwhile allies, such as the United States and the United Kingdom on the one hand, and France and Germany on the other. Even Europe has been rent asunder, with France, Germany and Belgium squaring up to Italy, Spain, Denmark, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. There has also been a much larger split between the West at large and the Islamic world. In most countries, public opinion was set squarely against the war. And although there was widespread support for the war in America and Britain, a vocal minority made itself loudly heard.

As far as the conduct of the war was concerned, every arm-chair general (including several retired military officers) pronounced away on whether the operational plan was adequate, if enough troops were involved, whether it was based on the right premises, etc.

The march from the Kuwaiti border to Baghdad produced one of the speediest armoured advances in history, and may rightly be compared to the German advance to the Channel in May 1940, the march to the outskirts of Moscow in 1941, and that of the Israeli army to the Suez Canal in 1967. Even if for that reason only, the Iraq War deserves the study of everyone with an interest in military history.

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[1]   This is the first part in a series of three articles.
[2]   Dr Scholtz is also Deputy Editor of *Die Burger* and holds the rank of Captain in the SAArmy Reserve Force.

Now that the fog of war has cleared somewhat, it may be possible to offer a first military analysis of the war. The purpose of this analysis will, therefore, be to look at the coalition security strategy which preceded the war, to compare the opposing armed forces and the operational plans, as well as the operations themselves. It will also be relevant to ask whether the war would have been as successful against a better armed, trained and led enemy. Finally, the purpose is to identify and analyse the main strategic and operational decisions on both sides, and to provisionally assess the military lessons emanating from the war, including those which may be of particular relevance to the South African National Defence Force.

The original idea was simply to offer an analysis of the conduct of the war in a single article. But after being urged to do a more comprehensive study by Lt. Col. Deon Visser, Chair of the School for Security and Africa Studies at the Military Academy at Saldanha, the task was approached with some hesitation, as the sources are still woefully inadequate. It does not need saying, therefore, that this is only a *provisional* assessment, based on sources that became available during and shortly after the war. Obviously, the full history of the war will be written by more able hands than these.

As the British commander in the coalition forces, Air Marshal Brian K. Burridge, put it, the three-week campaign was "something that military historians and academics will pore over in great detail for many years to come." Exactly why, is explained by these words of two American journalists at the time of the fall of Baghdad: "The set-piece battles of this war, in which the Republican Guard's divisions were smashed and their remnants scattered in a few brief days, bore no resemblance to the collisions in Europe, Africa and Asia of World War II. As far as is known, no Iraqi tank destroyed an American tank; no allied warplane faced an opponent in a dogfight. In the few brief strategic bombings this time, no city was reduced to rubble in the fashion of Dresden, Berlin or Hiroshima."[3]

One may agree or disagree with this assessment. But it does set the agenda which will be the subject of much debates and controversy among military historians and soldiers. But that is, after all, the nature of history.

The evolving US security strategy

Whoever wants to understand why president George W. Bush decided to go to war with Iraq, according to perhaps the most perceptive analysis to date by the

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[3]   John H. Cushman jr. & Thom Shanker, "A nation at war: combat technology" (*The New York Times*, 10.4.2003).

British journalist Rupert Cornwell,[4] has to go back to the seventies, just after the demoralisation of the Vietnam defeat. At the time, the CIA (then under the leadership of George Bush the elder) was suspected of downplaying the Soviet threat. So an informal group, known as "Team B", came together to second-guess the CIA. Predictably, they came to the conclusion that the Kremlin was indeed a greater threat than the Agency would admit. But the identity of the members was supremely interesting: Donald Rumsfeld (then, as during the Iraq war, secretary of defence), Paul Wolfowitz (in 1993 his deputy), Lewis "Scooter" Libby (chief of staff to the hawkish vice-president, Dick Cheney), Richard Perle (advisor of the Pentagon), and Douglas Feith (in 1993 under-secretary of defence for policy, or number three in the Pentagon).

Now fast-forward to 1992, when Dick Cheney was secretary of defence and Paul Wolfowitz his number three. Wolfowitz then wrote an updated "Defence Planning Guidance", which Cornwell describes as "a strategy blueprint for future military leaders". The document, which was subsequently leaked to the *New York Times*, stated that the US had to dominate the international system to "discourage" the "advanced industrial nations from challenging our leadership or … even aspiring to a larger regional or global role." The US had, therefore, to "retain the pre-eminent responsibility for addressing … those wrongs which threatens not only our interests, but those of our allies and friends …" America thus had to provide its allies with "adult supervision".[5] It also included a second innovation, which *The Observer* summarised as "a doctrine of the use of pre-emptive military force that should include the right and ability to strike first against any threat from chemical or biological weapons".[6]

Cornwell: "It proposed that with the demise of the Soviet Union, the United States doctrine should be to assure that no new superpower arose to threaten America's benign domination. Washington would defend its unique status by sheer military power, but also by being such a constructive force in world affairs that no one would want to challenge it. America would participate in coalitions, but on an *ad hoc* basis. The US would be 'postured to act independently when collective action cannot be orchestrated'. The document called for pre-emptive strikes against states bent on acquiring nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. Among the

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4   Rupert Cornwell, "Analysis: war is almost upon us – but how did it come to this?" (*The Independent*, 6.3.2003).

5   Charles Knight, "Bush administration policy toward Europe: continuity and change" (Project on Defense Alternatives, January 2002), at www.comw.org/ pda/fulltext/0201eurobush.pdf.

6   "Deep roots of Bush's hatred for Saddam" (*The Observer*, 16.3.2003).

hypothetical wars, Mr Wolfowitz imagined, was one against a Saddam Hussein out to avenge defeat in the 1990-91 Gulf war."[7]

This was too strong for the then Bush administration, and the final text was watered down. But, as Cornwell notes, it contains "exactly the thinking that underpins today's *Pax Americana*".[8]

In 1997, yet another piece of the puzzle fell into place. Bill Kristol, editor of the neo-conservative magazine *Weekly Standard*, published a manifesto called *Project for the New American Century*. Signatories included "the old Team B crowd", Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Libby, as well as Cheney. It contained four main recommendations: to increase defence spending; to challenge regimes hostile to US interests and values; to promote political and economic freedom around the globe and to extend an international order conducive to US security, prosperity and values.[9]

In other words, the intellectual underpinning of what happened in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, fell into place during the nineties. But these were simply ideas. Two things were necessary to convert them into a set of practical policies. One was the election of George W. Bush as president of the United States in November 2000. The other was 9/11.

It has become a cliché to say that the events of September 11th, 2001 changed the world. But it is true. More importantly, it changed America profoundly. For the first time in history, mainland America was subjected to a direct assault, and the unconscious feeling of invulnerability the Americans always had, evaporated and was replaced by a deep sense of insecurity. In these circumstances, the new approach suddenly made sense. As Cornwell writes, "With them, the neo-conservatives brought two core beliefs. The threat from terrorism and rogue states was greater than imagined … but, just like Communism, they could be defeated. Second, with the Cold War won, the US had an opportunity – nay, an obligation – to spread its triumphant values around the world.

"The tragic events of 11 September 2001 fused those separate strands into one. The spread of American power and values was not only desirable. It was

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[7]   Cornwell, "Analysis: war is almost upon us – but how did it come to this?" (*The Independent*, 6.3.2003).

[8]   Ibid.

[9]   See the "Statement of principles" at www.newamericancentury.org/ statementofprinciples.htm.

essential for America's very survival. And a frightened country was ready to believe it."[10]

Only a day after the airliners crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were already pushing for an attack on Iraq. During a meeting of the National Security Council on the afternoon of September 12th, Rumsfeld raised the possibility of taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the terrorist attacks to go after Saddam Hussein immediately. No decision was taken, mainly because secretary of state Colin Powell opposed it. At a special brainstorming session with all Bush's main advisors at Camp David on Saturday, September 15th, Wolfowitz pronounced himself worried about the US getting bogged down in Afghanistan, the country which hosted al-Qaeda, the Islamic terrorist movement responsible for 9/11. In contrast, he strongly argued, "Iraq was a brittle, oppressive regime that might break easily. It was doable."[11]

At this stage, his suggestion was not taken up. Bush decided to stay focused on Afghanistan. But the root of the idea was planted. And it grew.

First on the list was, therefore, Afghanistan. Within three weeks after the 9/11 disasters, the Americans had assembled a vast naval armada in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Pakistan with which to attack the Taliban regime in Afghanistan from the air. An equally vast international coalition was forged, consisting to a greater or lesser extent of most countries in the world. Nato invoked article 4 of the Nato charter, obliging all members to assist a fellow member country under attack. In Paris, the traditionally left-wing daily *Le Monde* famously proclaimed in its page 1 banner headline on September 12th, *Nous sommes tous des Américains* ("We are all Americans"). Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia were coaxed into furnishing active or passive military assistance in the war against their fellow Muslim Taliban regime. Before the end of the year, it was all over. Depending on a combination of air strikes, special forces and arming the opposition to the Taliban, the so-called Northern Alliance, all fears of a tough and sustained resistance evaporated. The Taliban regime tumbled like a house of cards. It was time for Wolfowitz to stick out his neck again about Iraq.

Exactly when and how the decision to go to war with Iraq was taken, is not known. Apparently it was taken in secret by a small group of people. Even a "senior Administration official" said in an interview with the *New Yorker* that he did not know. However, Richard Haass, the director of policy-planning staff at the State

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[10]   Cornwell, "Analysis: war is almost upon us – but how did it come to this?"
[11]   Bob Woodward, "Bush at war" (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2002), pp. 49 and 83-91.

Department, told the magazine that he became aware of such a decision in the first week of July, 2002.[12] This may very well be true, because after the war, the US air commander, Lt. Gen. T. Michael Moseley, said in a briefing that the first air strikes against Iraqi targets started from mid-2002 on the network of fibre-optic cable that Saddam Hussein's government used to transmit military communications, as well as airstrikes on key command centres, radars and other important military assets, ostensibly because of Iraqi transgressions of the no-flight zone. This made it possible to start the ground advance without having it preceded by an extended air campaign as in 1991.[13]

However, the first real step in the road to war in Iraq came as early as January 29th, 2002, when Bush delivered his State of the Union address before Congress. There he proclaimed that the real peril was the growing availability of weapons of mass destruction to terrorists or regimes who might be persuaded to use them. In this context, he coined a new phrase – the "Axis of Evil", consisting of Iraq, Iran and North Korea. "States like these, and their terrorist allies," he said, "constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, the regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic." Preempting what would come later, he darkly added: "I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."[14] By April, he was talking about "regime change" in Baghdad.[15]

Yet another very important step was the speech he gave to West Point graduates on June 1st.[16] In stark Wilsonian terms, Bush contrasted good and evil: "Our nation's cause has always been for a just peace – a peace that favors human liberty. We will defend the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers." Uncovering a central pillar of his international security strategy, he continued, "And we will

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[12] Nicholas Lemann, "How it came to war" (*The New Yorker*, 31.3.2003).

[13] Michael R. Gordon, "US air raids in '02 prepared for war in Iraq" (*The New York Times*, 19.7.2003).

[14] See the full text at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/print/20020129-11.html.

[15] Woodward, "Bush at War", p. 329.

[16] The full speech may be read at www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2002/06/mil-020601-usia01b.htm.

extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent." (This was a theme that would reoccur time and again.)

Bush then spoke of how America relied on deterrence for its defence during the Cold War. But, he added, new threats required new thinking. "Deterrence – the promise of massive retaliation against nations – means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment [the name of the policy used against the Soviet Union] is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.

"We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. We cannot put our faith in the words of tyrants, who solemnly sign non-proliferation treaties, and then systematically break them. If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. … [T]he war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge, in the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act."

The president repeatedly returned to the theme of good and evil. In words that would have made most other Western leaders cringe, he denied that it was undiplomatic or impolite "to speak the language of right and wrong". "Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place. … There can be no neutrality between justice and cruelty, between the innocent and the guilty. We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name. By confronting evil and lawless regimes, we do not create a problem, we reveal a problem. And we will lead the world to oppose it."

It was an extraordinary speech, not least for the almost religious belief in America's goodness, but also because of the utter absence of doubt. It was the language of a man who passionately believed that he possessed the absolute truth and that he was on the side of the angels. It was the language of a man willing to go to war to eradicate evil, whatever the consequences.

In its own way, this was a vision basically shared by prime minister Tony Blair of Britain, who went to war in 1999 on the then Yugoslavia of president Slobodan Milosevic, not because it served Britain's national interests, but to eradicate the evil committed to the Kosovar Albanians.[17]

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[17]   See the analysis of Leopold & Ingrid Scholtz, "Pirrhiese oorwinning: Die oorlog in Kosovo" (*Scientia Militaria*, 29/1999, pp. 80-112).

In September 2002 the ideas in Bush's speech were formalised into the Bush Doctrine through the publication of the document "National Security Strategy of the United States".[18]

To be sure, morality has traditionally played a much greater role in the formulation of the US foreign policy than in the case of the cynical Europeans, who repeatedly went to war over matters such as prestige, territorial expansion, to secure trade routes, etc. From the earliest times after independence, the American leaders rejected the European notion that the morality of states should be different from individual morality. Thomas Jefferson famously argued that there existed "but one system of ethics for men and for nations – to be grateful, to be faithful to all engagements under all circumstances, to be open and generous, promoting in the long run even the interests of both".[19] This morality, this belief in its own innate goodness, was a central element of US foreign policy throughout history. Even when declaring war on Germany in 1917, president Woodrow Wilson cast it in moral terms: "[W]e shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts, – for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own Government, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal domination of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free ..."[20]

In the words of George W. Bush on June 1st, 2002, one distinctly hears the echo of Thomas Jefferson and Woodrow Wilson – and indeed, for that matter, of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and other American presidents. But to appreciate the qualitative difference, we briefly have to look at postwar US foreign policy.

America's policy towards the Soviet bloc during the Cold War was one of *containment* (a word alluded to by Bush in his speech). Formulated by the diplomat George Kennan, and taken up by all American heads of state up to Jimmy Carter, it was basically a *defensive* policy, designed to preserve the *status quo* and the balance of power. Especially after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when the world teetered on the brink of an all-out nuclear war,[21] the two superpowers came to a tacit

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[18] See the full document at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc. A useful analysis is the one by Michael E. O'Hanlon, Susan E. Rice and James B. Steinberg, "The new national security strategy and preemption" (Policy brief #113, The Brookings Institution, January 2003) at www.brook.edu/comm/policy/briefs/pb113.htm.

[19] Henry Kissinger, "Diplomacy" (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 32.

[20] Julius W. Pratt, "A history of United States foreign policy" (2nd edition, London, Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 275.

[21] The best analysis is probably by Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, "One hell of a gamble" (London, Pimlico, 1999).

agreement not to wage war in the central theatre – i.e. Europe – but to feel free to keep on competing in the periphery of the world, in Vietnam, Angola, Nicaragua, etc. It was not until the advent of three leaders in the West at the end of the seventies that this was converted into an *offensive* posture. They were president Ronald Reagan of America, prime minister Margaret Thatcher of the UK, and Pope John Paul II in the Vatican. In concert and independently, and each for his or her own reasons, they worked to force the Soviet Union on its knees, which succeeded spectacularly in the years 1989-1991.[22]

It was, therefore, the task of George Bush the elder to manage this inherently dangerous process, which he did quite well, ably assisted by other statesman such as presidents Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR and François Mitterrand of France, and chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany.[23] Nevertheless, his goal was not to *revolutionise* the world order, but to *manage* the transition and *restore* international peace and rule of law. He did this by coalition building and strictly staying within the parameters of international law.

But Bush the younger went much further. He was not content to merely go on the offensive, as his big example, Ronald Reagan, had done; he wanted to *prevent* dangers by *pre-empting* them. And here he clearly crossed a line. He promised to revolutionise US foreign policy.

Perhaps the most authoritative document in international law ruling on matters pertaining war and peace is the United Nations Charter, which all member states (including the US) signed. In article 2, war is in principle declared illegal:

> "2.3 All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.

> "2.4 All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state …"

There are certain exceptions. Article 51 permits self-defence against an unsolicited attack and gives states the right to assist other states which are unlawfully attacked by third parties. And article 42, when read together with article

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[22]   The best analysis is perhaps that of Philip Zelikow & Condoleezza Rice, "Germany unified and Europe transformed. A study in statecraft" (Cambridge, Harvard University Press,1997).

[23]   See the very interesting analysis by Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, "At the highest levels. The inside story of the end of the Cold War" (London, Warner Books, 1994), as well as that of Zelikow & Rice.

53, also permits war by one or more states or an international regional organisation against another state which threatens international peace and stability, *provided the Security Council sanctions it through a resolution*.

In 1999, Nato (with Tony Blair on the forefront), ignored the Charter in their war against Yugoslavia's Milosevic. Nevertheless, the fact that the war was waged by Nato collectively, was a mitigating circumstance in the sense that it was a multilateral war of sorts.

Small wonder, then, that a group of eminent international law professors wrote to a British newspaper, saying that the war against Iraq could only be legitimised by the assent of the Security Council. Ominously, they added: "A decision to undertake military action in Iraq without proper security council authorisation will seriously undermine the international rule of law."[24] Kofi Annan, UN secretary-general, also warned that the war would be a violation of the UN Charter.[25] Even Richard Perle, a well-known hawk and Pentagon advisor, conceded some months after the war that it contravened international law, although he put a positive spin on it. "I think in this case international law stood in the way of doing the right thing," he told a London audience.[26]

Now, in certain circumstances, pre-emptive attack may be lawful. For instance, early in June, 1967, the Israelis got wind of an impending Egyptian attack, which they forestalled by their own offensive. This may be considered part of the right to self-defence. Bush, however, went much further. He reserved the right to attack countries *who might, in his government's view, become a threat at some unspecified time in the future*. This goes beyond a lawful pre-emptive attack. What he had in mind, was a *preventive* attack – essentially the same motive which drove European statesmen to war in 1914 and Japanese leaders in 1941.[27]

The international political scientist Jeffrey Record aptly sums it up: "The difference between preemption and preventive war is important … pre-emptive attack is justifiable if it meets secretary of state Daniel Webster's strict criteria, enunciated in 1837 and still the legal standard, that the threat be 'instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means and no moment for deliberation'. Pre-emptive war has legal sanction. Preventive war, on the other hand, has none, because

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[24]   "War would be illegal" (*The Guardian*, 6.3.2003).

[25]   Patrick E. Tyler and Felicity Barringer, "Annan says US will violate Charter if it acts without approval" (*The New York Times*, 11.3.2003).

[26]   Rory McCarthy, "Americans to hand over key town to Iraqi police" (*The Guardian*, 19.11.2003).

[27]   See for example the provocative book by Fritz Fischer, "Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/1918" (Düsseldorf, Droste, 1961); and John Costello, "The Pacific War" (London, Collins, 1981).

the threat is neither certain nor imminent. This makes preventive war indistinguishable from outright aggression, which may explain why the Bush Administration insists that its strategy is pre-emptive, although some Cabinet officials have used the terms interchangeably."[28]

Traditionally, US foreign policy has oscillated between – or were even a mixture of – *isolationism* and *messianism*, both resting on the belief of American moral superiority. According to at least one perceptive and influential international commentator, former West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, Bush now introduced a third element, namely *imperialism*.[29] To be sure, this would not necessarily be the traditional kind of imperialism, consisting of conquest, submission, permanent occupation and exploitation, but rather a "soft" version. But imperialism it would be all the same.

In George W. Bush, all three elements came together. Before 9/11, his course was largely isolationist. His administration refused to ratify the Kyoto Convention on pollution, to recognise the International Tribunal on War Crimes, and he let the Antiballistic Missiles Treaty, one of the pillars of the Cold War *détente* with the Soviet Union and its successor, Russia, lapse. The Administration did so "as brusquely as it could," according to the renowned American political scientist Fareed Zakaria. "It reneged on virtually every diplomatic effort that the Clinton administration had engaged in, from North Korea to the Middle East, often overturning public statements from Colin Powell supporting these efforts. It developed a language and diplomatic style that seemed calculated to offend the world."[30]

Even after 9/11, Bush did not abandon isolationism It cost Colin Powell a hard fight to persuade him to try the Security Council route in order to legitimise the attack on Iraq. And when that sanction was denied him, he went to war virtually unilaterally anyway. To Bob Woodward Bush explained: "Well, we're never going to get people all in agreement about force and use of force. But action – confident action that will yield positive results provides kind of a slipstream into which reluctant nations and leaders can get behind and show themselves that there has been – you know, something positive has happened towards peace." Woodward

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[28]   Jeffrey Record, "The Bush Doctrine and war with Iraq" (*Parameters*, Spring 2003, p. 7).

[29]   Jochen Bölsche, "Das Imperium Americanum schlägt zurück" (*Spiegel online*, 18.2.2003), at www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,236448,00.html.

[30]   Fareed Zakaria, "Where Bush went wrong" (*Newsweek*, 24.3.2003).

interpreted these words as "suggesting that an international coalition or the United Nations were probably not viable ways to deal with dangerous, rogue states".[31]

An American newspaper quoted a "senior diplomat" from a UN Security Council member state, saying that US officials told him: "You are not going to decide whether there is to be war in Iraq or not. That decision is ours, and we have already made it. It is already final. The only question now is whether the council will go along with it or not."[32] Rumsfeld put it even more brusquely: "The mission defines the coalition, not the coalition the mission."[33] In his own speech when presenting Saddam with an ultimatum to do away with his weapons of mass destruction, Bush also stood away from international law, saying the US had "the sovereign authority to use force in assuring its own national security … This is not a question of authority. It is a question of will."[34]

Another factor which influenced this situation, was the war in Kosovo. According to the British chief of the defence staff, Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, who may be assumed to know at least something about the mind of the Bush administration, "the United States has less need of consensus than we do. They are still seared by their experiences with NATO during the Kosovo conflict."[35] This referred to the laborious way in which the NATO allies had to obtain consensus for just about each decision, which hampered operations to a great extent and caused a lot of frustration. Going it alone, the Americans apparently felt, would enhance the efficiency of their operations.

According to some reports, the US even contemplated using nuclear weapons against Iraq,[36] but this never materialised. Nevertheless, Pentagon documents were leaked according to which the Bush administration was considering the construction of a new generation of nuclear weapons, including "mini-nukes", nuclear bunker-busters and neutron bombs designed to destroy chemical or biological weapons.[37]

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[31]   Woodward, "Bush at war", p. 341.

[32]   Karen deYoung, "US officials say UN future at stake in vote" (*Washington Post*, 25.2.2003).

[33]   Donald   Rumsfeld's   speech   on   transformation,   31.1.2002,   at www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2002/01/mil-020131-dod01.htm.

[34]   Doyle McManus, "To Bush, war may be ultimate problem-solver" (*Los Angeles Times*, 18.3.2003).

[35]   Speech in London on December 10th, 2001, at www. global-defence.com/2002/int-eur.html.

[36]   William M. Arkin, "The nuclear option in Iraq" (*Los Angeles Times*, 26.1.2003).

[37]   Julian Borger, "US plan for new nuclear arsenal" (*The Guardian*, 19.2.2003).

In an open letter, John Brady Kiesling, a career diplomat who resigned in protest against the Bush administration policy, portrayed that policy by referring to a favourite saying of the Roman Emperor Caligula, *Oderint dum metuant*. Freely translated, "let them hate as long as they fear."[38] And veteran diplomats in the State Department bitterly complained of the Pentagon's "hijacking of foreign policymaking and efforts to undercut their boss, secretary of state Colin L. Powell".[39]

The message was clear. Saddam had to go. If possibly, with the authorisation of the Security Council. Barring that, with the help of a "coalition of the willing". And if nobody was willing, the US would do it alone. But the job would be done.

In a critical analysis, the influential US policy analyst Richard Haass, chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations and until June 2003 director of foreign planning at the State Department, made a distinction between wars of *choice* and wars of *necessity*. Most wars, he wrote, are of the last category. "The debate can and will go on as to whether attacking Iraq was a wise decision, but at its core it was a war of choice. We did not have to go to war against Iraq, certainly not when we did. There were other options: to rely on other policy tools, to delay attacking, or both. Iraq was thus fundamentally different from World War II or Korea or even the Persian Gulf War, all of which qualify as wars of necessity."[40]

George Bush, it appears, is not a man given to doubt. A reformed alcoholic and reborn Christian, his presidency, according to one analysis, "is the most resolutely 'faith-based' in modern times, an enterprise founded, supported and guided by trust in the temporal and spiritual power of God. Money matters, as does military might. But the Bush administration is dedicated to the idea that there is an answer to societal problems here and to terrorism abroad: give everyone, everywhere, the freedom to find God, too." The core of the present-day Republican Party is the evangelical movement in political life. Its strongest backers are conservative Christians.[41] Also, his biggest supporters hail from the southern states, where the new security strategy of shooting before asking questions is considered "only logical". "White Southerners," writes a journalist, "are the most martial subculture in the United States. Private military academies are as commonplace in the South as liberal-arts-colleges are in New England. Southern whites have always

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38   Paul Krugman, "Let them hate as long as they fear" (*The New York Times*, 7.3.2003).
39   Sonni Efron, "Diplomats on the defensive" (*Los Angeles Times*, 8.5.2003).
40   Richard N. Haass, "Wars of choice" (*Washington Post*, 23.11.2003).
41   Howard Fineman, "Bush and God" (*Newsweek*, 10.3.2003).

been, and remain, overrepresented in the U.S. military – and underrepresented in the diplomatic corps."[42]

The war aims

In accordance with the US national security strategy, there never was any doubt about the American war aims. There were basically two immediate ones: the disarming of Iraq, and the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime. The two aims were used interchangeably, although, while he still hoped to get the sanction of the Security Council, Bush emphasised the disarming motive and downplayed the regime change element. From the myriad of pronouncements, it is, at any rate, clear that the two were irrevocably intermeshed. Disarmament was not possible without regime change, it was believed.

It would, however, appear, that disarmament and regime change were but the beginning of a much more ambitious war aim – nothing less than a democratic revolution in the Middle East. Colin Powell cast it in very benign terms when he told the Al Arabiya TV news network that the purpose was to make "Iraq a good neighbour that is not developing weapons, that is not threatening its neighbours … So we are going into Iraq not to destroy the place, but to make it better."[43] Underlaying this, according to the understanding of the influential Harvard historian Paul Kennedy, is the aim "to transform and reform the Middle East. The region would thus be brought into the modern world … and have Western-style democracy thrust upon it through an odd combination of Wilsonian idealism and Reaganite muscularity."[44]

Thus Paul Wolfowitz said some months before the outbreak of the war, "If people are liberated to run their countries the way they want to, we'll have a world that will be very congenial for American interests."[45] And Robert Kagan and William Kristol, leading ideologues of what may be called the US democratic imperialists and very near to Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, wrote in their magazine *Weekly Standard*, "A devastating knockout blow against Saddam Hussein, followed by an American-sponsored effort to rebuild Iraq and put it on a path toward democratic governance, would have a seismic impact on the Arab world – for the better. The Arab world may take a long time coming to terms with the West, but that process will be hastened by the defeat of the leading anti-western Arab tyrant. Once

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42   Michael Lind, "Bush whistles Dixie" (*Newsweek*, 23.12.2002).
43   Reuters news report, 21.2.2003, as sent out to the media.
44   Paul Kennedy, "The perils of empire" (*The Washington Post*, 20.4.2003).
45   Ivo H. Daalder & James M. Lindsay, "It's hawk vs. hawk in the Bush administration" (*The Washington Post*, 27.10.2002). Cf. also David Ignatius, "Wolfowitz' war: not over yet" (*Washington Post*, 13.5.2003).

Iraq and Turkey – two of the three most important Middle Eastern powers – are both in the pro-western camp, there is a reasonable chance that smaller powers might decide to jump on the bandwagon."[46]

In the same vein, "high-ranking Pentagon officials" told an American newspaper that the US was planning a long-term military relationship with the new Iraqi government, which would grant the Pentagon access to military bases and project American influence far beyond the Iraqi borders, including Iran and Syria.[47]

In the end, the Bush administration formally formulated eight war aims:

- To end the regime of Saddam Hussein;

- To identify, isolate and eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction;

- To search for, to capture and to drive out terrorists from that country;

- To collect such intelligence as can be related to the global network of illicit weapons of mass destruction;

- To end sanctions and to immediately deliver humanitarian support to the displaced and needy Iraqi citizens;

- To secure Iraq's oil fields and resources; and

- To help the Iraqi people create conditions for a transition to representative self-government.[48]

However, this only came about at the last minute. For a long time, the military were confused about what some called "confused objectives".[49]

The international wrangling

In the months preceding the war, an unedifying international wrangling took place largely in public about the role, if any, the UN Security Council had to play. In the process Nato unity was dealt the heaviest blow since its founding in 1949.

At issue was the question whether America should go the Security Council route to seek international sanction for its proposed war on Iraq. Within the Bush

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[46] Robert Kagan & William Kristol, "What to do about Iraq" (*Weekly Standard*, 21.2.2002).
[47] Tom Shanker & Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon expects long-term access to four key bases in Iraq" (*The New York Times*, 20.4.2003).
[48] Briefing on military operations in Iraq by General Tommy Franks, 22.3.2003, at www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/Transcripts/20030322.htm.
[49] Richard Norton-Taylor, "Commanders infuriated by delays and confusion over objectives" (*The Guardian*, 26.4.2003).

Administration, there was intense divisions – largely between the civilian overseers of the Pentagon (especially Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz) and the State Department, with Colin Powell at the forefront. Indicative of the negative feelings within the right wing of the Republican Party about the UN, John Bolton, senior vice president of the American Enterprise Institute, and later fourth man at the State Department (to be sure, no friend of Colin Powell), already in a 1994 panel discussion sponsored by the World Federalist Association claimed "there's no such thing as the United Nations", and stated "if the UN secretary building in New York lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference."[50] In 1997 he wrote that "the United Nations has a limited role to play in international affairs for the foreseeable future".[51]

At first, it seemed as if the anti-UN people would get their way. Without consulting either Powell or Bush himself, Dick Cheney declared himself to be against UN weapons inspections because there was a danger that it would provide "false comfort" to the anti-Iraqi powers. Powell nearly went through the roof, because this flew against everything he believed in. With Bush's national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, as intermediary, he then secured a long interview with the president, convincing him to seek UN authorisation first before striking. Tony Blair simultaneously applied pressure from London. Bush agreed.[52]

So on September 12th, Bush stood on the podium before the General Assembly to make his case. On the one hand he said, "My nation will work with the UN Security Council to meet our common challenge", and "We will work with the UN Security Council for the necessary resolutions". But he also added: "But the purposes of the United States should not be doubted. The Security Council resolutions will be enforced – the just demands of peace and security will be met – or action will be unavoidable."

His last sentences were especially revealing: "We must choose between a world of fear and a world of progress. We cannot stand by and do nothing while dangers gather. We must stand up for our security, and for the permanent rights and the hopes of mankind." And then he threw down the gauntlet: "By heritage and by choice, the United States of America will make that stand. And, delegates to the United Nations, you have the power to make that stand, as well."[53]

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[50]   Quoted by the Council for a Liveable World: "Oppose John Bolton's nomination as State Department's arms control leader!", at www.clw.org/bush/opposebolton.html.

[51]   John Bolton, "America's skepticism of the United Nations" (*USIA Electronic Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May 1997), at usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0597/ijpe/pj2bolt.htm.

[52]   Woodward, **"**Bush at war", pp. 344-345; Patrick Wintour & Martin Kettle, "Brought to the brink of defeat – part 1" (*The Guardian*, 26.4.2003).

[53]   Full text of the speech at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html.

Nobody could mistake his meaning. If the UN wanted to help, good and well. If not, the US would go it alone.

Indeed, US and British diplomats immediately went to work to draw up a Security Council resolution. However, things almost immediately went wrong. Because of a technical hitch, Bush's words about a Security Council resolution did not come up on the teleprompter, which caused Colin Powell to almost have a heart attack. However, the president ad-libbed, and talked about "resolutions" – plural. The French minister of foreign affairs, Dominique de Villepin, promptly jumped on that, and demanded a process of *two* resolutions: First, to call on Iraq to allow the resumption of weapons inspections which had been stopped by Saddam Hussein in 1998, and if that did not go satisfactorily, a second resolution to authorise "all measures necessary" (diplomat-speak for war).[54] This resulted in Resolution 1441 on November 8th, threatening Iraq with "serious consequences" – the nature of which were not spelt out – if it didn't co-operate. The resolution was passed unanimously, even with the support of Syria.[55]

But that was as far as it went. The inspectors duly went into Iraq under the leadership of dr. Hans Blix of Sweden, but did not find any weapons of mass destruction. And contrary to what the Americans expected, Blix's reports to the Security Council increasingly became more sceptical of the US' assertions that Iraq had lots of weapons of mass destruction stashed away. At one such altercation, the French minister of foreign affairs, Dominique de Villepin, swept the floor with Colin Powell and, in effect, humiliated him in the full glare of world attention. This angered the normally doveish Powell so much that he henceforth strongly leaned towards the hawks in his own government.[56]

In the end, no second resolution was passed, France's president Jacques Chirac and Russia's president Vladimir Putin having made it quite clear that they would veto such a resolution. America, together with Britain, went to war alone, albeit with a small Australian contingent of SAS troops and with the political support of the governments of countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Japan.

The fallout was heavy. The rift between the Anglo-Saxon powers on the one hand and France, Germany and to a somewhat lesser extent Russia, became a huge valley which caused some commentators to ask whether Nato would survive it.

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[54]   Wintour & Kettle, "Brought to the brink of defeat – parft 1" *(The Guardian*, 26.4.2003).

[55]   Full text at www.iaea.or.at/worldatom/Press/Focus/IaeaIraq/iraqres.pdf.

[56]   Kamal Ahmed et al, "Worlds apart on war" (*The Observer*, 16.2.2003).

Each of these powers had their own reasons for doing what they did. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's position was, perhaps, the most cynical of all. During the summer of 2002 he was desperately battling to be re-elected, his Social Democratic Party trailing the opinion polls by far. A flood in the Danube and Poltava basins, which he handled deftly, helped his political fortunes. But he also strongly played on the Germans' pacifist feelings which they acquired after the Second World War, saying that he would under no circumstances support a war against Iraq.

For Schröder it was simply a question of getting re-elected. It had probably little to do with matters of principle or his views on Germany's national interests. But to know why the electorate fell for it, one has to understand the German psyche. James W. Davis, an American-born professor of international relations at the University of Munich, perceptively wrote: "The categorical rejection of the use of force in Iraq, however, has less to do with Germany's view of the US than it does with Germans' view of themselves. Debates over how to deal with international conflicts, whether in the Balkans or the Middle East, are in the first instance confrontations with German history.

> "Whereas Americans derive their foreign policy from a strong sense of national interest formed by national ideals, Germans view international politics first through the prism of a national identity that is very much a work in progress. Germans of Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer's generation define themselves through their opposition to the political values of their parents and grandparents. Theirs is the generation that asked: What did you know? Their pacifist reflexes are genuine and flow from an acceptance of Germany's historical guilt."[57]

And the German commentator Rafael Seligmann observed that the one fact which differentiated the Germans from their fellow Europeans, was "Germany's Hitler trauma". In Germany, "the horror of war is so high, that many rational arguments no longer function".[58]

Whereas Schröder painted himself into a corner right from the beginning, Chirac started off by keeping all doors open. He even hinted in a speech that France could join the war, and sent a naval task force, including the nuclear aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, to the eastern Mediterranean in a move that was widely interpreted as a desire to be ready to participate in the attack if necessary.[59] Even

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[57]   James W. Davis, "Germans spooked by history" (*Los Angeles Times*, 24.2.2003).
[58]   Rafael Seligmann, "Schröder benutzt das Hitler-trauma" (*Die Welt*, 14.2.2003).
[59]   Julian Borger, "Chirac backs inspection deadline" (*The Guardian*, 10.9.2002).

during the first weeks of February 2003, Tony Blair apparently still believed that Chirac would come around and support the war after all.[60]

However, after meeting Schröder in Paris for the 40th celebration of the Franco-German Friendship Treaty of 1963 in the beginning of 2003, Chirac increasingly moved over to the German side, and openly threatened to use the French veto to prevent a Security Council resolution to authorise the war. In a TV interview he was blunt: "We are not in a conflict with the United States … but we have a problem of principles, I would say a moral problem. Are we going to war if we have perhaps a means of avoiding it? That's where France, following its traditions, says if there is a means of avoiding it, we must do all we can."[61]

Whoever knows something of French history and the very pragmatic French political culture, will find this high moral principled stand hard to swallow. Moreover, a knowledgeable observer such as professor Andrew Knapp, expert on French politics at Reading University in the UK, pointed to the fact that Chirac was known to tend to follow the people whom he was leading. In fact, Knapp said, "[h]e is not a conviction politician, by and large, but a consensus politician who reacts to short-term stimuli and who has been accused of lacking a longer-term strategy."[62] Also, Chirac's verbal assault on Central European nations who dared support the American position, cast some doubt on his political morality. "These nations have let the opportunity go to keep their mouths shut," he said, prompting accusations of Gallic arrogance.[63]

Many commentators also accused the French of hankering after their supposedly glorious past, which they wished to recreate by standing up to the Americans. Others, such as the American hawk Richard Perle, pointed to the French economic interests in Iraq: "[T]he French president has found his own way of dealing with Saddam Hussein. It would be counter to French interests to destroy that cosy relationship and replace it with a hostile one."[64]

Whatever the merits or demerits of the relative positions, it was, in the end, quite clear that Nato was the big loser of the transatlantic rift. This showed in the unedifying spectacle of Nato members squabbling for more than a week in Brussels about the possibility of sending military help to fellow member Turkey in case Iraq attacked it. Predictably, France, Germany and also Belgium opposed it, while Britain and the others were in favour. Although the US won after a while, it did so only by

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60   Nicholas Watt et al, "Blair confident of French support" (*The Guardian*, 3.2.2003).

61   Sebastian Rotella, "Chirac seals role as US critic" (*Los Angeles Times*, 11.3.2003).

62   Ibid.

63   Jacques Schuster, "L'Europe, c'est moi" (*Die Welt*, 19.2.2003).

64   "Top Bush aide savages 'selfish' Chirac" (*The Observer*, 23.2.2003).

bypassing the North Atlantic Council, the Nato governing body of which France was a member, and forcing the issue in the Defence Planning Council, the military body where France does not participate. But the damage was done. Nato unity lay in tatters.[65] In fact, after the war, the Americans began discussing to punish France by shifting decisions asked of Nato permanently to the Defence Planning Council. As a matter of fact, when asked by a journalist whether France would suffer the consequences, Colin Powell's answer was short and blunt: "Yes."[66]

"It seems hard to believe," an American journalist wrote, "that the United States and Europe are actually old friends and partners and that their alliance is at the heart of a Western culture based on personal liberty and political democracy."[67] And Gen. Klaus Naumann, who used to be chairman of the Nato Military Council during the Kosovo War, was scathing in his criticism of Gerhard Schröder. International confidence in Germany had taken a heavy knock, he wrote in a newspaper article. "Germany has lost confidence and its particular role in Nato. Germany was the bridging member which glued Europe with the USA, even more so than Great Britain. … That is now finished. … German influence has been lost …"[68]

At the heart of things, the rift reflected how American and European political cultures had diverged. François Heisbourg, director of the Foundation for Strategic Research, a Paris think tank, observed, "The biblical references in politics, the division of the world between good and evil, these are things that we [Europeans] simply don't get. In a number of areas, it seems that we are no longer part of the same civilization. You have a fairly religious society on the one hand and generally secular societies on the other operating with different references. What would unite us does not seem to be in the forefront."[69] At the same time, the growing integration of the European Union illustrates that to the Europeans the sovereign nation-state is no longer the one and only building-block of international politics. The Americans still cling to the idea. Whereas the Americans view military power as the key to achieving international goals, including liberal ones, the Europeans have created a zone where warfare is absolutely unthinkable. Lastly, the

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[65]   Ian Black, "France snubbed as Nato strikes Turkish deal" (*The Guardian*, 17.2.2003).
[66]   Elisabeth Bumiller, "US angry at French stance on war, considers punishment" (*The New York Times*, 24.3.2004).
[67]   Sebastian Rotella, "Rift with Europe runs deep" (*Los Angeles Times*, 18.2.2003).
[68]   Klaus Naumann, "Die Nato – erstes Opfer Saddam Husseins" (*Welt am Sonntag*, 16.2.2003).
[69]   Sebastian Rotella, "Rift with Europe runs deep" (*Los Angeles Times*, 18.2.2003).

American cultural inferiority complex vis-à-vis the Europeans has faded.[70] Whatever the case, the natural transatlantic alliance seemed to be unravelling.

Russia had its own reasons for opposing the American/British war in Iraq. According to one analyst, "the Kremlin decided that a cold calculation of its interests dictated that it side with France and Germany in opposing war, not in quietly assenting to American pressure. Economics is … a key factor, but not necessarily in Washington's favor. In purely monetary terms, war-weary Europe easily trumps the United States: Russian trade with Germany alone roughly equals that with America, and Russia's biggest company, the state-controlled monopoly Gazprom, supplies a healthy share of Europe's natural gas." Besides, some Russian commentators quietly exulted in the "comeuppance after years of steamrolling Russian objections to things like the NATO air war against Yugoslavia, the junking of the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty, the expansion of NATO, etc."[71]

The Russians even went further. After the fall of Baghdad, a British newspaper reporter, rummaging in the smoking headquarters of the Iraqi Intelligence Service in the capital, stumbled on documents showing that the Russian Federal Security Bureau (successor to the infamous KGB) had spied on Tony Blair and gave the information to Saddam. The Russian spies apparently also briefed Saddam on American political strategy: They told him that America's plans depended on Iraq obstructing the UN weapons inspections team. (The Russians subsequently denied the allegations, but they certainly do have the ring of truth.)[72]

Tony Blair was one of the few statesmen who got out of this bruising fight with his reputation enhanced, even if only temporarily. He took a very big risk in supporting the war, seeing that a majority of the Britons were not with him on this. Along with Colin Powell, he fought quite hard to get Bush to agree to go the UN route, and when this did not materialise, things for a while looked bad for him. However, in the end, despite almost despairing about his political survival, in an impassioned plea he got the House of Commons to back him.[73]

Blair was apparently very much moved by idealism, believing that war was a justified means of deposing dictators and improving people's lives. This was what

[70]   See the very interesting analysis by Timothy Garton Ash, "Anti-Europeanism in America" (*The New York Review of Books*, 13.2.2003).

[71]   Michael Wines, "In Russia, no time for gloating" (*The New York Times*, 7.3.2003).

[72]   David Harrison, "Revealed: Russia spied on Blair for Saddam" (*The Telegraph*, 13.4.2003); David Harrison, "Russian spies told Saddam how Bush would justify war" (*The Telegraph*, 20.4.2003).

[73]   Wintour & Kettle, "Brought to the brink of defeat – part 2" (*The Guardian*, 26.4.2003); Gaby Hinsliff et al, "Blair stakes his political future on beating Iraq" (*The Observer*, 16.2.2003).

also drove him during the controversial Kosovo War. In an article which laid bare his political beliefs (and, incidentally, also illustrated his position before and during Gulf II) he wrote at the time, "We are fighting for a world where dictators are no longer able to visit horrific punishments on their own peoples in order to stay in power. We need to enter a new millennium where dictators know that they cannot get away with ethnic cleansing or repress their peoples with impunity. In this conflict we are fighting not for territory but for values. For a new internationalism where the brutal repression of whole ethnic groups will no longer be tolerated. For a world where those responsible for such crimes have nowhere to hide."[74]

A man clearly as idealistic as Blair surely formed a strange bed-fellow with Bush, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and the other Washington hawks. No wonder that Blair, according to some reports, remained in intensive secret contact with his old partner, former president Bill Clinton, seeking advice on how to unlock the diplomatic impasse between Europe and the US in the build-up to war. It didn't help, mainly because of the obduracy of Bush as well as Chirac.[75]

Anyhow, the intense international fight, the transatlantic rift in NATO and the bypassing of the UN Security Council left the international legal order in tatters. It clearly opened up the possibility of international politics reverting to the instability and chaos which characterised it before World War II. "If this keeps up," Henry Kissinger said in an interview, "we will wind up in a sort of 19th-century balance-of-power game …"[76]

The protagonists

There can be no question that the Vietnam War was – perhaps apart from the Civil War – the most traumatic conflict in the entire American history. According to Henry Kissinger, the war caused the American public to question the American values which brought them into the war in the first place. "American society did not debate, as others might have, the practical shortcomings of its policies but America's worthiness to pursue *any* international role. It was this aspect of the Vietnam debate that produced wounds which have proved so painful and so difficult to heal."[77]

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[74] Cited in Scholtz & Scholtz, "Pirrhiese oorwinning" (*Scientia Militaria* 29/1999, pp. 88-89).

[75] Wintour & Kettle, "Brought to the brink of defeat – part 2" (*The Guardian*, 26.4.2003); Patrick Wintour, "Blair's secret war meetings with Clinton" (*The Guardian*, 25.4.2003).

[76] Patrick E. Tyler, "A fissure deepening for allies over use of force against Iraq" (*The New York Times*, 6.3.2003).

[77] Kissinger, "Diplomacy", p. 621.

This trauma and loss of confidence also applied to the American military. In 1973, the draft law, ensuring a steady stream of recruits into uniform, expired, and the military had to adapt to being a professional force. But the quality of the new recruits were low, and many professionals left the force. Tom Clancy writes about these testing times that "many in the Army were on drugs, mostly hashish, but some were on heroin. There was racial violence in the barracks, which sometimes spilled over into the streets. Gangs ran some barracks. Leaders – officers or non-commissioned officers – were physically attacked. The chain of command in units struggled day to day simply to maintain good order and discipline.

"It was not an Army that expected to win, or was ready to win."[78]

When the strategist Col. Harry Summers somewhat diffidently remarked to a North Vietnamese officer a week before the fall of Saigon, "You know you never beat us on the battlefield", the answer was: "That may be so. But it is also irrelevant."[79] This remark, together with a study of the lightning Yom Kippur War of 1973, proved to be the spark of an intellectual renaissance in the American military, as they tried to understand why their overwhelming firepower and technology was to no avail against a far more primitive army. Summers himself wrote a famous scathing analysis of the US conduct in Vietnam, in which he came to the conclusion that the American loss had to be explained on the strategic level, and that this was primarily because the American military did not have an adequate intellectual grasp of strategy.[80]

The intellectual leaders of the renaissance were officers such as Generals Creighton Abrams, William E. DuPuy, Glenn K. Otis, John H. Cushman, and Huba Wass de Czege, and this included a rediscovery of the relevance of the strategic thoughts of the Prussian war philosopher Carl von Clausewitz. This resulted in a multi-pronged new operational doctrine, known as AirLand Battle, which made use of forgotten concepts such as mobility, inter-arms co-operation, surprise and speed.[81] Also, the so-called deep battle doctrine, first formulated by Soviet marshal Mikhail

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[78]   Tom Clancy, "Into the storm. On the ground in Iraq" (London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 2000), p. 85.

[79]   Harry G. Summers jr, "On Strategy II. A critical analysis of the Gulf War" (New York, Dell, 1992), p. 45.

[80]   Harry G. Summers jr, "On Strategy. The Vietnam war in context" (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, US Army War College, 1982).

[81]   See Summers, "On Strategy II", chapters 4-8; Clancy, "Into the storm", chapter 5. Cf. also Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales, jr, "The Iraq war. A military history" (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap, 2003), pp. 46-47.

Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky in the thirties, influenced US strategic and operational thinking to a great extent.[82]

On the national security strategic level, the then chairman of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Colin Powell – he reappears in these pages as secretary of state – formulated the so-called Powell Doctrine. This boiled down to the following: Wage war only with the greatest reluctance, and only when America's national interests are directly at stake. But when you do, do it surely and swiftly and with all the might at your disposal.[83] On his Pentagon desk Powell displayed a saying by the Athenian historian Thucydides: "Of all manifestations of power, restraint impresses men most."[84]

On the material side, much energy and money was poured into new weapons. These included "smart" bombs and missiles, but also the hugely successful M1A1 and M1A2 Abrams main battle tank, the M2/3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle, as well as new navigation systems (GPS) and nightfighting equipment.

All these came together in March 1991. Iraq's dictator, president Saddam Hussein, made the mistake of invading Kuwait on August 2nd, 1990, and underestimating the resolve of the US and its leader, president George H.W. Bush, to free the tiny sheikdom. The Americans assembled probably the largest international coalition since 1945, countries sending troops being the US itself, the UK, France, Italy, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco and even Syria. After a five week air campaign in which the Iraqi air force was decimated and the army pounded into submission, it took a ground campaign of only a hundred hours to cut the occupation forces off from their hinterland and force most into surrender. Interestingly enough, this took the form of a giant "left hook", a flanking march past and through the elite Republican Guard, in the best tradition of the "indirect approach", first mooted in the twenties and thirties by the British military thinker Sir Basil Liddell Hart, and now rediscovered by the Americans.

However, when president Bush ordered the tanks to halt, a narrow corridor in the vicinity of Basra was still open, and through this gap poured most of what survived of the Republican Guard. In the months hereafter, the southern Shiites and the Kurds in the north rebelled, but with the remains of the Republican Guard, Saddam crushed the rebellion mercilessly. Sanctions was ordered by the UN to induce the Iraqi leader to give up his weapons of mass destruction. UN weapons

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[82]   Cf. Richard Simpkin & John Erickson, "Deep battle. The brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevsky" (London, Brassey, 1987).
[83]   See for instance Rick Atkinson, "Crusade. The untold story of the Gulf War" (London, HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 122-123.
[84]   Bob Woodward, "The Commanders" (New York, Pocket Star, 1991), p. 128.

inspectors were led on a goose chase by the Iraqis, and in 1998 they kicked the inspectors out. The matter of weapons of mass destruction would play a major role in the forging of a second war, with the Americans now being under the leadership of president George W. Bush, son of Bush the elder.

The Gulf War taught the Americans a lot, especially as far as the use of precision aerial weapons was concerned. The videos given out by the Pentagon at the time gave the false impression of a clinical war, without damage or casualties. However, only about 10% of the bombs used in that war were "smart". In the Kosovo War that percentage reached about 70. As a matter of fact, Kosovo was won from the air, without ground troops being committed, although the threat of ground operations did play an important role in persuading Slobodan Milosevic to withdraw from the territory.[85] Once again, a lot of hope was placed in these weapons, which had been refined to a great extent since Gulf I.

Then came the war in Afghanistan as the Americans hit back at the terrorist group al-Qaeda, which was responsible for 9/11, and at the Taliban regime in Afghanistan which housed the terrorists. In contrast to Gulf I, but more in line with Kosovo, the US placed its trust in air attacks. Some special forces were committed. The boots on the ground were, however, provided by the so-called Northern Alliance, a collective of rebel groups.

This fits in quite nicely with the ideas of the US secretary of defence, Donald Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld had been trying to transform the US defence force, and especially the army, ever since he took office in January 2001, often against the strong opposition of the Generals. It did not help that Rumsfeld was strong-willed and quite arrogant, often treating three- or four-star Generals and Admirals like recruits. Once, Rumsfeld confronted Gen. Eric Shinseki, the army chief of staff, yelling at him in front of junior officers, "Are you *getting* this yet? Are you *getting* this yet?"[86] Apparently, relations between Rumsfeld and Shinseki, an American of Japanese descent, were not good. In the month before the war, the two publicly repudiated each other about how many troops would be needed after the fighting to keep the peace: Shinseki said several hundred thousand, Rumsfeld called it "far off the mark" and then Shinseki repeated it in public.[87] (After the war, it became clear that Shinseki was right after all.)

The secretary's ideal was for a much smaller and lighter army than the one he inherited, depending much less on heavy arms and much more on massive air

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[85]   Scholtz & Scholtz, "Pirrhiese oorwinning" (*Scientia Militaria* 29/1999, pp. 101 and 104).
[86]   Seymor M. Hersh, "Offense and defense" (*The New Yorker*, 7.4.2003).
[87]   Matthew Engel, "Scorned General's tactics proved right" (*The Guardian*, 29.3.2003).

power, special forces and lightning speed. In a speech before students at the National Defense University on January 31st, 2002, Rumsfeld laid bare his soul on the question of military transformation. He referred to the Afghan Northern Alliance's advance to the city of Mazhar, the first ground victory of the war, through a combination of precision air strikes on Taliban positions, help from US special forces, and Northern Alliance fighters, some riding on horseback. This showed, he said, that the revolution in military affairs is "about more than building new high tech weapons, though that is certainly part of it. It's also about new ways of thinking, and new ways of fighting."

During the Cold War, Rumsfeld continued, the US faced a fairly predictable set of threats. No more. What was needed now, was "rapidly deployable, fully integrated joint forces capable of reaching distant theaters quickly and working with our air and sea forces to strike adversaries swiftly, successfully, and with devastating effect. We need improved intelligence, long-range precision strikes, sea-based platforms to help counter the access denial capabilities of adversaries." It also included "rebalancing existing forces and capabilities" by reducing weapons systems that were no longer necessary, such as nuclear bombs, heavy armour and artillery.[88]

As a matter of fact, new weapons systems used for the first time either in Kosovo or Afghanistan, opened up lots of vistas for military transformation. Apart from "smart" precision weapons (such as laser- or satellite-GPS-guided bombs and missiles), the main new type introduced in Afghanistan were two types of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's), the RQ-1 Predator and the high-altitude Global Hawk. Predators first saw action in Bosnia in 1995, while a prototype of the Global Hawk first flew in the Afghan War. These would make it much easier for the attacking coalition forces to reconnoitre enemy positions without endangering their own pilots.[89] In Afghanistan, Northern Alliance fighters were also amazed to see special forces equipped with digital satellite phones calling in precision strikes which materialised within minutes and simply decimating the Taliban forces.[90]

One other weapon system which got a lot of publicity, probably to intimidate the Iraqis, was the so-called MOAB (Massive Ordnance Air Blast, nicknamed Mother of all Bombs). According to a Reuters news report, this 9 450 kg bomb "spreads a flammable mist over the target, then ignites it, producing a highly destructive blast". It was produced as the most powerful conventional bomb in the

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[88]   Speech   at   www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2002/01/mil-020131-dod01.htm.

[89]   Eric Schmitt, "In the skies over Iraq, silent observers become futuristic weapons" (*The New York Times*, 18.4.2003).

[90]   Reuters analysis, 13.3.2003, as sent out to the media.

US arsenal. And then there was the 6 750 kg Daisy Cutter, about the size of a Volkswagen, pushed out of a C-130, designed to kill troops within at least 550 metres of the blast."[91]

One potentially very powerful innovation was the digitalisation of the battlefield, although circumstances prevented the Americans from testing this in practice fully. The 4th mechanised Infantry Division served as the prototype digitalised force in the American Army. Communication between units would not so much be by radio, but by secure e-mail. GPS would also play an crucial role. In the old way, a commander would receive radio reports about what his own and enemy troops were doing and have the information chalked on large maps in his HQ. In the 4th Division, the CO would be looking at a computer screen. All his units would be tracked by GPS and projected on his screen in real time. This would be supplemented by information gathered by the UAV's. This would, therefore, enable a commander to react much quicker and more precisely about what was going on the battlefield, thereby reducing the fog of war and battle friction.[92]

After the war, Gen. Franks related how he was watching the progress of the 3rd Infantry Division through the Karbala Gap, beautifully illustrating how the new technology worked (and, incidentally, how the embedding of reporters with units worked in favour of the American operations). "I was looking at the flat panel [of the computer screen] and all of a sudden I saw one small blue icon … a little dot on the screen .. that showed where a company-sized unit was. I noticed that there was a blue dot 8 to 10 miles in front of a big bunch of blue dots. This blue dot seemed to be moving up Highway 8 to the southern part of Baghdad and headed for Saddam Airport. I looked at that dot and I thought: 'That's a very interesting dot'.

"It was characterized as one of the troops of the 3/7 Cav. I looked at that dot and I had a number of flat panels on the wall. I started channel surfing on one of them which had satellite links to all of the networks, everything from Al Jazeera to Fox to CNN. Unitil I found the embedded reporter who happened to be with this troop of 3/7. He was reporting live a thunder run down Highway 8, talking as they were shooting, and it was this particular unit I was watching on the panel. That's one of my favorite stories because it talks to the power of information; to the power of technology."[93]

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[91]   Ibid.

[92]   On the 4th Division, see "Understanding the Fourth Infantry Division's tactical internet" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 14.4.2003); Kevin Coughlin, "Army makes foray into digital battlefield" (*The Star-Ledger*, 7.4.2003).

[93]   Joseph L. Galloway, "General Tommy Franks discusses conducting the war in Iraq" (*Knight Ridder*, 19.6.2003).

This also applied to aerial ground attacks. Now US aircraft were able to linger over the battlefield and react instantly to commands from their controllers, based on real-time information fed to them by special forces on the ground or UAV's. This multiplied US firepower greatly.[94]

This instant communication proved to be supremely important. The senior Army officer in the campaign, Lt. Gen. David D. McKiernan, said at a media conference that it "allowed me to talk via tactical satellite communications and other means across a battle space of hundreds of miles; to be able to conduct, when we need to, video teleconferences, where commanders can plot out where they're at and what decisions they need to do next; and all of that put together in a joint construct, where I could see where all the airframes were, where all the ships are, where my counterparts in the air and the maritime components can see where the ground components are".

"When you put all that together, that allowed us to make decisions with situational awareness of where we were at, where the enemy was at, and our view of the terrain and the weather much, much faster than we ever could in the past and exponentially faster than our opponent could. So when you put all that together, it allowed us to make decisions and then execute those decisions faster than any opponent."[95]

Apart from these new systems, the fact remained that most weapons in the US arsenal were getting rather old. As the legendary Brig. Gen. Huba Wass de Czege and Col. Richard Hart Sinnreich, the people who were primarily responsible for AirLand Battle, wrote in a study about transforming the US Army, most of the army's major combat systems – the Abrams, Bradley, Apache gunship, Black Hawk utility helicopter and the Patriot air defence system – "are products of post-Vietnam modernization. Others, such as the M109 howitzer, are even older."[96]

Also, the US Marines did not at the time have all these advantages. In some respects, their technology was downright primitive. For instance, they still used the Cobra gunship (from Vietnam vintage) instead of the modern Apache Longbow. The

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[94]   Thomas E. Ricks & Vernon Loeb, "Unrivaled military feels strains of unending war" (*The Washington Post*, 16.2.2003).

[95]   DoD briefing, 23.4.2003, at www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030423-0122.html.

[96]   Huba Wass de Czege and Richard Hart Sinnreich, "Conceptual foundations of a transformed US Army" at www.ausa.org/PDFdocs/lwp40.pdf.

1st Marine Division could not talk by radio to the other Marine formation, Task Force Tarawa, as they were communicating on a different frequency hop code.[97]

Nevertheless, there was no other country in the world able to stand up militarily to the US. The American military budget was not only the biggest in the world; it was actually bigger than the rest of the world put together.[98] Against this formidable fighting force, Iraq stood no chance at all.

Iraq went into the Gulf War with the fourth largest military in the world. But during its eight year war against Iran in the eighties, the Iraqi officers' corps showed itself unimaginative and without military talent. Their tactics consisted chiefly of mass attacks, more or less in the manner of the Western Front in World War I, although some units had quite tough fighters. In the Gulf War, the Iraq military narrowly escaped having their back broken. The elite Republican Guard, which fought quite hard – although without any imagination – escaped through the Basra gap to fight another day.

Years of strict sanctions followed, in which the army slowly withered. It remained quite capable of dealing with internal unrest, but to take on the Americans and British, was quite a different kettle of fish. Anthony Cordesman makes the point that Iraq "still had major holdings of armor and artillery, a significant air force, and extensive ground-based air defenses. If it had fought some combination of regional opponents, it would probably have been far more effective and might well have won any defensive battle."[99] Nevertheless, when captured after the war, the Iraqi chief of military intelligence, Gen. Zuhayr Talib Abd al-Sattar al-Naqib, told his interviewers that Saddam had failed to rebuild his army after the 1991 war. "The army stayed for 12 years as it was. There was no replacement of weapons, no modernisation. It was more than 50% degraded from 1990."[100] The most modern weapons Iraq had, were Soviet T-72 tanks which were no match for the Abrams. As far as the few aircraft left are concerned, these were moved from air bases near Baghdad to western Iraq well before the first shots were fired.[101] The Iraqi air force was to play no role in the following war whatsoever.

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[97] Bing West and Ray L. Smith, "The march up. Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division" (New York, Bantam, 2003), p. 41.

[98] Bruce D. Berkowitz, "The new face of war. How war will be fought in the 21st century", ch. I, at www.calendarlive.com/templates/misc/books.

[99] Anthony Cordesman, The *"instant lessons"* of the Iraq war*: Main report, eighth working draft, May 14, 2003, pp. 15-16, at www.csis.org/ features/iraq_instantlessons.pdf.

[100] Oliver Burkeman, "Saddam's fear of betrayal ruined army, says spy chief" (*The Guardian*, 25.4.2003).

[101] Bill Gertz, "Saddam shifts jets from Baghdad" (*The Washington Times*, 21.2.2003).

Certainly Saddam lived in a dream-world he created for himself. Not only did he miscalculate badly when he attacked Iran in 1980 and again when occupying Kuwait a decade later, he always thought things were going his way, no matter what the facts suggested. Nothing illustrates this better than a visit by a high-level Cuban diplomatic delegation to Baghdad in the fall of 1990 to persuade him to pull back his forces from Kuwait. After having been briefed in detail by the chief of Cuban military intelligence about the allied military build-up to oust him from Kuwait, Saddam interrupted him. According to Alcibíades Hidalgo, a member of the delegation who later defected to America, he said, "I have received various reports quite similar to yours. I get them from my ambassador to the United Nations. They almost always end up there." According to Hidalgo, he raised his voice when he said that "and pointed to a grand marble wastebasket in a corner of the huge room".[102]

Out of fear, his military commanders fed this delusion. After the war, a captured Iraqi, Gen. Ghanem Abdullah Azawi, told an American reporter in a rare interview that the army was allowed to wither after 1991. All the claims of scientists upgrading existing weapons systems, were "lies, all lies. People were lying to Saddam, and Saddam was believing them or deceiving himself." Telling the truth would just get you into trouble, he said.[103]

One of Saddam's biographers, the Brit Con Coughlin, had nothing but contempt for his military prowess. "Despite the many successes he had achieved in his ruthless rise to power through the ranks of the Baath Party," Coughlin wrote, "Saddam was singularly unsuited to be a war leader. For all the uniforms, titles and honorific ranks he had awarded himself – including that of field marshal – Saddam had never had any military experience, had probably never read a military textbook, or ever considered the finer points of strategy and tactics."[104] In fact, he only remained in power by ruthlessly crushing all forms of opposition. Opponents were routinely assassinated, tortured, maimed or intimidated. After the war, stacks of documents were found by enterprising journalists detailing the horrific aspects of Saddam's rule.[105]

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[102] Alcibíades Hidalgo, "Saddam's rough to persuade. Cuba tried" (*Washington Post*, 9.3.2003).

[103] William Branigin, "A brief, bitter war for Iraq's military officers" (*Washington Post*, 27.4.2003).

[104] Con Coughlin, "Saddam. The secret life" (London, Macmillan, 2002), p. 176.

[105] Cf. for example Mark Magnier, "Documents reveal extent of Baath party rule" (*Los Angeles Times*, 6.4.2003); John Daniszewski, "File details Iraqi unit's role in dozens of assasinations" (*Los Angeles Times*, 25.4.2003); Melina Liu et al, "The Saddam files" (*Newsweek*, 28.4.2003).

Whatever the case, one thing was clear even before the war started: Iraq would lose badly. The only real question was how long the coalition victory would take and how many losses the Americans and British would suffer.